

Discipleship Begins with Beholding
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We are in a series called Forward in Faith where we are learning what it means to be a disciple – a follower of Christ. In this series we are using the word FORWARD as our outline. Follow – Obey – Reach – Worship – Abide – Resist – Disciple

We spent several weeks on what it means to follow Christ. We saw that there's a difference between being a believer and a disciple. We saw that the goal of discipleship is to become like Christ.

Following Christ involves obeying Him. So, we taught on the blessing of obedience. Then we spent several weeks teaching on how to reach others for Christ. We can't teach them until we reach them.

Today I'm preaching on the W in Forward – Worship. I preached on worship many times, so I was looking for a fresh approach. I came across a book that really blessed me and I love the title. I really recommend this book to you. And I'm using the title of that book for this message: Discipleship Begins with Beholding.

In this series we've talked about how discipleship is one of our primary purposes as a church and as believers. But how do we make disciples? Most people would say by teaching the word. And that's a big part of it. But if all you have is information without transformation – you have not made a disciple.

So, we cannot reduce discipleship down to learning information. Learning is part of the discipleship process, but it is not discipleship unless the information enables us to behold the Lord and be transformed into His image. Discipleship means to become like Christ and we cannot be like someone we do not know! We must know about Christ, but we cannot stop there - we must know Him. And to know Him we must spend time beholding Him.

Discipleship begins with beholding Christ. That means you must first have a revelation of who He is. The Amplified Version of 2 Corinthians 3:18 says:

All of us, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transformed His very own image from glory to glory, in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another, by the Spirit of the Lord.

Notice it says "all of us" – this ministry is for all of us, not a few of us. Yes – some of getting to know God is done on your own. But this verse is saying that as we all behold the Lord, we are changed into His likeness. This is speaking of a corporate experience of beholding the Lord and spending time in His manifest presence

together.

As long as our eyes are focused on circumstances, we will never change.
As long as our eyes are on ourselves – we will not be transformed.

We become like what we behold – so if we are only beholding ourselves we will never change – we just will stay ourselves. To become like Christ we must behold Christ.

You will become like what you behold and what you worship. Marketers know this. That's why they spend millions of dollars to get celebrities to endorse products. They know that people want to become like people they believe are beautiful or successful or talented in sports or entertainment. They spend millions because they know people will spend billions to buy what celebrities endorse. Buying those things will not turn them into athletes or entertainers, but people want to be like those they behold as beautiful or successful.

What do you behold? Whatever or whoever that is – is what you will become like. So, to become like Christ, you must behold Christ.

To behold means to look, to see. But it's not just a glance – to behold means to hold in your view. To become like Christ takes more than glancing at Him occasionally. Hebrews 12:2 tells us:

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.
AMP - Looking away (from all that will distract) to Jesus.
God's Word - We must focus on Jesus.*

Beholding Christ is a constant, daily discipline. It takes effort to stop focusing on other things and focus on Him. But this is the key to becoming like Him.

Think about it: you cannot even be born again without beholding Christ – seeing Him for who He truly is. John 1:29 says:

John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Before you can become a disciple by beholding Christ – you must first be born again by beholding Christ and putting your faith in Him as the Lamb of God who takes away your sin.

If you don't see Jesus as the one and only Savior, you will not be saved.
And you can take that farther:

If you don't see Jesus as the Healer, you will not be healed.

If you don't see Jesus as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, you will not be filled.

If you don't see Jesus as the Deliverer, you will not be set free.

We must focus our eyes on beholding the author and finisher of our faith.

With unveiled faces we must behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord--
What is the glory of the Lord? It is outshining of His attributes.

By the way, no mortal can look directly at the face of God. In Exodus 33, when Moses asked God to show him His glory, God said in verse 20:

You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live.

Since we cannot look directly at the Father, He has revealed Himself to us in His Son. Colossians 1:15 says:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Hebrews 1:3 says:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.

Jesus is the exact representation of God. When we behold Jesus, we behold God. And when we behold Him, the Holy Spirit changes us.

The first way beholding changes us is this: when we see Jesus, we see ourselves in His light. We see our imperfection in the light of His perfection. When we see God's glory, we see our need for change. And you won't change until you see the need to change! When Isaiah saw himself in the light of God's glory, he said woe is me. When Job saw the Lord, he repented in dust and ashes.

This phrase "beholding the Lord" has 2 meanings: "to behold oneself in a mirror" and "to serve as a mirror"-- that is "to reflect." The NKJV says:

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord...

The NIV says:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory...

Which is it? Both!

First – it means to behold the Lord AS we behold ourselves in a mirror. In other words, it's not a glance, but an intense stare, like when a man shaves or a woman puts on her makeup.

We are to fix our gaze on the glory of the Lord.

We are also to reflect the glory of the Lord to others.

We are only Jesus some people will ever see.

We are like the moon – which has no light of its own – it just reflects the light of the sun. Our reflections of the Son vary from a full moon to a total eclipse.

How is your reflection of the Son? Is it light or dark? Real or distorted?

We have been created in the image of God. Sadly, that image is often distorted in our lives.

So, while we all in some ways reflect something of God, the goal is to become a perfect mirror image of Christ. We will never be perfect in this lifetime – but as we behold the Lord's glory, He transforms us into His likeness with ever-increasing glory.

