

The Watering Can

THE EARLY CHURCH

In this letter I would like to look at the Apostles, in the context of what they did and why. I will also answer the following questions:

What is a Christian?

What is a Disciple?

The Apostles

What made the Apostles different to us?

Turn with me to Matthew 10. (It is important to remember that the word Apostle means “one sent forth”)

“And when he (Jesus) had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.” Verse 1 here teaches us that they had the power from Jesus to do some of the signs that Christ was able to do. We do not read of any others in scripture who received this power. Paul was the thirteenth Apostle (for Judas Iscariot was counted among the Apostles in the Gospels), and he also had power to cast out demons (Acts 16 v 16-18) and he gave Eutychus back his life, after he had fallen from “*the third loft*” (Acts 20 v 7-12).

“The names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Labaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.” This list of names represents all those who were called to be Apostles. These men were chosen from all walks of life, from fishermen to tax collectors. The difference was that each one had accepted the call in their life and had left all to follow Jesus. Even Judas forsook all to follow Him. Judas was included in this list and the power was also given to him. It is even more of a wonder that Judas was to betray our Lord.

Jesus commanded the twelve to go and preach that “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*” but it was not given to the Gentiles at this time. They were specifically told not to go to the Gentiles but to go “*to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” It is interesting that this command was given, especially as Matthew had served the Gentiles (the Romans) and Simon the Canaanite had belonged to a group that opposed all Gentile rule (in Luke he is called Simon Zelotes). This was the time when the Israelites had an opportunity to accept Christ as King, but instead they heard, they followed to watch the miracles, then they had Him crucified when He did not meet their ideas of what the Messiah should be.

Jesus then gives them the full mission statement: “*as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.*” The message that they proclaimed was different to the message of the Gospel that is proclaimed today. Their message was simply that the kingdom was coming. We proclaim the glad tidings (gospel) that the Son of God came and died upon a cross so that we may go to heaven. Then He rose from the grave and is now in Heaven, preparing a home for those who trust in Him. The news that the disciples had freely received the gift of God is one that can be related to us. For we have freely received His Son, for there is no price attached to it. There is nothing that we can do that will pay for the gift. Therefore, because we have freely received, let us freely give. It is one thing to receive, but it is quite

another to give. We all like to receive, but how many of us are prepared to give? We have been given so much; let's share what we have with those who have it not.

So, we have evidence here that the apostles were given special privileges. However, they also had strict instructions on what to do and what not to do. They were not to take anything with them when they travelled other than the clothes that they wore. In other words, every detail of their journey was to be provided by God and not by man. They were told to go and they would be provided for. We can also worry too much about our lives. I had an email that told me that God was monitoring the very hairs of our head. It then went into detail as to how God might achieve such a task (from a human perspective). It also stated that as God was monitoring our hairs, just think how many other parts of our lives He is monitoring and providing for without us recognising it. Luke tells us that we are of more value than the sparrows (yet God takes notice of each one that dies.) Despite what men tell you, God is still in control of this Earth. Nothing takes place without Him knowing it.

What about after the Lord's ascension into heaven? What did the disciples do and did they still have this power? For the answers to these, turn with me to Acts 1 v 8, "...ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." This verse reveals to us that the power they had came directly from the Lord, and although they could do certain things, it was not by the Spirit that they did them. Remember, the Lord told the woman at the well in Sychar that, "...the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth... God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." So, here in Acts they are promised power. Notice that it is only received after the Holy Spirit has been given. The source of their power was Jesus, but He is now going back to the Father. While He could have given them the power to continue to do the things that He did, this was not what the Father wanted. All things must be done in accordance with the will of the Father. This is why Jesus came in the first place. He came to do the will of Him that sent Him (John 6 v 38). Jesus said that if He did not go, the comforter would not come (John 16 v 7). The Holy Spirit is the comforter that Jesus spoke of. It completely changed these disciples, from being scared and frightened, to being bold and prepared to die for their faith.

Let us look a little more closely at the power that was given to them after the Spirit came:

a) **Tongues**

Vine says, "the supernatural gift of speaking in another language without its having been learned." This means that this is an earthly language and not a spiritual or godly language. Remember, God created the languages that men use today (see Genesis 11 v 1 – 9) so it is very possible for the Spirit to give to men a use of language that they did not study or seek to learn. Now, there are some who claim to have the gift of tongues, yet what they speak is not an earthly language. You will find it is normally a few words spoken over and over again. While they do not understand what they are saying, they do not have anyone to interpret so "*that the church may receive edifying*" (1 Corinthians 14 v 5). I myself have spoken in this way but there was no benefit in it. It is interesting to note that as I have grown Spiritually, the practice of "speaking in tongues" has stopped. What I mean is that I no longer speak in this way as it does not benefit my Spiritual life, neither does it benefit the Assembly that I am with.

b) **Wonders and Signs**

These are the miracles that the apostles performed. It is interesting to note that Peter, in his first sermon to the people stated that "*Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.*" The people knew that Jesus did many good things among them, but Peter brings before them that He was approved of God because of these wonders and signs. Therefore, it is logical that the apostles would also be given this power, so that the people could see that they were also approved of God. This was so that no one could turn round and say that it was a complete fake. There would have been many who had seen Jesus die upon the cross. To these, death cannot be broken. Once someone is dead, they stay dead. Yet, Peter carries on his message with these words: "*Him, being delivered by the determinate*

counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." This is the first time that it was told to the general people that Jesus could not be held in death. These people were Jews from every nation on Earth, so they would know what to expect from a Messiah. They were looking for signs that the Messiah had come. Yet they missed them because they would not accept that a simple carpenter was the promised one. They thought that the Messiah would be a grand prince, come to free them from the Roman Empire and would establish the kingdom of God on Earth. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, the people took this a sign that the Messiah had come, and was now going to attack the Romans, in order to free the Israelites. They completely overlooked God's plan for the Messiah, for God had made it clear that the coming Messiah would be slain (Isaiah 53) and that He would be raised up from the dead (Hosea 6 v 2).

Let's have a look at the comparison between the messages proclaimed before the resurrection and after it. Before, the apostles preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. Jesus Christ did most of the actual teaching, so the apostles did not have to preach much. Yet the messages that Jesus preached were actually aimed at teaching His disciples more than teaching those around Him. Some were able to understand, but He explains some of His parables to the disciples. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5,6 and 7 is a good example of this. While it does say, "*the people were astonished at his doctrine*", the message was intended for His disciples for the beginning of chapter 5 says, "*And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them.*" A number of aspects of a Christian's life are contained within this sermon. In comparison to this, the preaching done by the apostles after Christ's resurrection was mainly to confirm that Christ had risen from the grave. The first sermon given by Peter was to the Jews; therefore it contained a lot of Old Testament Scriptures. It concentrated on who Jesus of Nazareth is, the fact that He is alive (risen from the grave) and the fact that each of the apostles were witnesses to this. Witnesses are important to the Jews and must be more than two, as per the instructions given by Moses in Deuteronomy: "*One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established*" (Deut 19 v 15). Peter was saying that in effect there were at least 11 witnesses to the Lord's resurrection. Each one of us are witnesses to the Lord's resurrection. As witnesses, what message are people reading from our lives?

The Christian Life

What is a Christian?

Turn to Acts 11 v 26, "*...And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" These days we take this title upon ourselves to mean a follower of Christ. However, in the days of Acts, it was meant as the highest insult that could be bestowed upon a person in the Roman Empire. If you were known as a Christian you would be marked for death, hunted down and persecuted. Yet, it is interesting to note that the more early Christians were persecuted, the more the Church grew. Notice that it is the disciples who were called Christians.

What is a Disciple?

The word disciple means "a learner" (W.E. Vine), and it bears the thought of someone who follows someone else's teaching. Therefore we have disciples of Moses (John 9 v 28), disciples of John the Baptist (Matthew 9 v 14) and the disciples of the Pharisees (Matthew 22 v 15-16). However, being a disciple of someone goes much deeper than just learning their ways and their teaching. It involves imitating their ways and trying to live like their master. As Christians, we should not be only learning the ways of the master, but seeking to live a life like the master lived. Our Master is Jesus Christ, and we have a glimpse of His life given to us through the Bible. Therefore, we should be seeking to learn His teaching and then apply it to our lives. John 8 v 31 confirms what I have stated. "*...If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.*" These words spoke Christ to the Jews that believed on Him. He wanted them to understand that it is more than just head knowledge being taught. Jesus

Christ, the Son of the Living God, wanted people to trust Him, learn from Him about the Father, and then to live according to the teaching given. James, in his epistle, reminds us that *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed”* (James 1 v 22-25). Therefore, you cannot be a Christian, and not a Disciple. If you call yourself a Christian, you are stating to those around that you follow Christ and His teaching. This is also known as being a disciple.

The Sermon on the Mount

As I referred to above, the Sermon on the Mount gives us a number of helpful and practical points to help us to live as a Christian. The Sermon is found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Turn with me to chapter 5:

In 5v3-12 we have the introduction to the sermon. Christ is giving guidelines and encouragement. His disciples were still looking for their own gain from following this man, so Christ teaches them that there is more than the material world.