The word transformed means "to take on a different form." It can refer to an outward change or, as here, to an inward change.

From glory to glory means that transformation is not a one-time event; it is an ongoing process. We are "constantly being transformed" as we behold Christ and become more and more like Christ.

So – how to we behold the Lord? Many people think that beholding God requires dramatic encounters with God like the people of Israel had at Mount Sinai, like Moses had with the burning bush, like Paul had on the road to Damascus.

That kind of thinking will hinder you because those kinds of encounters were rare in the Bible. And they are rare today. Most people in the Bible did not have those kinds of encounters. Most of the time – beholding God is much more ordinary than that. And it happens through intentional activity. Don't let your desire for the dramatic or spectacular keep you away from beholding God in your everyday life.

We behold God in the person of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The main way we behold God is through His Word. We first behold Him in Jesus – the Living Word. John 1:1-5 says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Verses 10-14 say:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus came to earth for His own – the Jewish people - but they could not receive Him or know Him because they did not see Him for who He truly is – the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord. But those who could behold Him – see Him in all His glory – they received Him and believed in Him and became children of God.

Beholding Him means you get a revelation of who He is.

That also comes through the written word of God. But always remember that the purpose of the written word is to reveal the Living Word. In John 5:39-40 Jesus said:

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.

You can search the Scriptures and miss the point: which is Jesus.
 You can have Bible knowledge and not have eternal life.
 You can know doctrine and not know God.
 You can know the Word of God and not know the God of the Word.

So – when you read the Bible – your goal should be to behold Jesus. He’s in every book of the Bible! In this passage in John – when Jesus said the Scriptures testify of Me, He was talking about the Old Testament because that’s the only Bible they had at that time.

After His resurrection, Jesus met 2 men on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:27 says:

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

You not only see Jesus throughout the New Testament, but also in the Old. In fact, there is a theme woven throughout the entire Bible. If you understand that theme, you understand the Bible and the plan of God. If you don’t understand this theme – none of it will make sense to you. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 Paul said:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Paul says that the message of God is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That’s why he said in 1 Corinthians 1:23

We preach Christ crucified.

The message of the Bible is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The scarlet thread running throughout the Bible – from Genesis to Revelation – is the blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross.

In the very beginning - when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden - God shed the blood of animals and covered Adam and Eve with their skins – this pointed to the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

In the Exodus from Egypt, when God told His people to kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts of their houses – that Passover Lamb pointed to the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. 1 Corinthians 5:7 says:

For indeed Christ, our Passover Lamb, was sacrificed for us.

Whenever the high priest went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkled the blood of a lamb on the mercy seat – that pointed to the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

In fact, every single blood sacrifice in the Old Testament pointed to the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. You can also see Christ in every feast that Israel celebrated.

And that scarlet thread runs all the way through the Bible to the book of Revelation when John had a vision of heaven and a revelation of Jesus as a Lamb that had been slain. And John said in Revelation 5:9-12 that he saw angels

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy... because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

One day I'm going to be in that heavenly choir singing praise to the Lamb – Jesus Christ – who is worthy of all praise. And if you are a born-again believer in Christ – you will be there too!

Here's the other part of that theme: God sent His only Son to earth to die for our sins – but also that He could be the firstborn of a vast family who will behold the Lord and worship Him together.

After the Children of Israel sacrificed the Passover lambs, they left Egypt and went out into the wilderness to worship. Every time Moses went to Pharaoh to ask him to let God's people go, he said this – like in Exodus 7:16

The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let My people go, so that they may worship Me.

You see – when God sets you free – it's freedom with a purpose. And that purpose is that you might be free to worship. And when Israel got to Mount Sinai, they all experienced beholding God and His awesome manifest presence together. Up till then, God had revealed Himself to individuals like Abraham and Moses.

This was the first time in history that an entire corporate people beheld God together. God's purpose was for them to behold Him together, to become like Him together, and then to represent Him to the nations together. That's why God said to them in Exodus 19:6

You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (consecrated, set apart to the worship of God).

And guess what – we share that same purpose today. 1 Peter 2:5 says:

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:21 says:

In Christ, you are being built together to become a habitation of God through the Spirit.

God is building us together to be a people where God's presence dwells, where we behold Him together, where we are transformed into His likeness together, and when we represent Him to the world together!

To do that we must behold the Lord in the Word, behold the Lord by the Spirit, behold the Lord in prayer, behold the Lord in His people and behold the Lord in our worship.

We must fix our eyes on Jesus!

When we are lost, we must behold Him as our crucified Savior.

When we are empty, we must behold Him as the baptizer in the Holy Spirit.

When we are sick, we must behold Him as our healer.

When we are addicted or oppressed by the enemy, we must behold Jesus as our deliverer.

When it seems we're walking in darkness, we must behold Jesus as the light of the world.

When we can't find our way, we must behold Jesus because He is the way!

When we're searching for truth, we must behold Jesus who is the truth!

When we feel the life drain out of us, we must behold Jesus who is the life and who came to give us abundant life!

Behold the Lamb who takes away your sin!

Behold the man who Pilate could find no fault in.

Behold the Judge who is standing at the door.

Behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who will come back to earth with ten thousands of His saints to rule and reign forever!

Hallelujah! Behold the Lord your God!

Because discipleship begins with beholding.