The rest of the Sermon is split up like so:

- a) **Testimony.** *“Ye are the salt of the earth”* (5v13-16). Christ was teaching His disciples that they would be that which reflects the person of Christ upon Earth when He had gone. A friend of mine went to work and got drunk every lunchtime with his work colleagues. When the Lord convinced him that it was wrong, he tried everything to speak to his colleagues about Christ, but they laughed at him. He spoke one thing, and did another. Jesus was warning against this very thing, for others will see who we are before we actually tell them. They should be able to see something different in our lives.
- b) **Teaching.** *“...whosoever shall do and teach...”* (5v17-20). Here, Jesus tells His disciples that He has not come to make the Law obsolete, but to fulfil the Law. He was the only man who could keep the entire Law. Each one of us has an inbuilt problem, in that we cannot keep God’s Law. However, Christ’s warning is to those who break the commandments, and then go and teach others to do so. He is specifically referring to the Pharisees when He says this (see v20). The Pharisees actively taught their followers that certain rules did not apply to them (see Mark 7).
- c) **Problems.** *“Leave there thy gift”* (5v21-26). Here Jesus was using the Old Testament commands and changing them. He reminds the disciples that one of the Commandments was not to kill, but then adds to this by bringing in anger without a cause. He describes three different levels. The first of these is anger, with the punishment being *“in danger of the judgement.”* The next is Raca (which means the same as calling someone empty headed, or without intelligence) and the punishment for this is *“in danger of the council.”* However, the next is calling someone a fool (which means morally worthless) and the punishment being *“in danger of hell fire.”* What all this means, is that we need to control our anger and our words. Words said in the heat of an argument could have serious repercussions. Yet Jesus says that if our brother (our neighbour) has anything against us we must first be reconciled to them before we come before the Lord at the altar. We are commanded to leave our gift at the altar and go sort it out. If we don’t and the person comes to us with the police then we shall not escape until we have paid the last penny.
- d) **Adultery.** *“Looketh on a woman to lust after her”* (5v27-32). Again Jesus takes the Old Testament Commandment and changes it. The Commandment was not to commit adultery, but Jesus changes it to mean adultery of the heart as well as

physical adultery. He then goes on to say that we should cast bits of our bodies away from us if they offend us. This means that we should be careful what we do. He uses the right eye as an example of what we see and the right hand of what we do. He then goes on to talk about divorce, and makes it clear that to divorce is to cause adultery.

- e) **Oaths.** “*Swear not at all*” (5v33-37). The Israelites had been told that if they needed a guarantee of someone’s word, then it was to be by the Lord their God. Yet Jesus says that this is not to be among believers. Our word should be our bond, i.e. what we say we will do, we actually do. If say one thing and do another, we dishonour our God and ourselves. Hence Jesus says “*let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*”
- f) **Giving.** “*Give to him that asketh thee*” (5v38-42). In the Old Testament they had specific laws given to them regarding the general running of a society. A tooth for a tooth relates to crime in general (see Deuteronomy 19 v 16-21). Yet again, Jesus changes what the Jews had only known as the commandments of God. He introduces the policy of non-retaliation, i.e. turn the other cheek. If we look to Jesus for the example of this, consider the trial that He went through. The Pharisees were shouting accusations at Him, and He did not respond.
- g) **Enemies.** “*Love your enemies*” (5v43-48). The Israelites had also been told to love their neighbours, but to hate their enemies. Again, Jesus went against what they had previously been commanded, and told them to love their enemies. This is important, when you remember that most of the disciples would be persecuted and thrown in jail later in their lives. Christ is preparing them to love those that would persecute them, in order to reach them with the Gospel. From a personal perspective, I have known much persecution from those in the world. It is hard to not hate them or bear a grudge against them. However, we are commanded to love our enemies, for what benefit will be given to us from loving only those who love us?
- h) **Motives.** “*Do not sound a trumpet before thee*” (6v1-4). Here Jesus compares the things that are done by the Pharisees and those things that should be done. Giving money to the Church should be done secretly, between you and God. The Pharisees liked to broadcast exactly how much they were giving and when and would get trumpets blown as they walked towards the synagogue, so that people had a chance to gather round and witness their generosity. Their motives for giving were to gain the praise of men, not the praise of God. What are our motives for doing things? Do we give God the glory and look for His reward or do we look for the glory of men?
- i) **Prayer.** “*When thou prayest, enter into thy closet*” (6v5-15). Again, the Pharisees custom was to stand where everyone could see and hear, and give a wonderful analysis of all that they had done for God. In reality, they were talking to themselves, in order to receive the praise of men. Jesus tells His disciples to go into the secret place to pray, that it may be between them and God. Then He gives them the template to base their prayers around. This is commonly called the Lord’s Prayer, but it was actually the Disciple’s Prayer, for the Lord never used it.
- j) **Fasting.** “*When ye fast, be not...of a sad countenance*” (6v16-18). There is one significant theme running through these last few thoughts. That is “*thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward openly.*” The Pharisees did everything openly, and nothing secretly (when it came to praying, fasting etc). In other words, everything they did was for show. Nothing was for God and this is why Jesus refers to them again and again as the hypocrites. When it came to fasting, the Pharisees went around with sad faces, so that everyone knew what they were doing. The disciples were to act as if they were not fasting, so that no one knew

whether they were or not. I am greatly encouraged by the words of Jesus when He says that the Father sees the things we do. He knows what we do and why, and rewards us accordingly. As for fasting, it is normally accompanied by intense prayer. If you are going to fast, let it be for the right reason (i.e. to spend time before the Lord in prayer). However, it is between the individual and God and not for men to see that you are fasting.

- k) **Treasures.** *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth”* (6v19-23). He Jesus reminds His disciples that the riches of this world do not last, but then He goes on to teach them that there a treasure that will last forever. It is true that *“where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* If our treasure is on Earth, then we will be constantly worrying about it, making sure it is safe. I know of many a person who has started well on the Christian path, but lost their way when the treasures of this world tempted them. We need to keep our treasures in heaven, and store them up for when we go to be with our Lord.
- l) **Masters.** *“No man can serve two masters”* (6v24). Here we are confronted with the two masters. There is the god of this world, who has blinded men into serving him, and then there is the true and living God who made the heavens and the earth. We who are His have chosen to serve Him. It is not because of what we have done or who we are, but because He called us. He called, and we responded to His call. The disciples were called from their various walks of life to follow Jesus; we are called to do the same. Remember there is no middle ground. There are only two masters and everyone serves one or the other. If you do not serve God, you serve Satan. You cannot serve both.
- m) **Seek.** *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God”* (6v25-34). The last section of chapter 6 is all about what we need to serve God. Sometimes it is easy to get worked up and worried about the events that are taking place in our lives. This section reminds us to seek God first and let Him worry about it. He knows what we need before we do and will provide all our needs. Jesus refers to nature, and how God provides for the animals and flowers of this world. If God is prepared to look after grass, how much more precious in His sight are those that follow Him. He gives us all that we need.
- n) **Judging.** *“Judge not, that ye be not judged”* (7v1-6). Here Jesus reminds His disciples that they are not worthy to judge their fellow man. He uses the example of seeing a small piece of straw (mote) in someone else’s eye, when we are unable to behold a beam in our own eye. A beam would have been used to support a building’s roof. What He is trying to say is that we need to judge ourselves and not others. It is the difference between a small error in someone else’s life and a large error in our own. Let us examine ourselves.
- o) **Ask.** *“Ask, and it shall be given you”* (7v7-12). Jesus is teaching the power of prayer. If we ask in accordance with God’s will, then it will be granted. Remember, that we are not to worry about the things that we need, for God will provide those (although it does not hurt to pray for them). This is reminding the disciples that God is able to provide good things for those who love Him. Men, who are evil in nature, provide good things for their children. So God, who is good in nature, will provide better things for His children. However, Jesus closes this section with these words, *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”* He is teaching that all things gone before relate to loving your neighbour and helping him.
- p) **The Way.** *“Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way”* (7v13-14). Here we have the broad and narrow ways taught. The majority of people in this world are on the broad way that leads to destruction. This is an easy path to take, as it requires very little effort to travel down, but the destination of this path is hell.

The narrow way is not an easy path, but the destination is heaven. Let me encourage you to continue on the path.

- q) **False Prophets.** *“Beware of false prophets” (7v15-23).* Every action of Jesus displays His concern for His people. Even here, He is teaching them that there will be some who come forth in His name to teach but they seek to destroy the people of God. It is interesting to note that Jesus talks of men’s actions being like fruit. He repeats that, *“by their fruits ye shall know them.”* This means that men’s actions will speak louder than their words. Jesus then goes on to say that there will be those who call to Him in the day of judgement, they will state that they did this or that in His name but they did not receive Him as their saviour. He will tell them to depart. In this day and age, there are many false teachers around who will teach error. Be careful and study His Word.
- r) **Hear and Do.** *“Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them” (7v24-27).* Here Jesus tells the famous wise man and foolish man story. The wise man is the person who hears His words and does them. The foolish man is the person who hears but does not do them. Hearing His words is not enough on it’s own, for we need to do what He commands. Build upon the rock and not upon the sands.

The reaction of the people was that they were astonished. He taught them as one who had authority. The scribes taught out of a sense of duty and did not really believe what they were teaching. The words of Jesus were direct from the Father, for He says in John 14 v 10 *“the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.”* Therefore, let us listen to His words and do what He commands.

Closing Remarks

As I close this letter, turn with me to Romans 12. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*

I don’t want to say very much about the above verses, as they speak for themselves. A living sacrifice means that what we want is completely irrelevant in the light of God’s will. We give ourselves completely to do His will, not retaining a desire to do our own thing. Let us stand out from the world, preferring that which is holy. Many things are lawful according to the world’s standards, yet God calls them unlawful. Stand by His word as you serve Him.

May God be glorified, not man.