

5 Marks – Available

7/29/20

Matthew 28:16-20

Sunday AM

It's hard to believe August 2020 has arrived. I don't know about you, but this has been w/out question, the longest, craziest year of my life – and I only vaguely remember January 1st.

As I was thinking about how bizarre and upside-down this year has been, the other day I stumbled across a couple of cartoons I think sum up this year thus far.

Insert – **Caveman Cartoon**

Insert – **Fear of Opening July Door Cartoon**

I'm not sure if you remember, but back in January, we began the year by refocusing/refreshing our mission and vision for the future w/ the hope of continuing and clarifying our commitment to being a reproducing, disciple-making church that touches the nations. And while this hasn't changed, we've obviously have had to adjust to the new reality that maybe things aren't going to take place in the way we initially planned.

But to refresh your memory – the leadership of our church, based on **Colossians 1:28** – sought to answer the (4) big questions regarding our mission/purpose.

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone w/ all wisdom, so that we might present everyone fully mature in Christ. Colossians 1:28

Our **WHAT** – To influence all people into intimate fellowship w/ Jesus

Our **WHY** – b/c God wants all people to experience a satisfying, significant, and intimate relationship w/ Him...

Our **HOW** – By relationally *making, maturing, mobilizing, and multiplying* disciples who regularly experience God

Our **HOPE** – To see the people of FBC Peachtree City launch a movement of healthy disciple-making ministries across southwest Atlanta and around the world

This raises the question – what is a **DISCIPLE**?

To appreciate this question, allow me to expound upon some of the things we've discussed over the years.

A **disciple** refers to an apprentice who follows their teacher – meaning a disciple is a committed, faithful follower. In Jesus' day, a disciple was a student who followed/learned from his rabbi. Wherever he went, the disciple went. Whatever he taught, the disciple learned/retought. They did whatever the rabbi did.

A Rabbi was a spiritual teacher – and the rock star of his day. He was known for pouring His life/beliefs into a chosen, few disciples to help them to know/serve God. ***Most young, Jewish boys aspired to follow in the footsteps of a Rabbi to one day become a Rabbi.***

When a Jewish boy reached age 5, he'd begin his education at the local synagogue in what was known as **Bet Safar** – *house of book*. In this school, a local rabbi would teach the boys to love God's Word as they memorized the first (5) books of the O.T.

It's said on the 1st day, the rabbi would pour honey on each student's slate and require they lick the honey off their slate and fingers. As they did, the rabbi quoted Ps. 119:103, "*May the words of God be sweet to your taste, sweeter than honey to your mouth.*"

On completing **Bet Safar**, most boys went back to the family business to apprentice b/c they weren't the *best of the best*; but the boys who were a cut above, they'd be invited to continue their education by participating in **Bet Talmud** – *house of learning*. So, from ages 10-15, these boys would memorize the rest of the O.T. and oral traditions. On completing **Bet Talmud**, a boy had the option of going home or applying for **Bet Midrash** to become a rabbi's disciple.

In **Bet Midrash**, a boy would go to the Rabbi he wanted to follow to be quizzed on his knowledge of the Torah/Talmud. If the rabbi thought he had "IT", then he'd say, "***Lech Archarai – Come follow me.***" This young man would leave everything (his home and family) to become a ***Talmudeen*** (disciple) to his Rabbi for the next 14 yrs to learn his Rabbi's yoke – his teachings/interpretation of the Law.

Incidentally, often whenever a Rabbi would go into a town w/ his posse of disciples, in a line according to their pecking order of tenure/excellence, the people would recite a phrase made popular by the wisemen and sages – ***May the dust of your Rabbi fall upon you!***

So, to put this into perspective – when Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John in Matthew 4:19 – when he asked, *Follow Me and I'll make you a fisher of men* – this was no small ask. He was inviting them to abandon their lives to become His disciples. He asked them to drop everything to begin to follow Him.

Fast forward to today. Jesus has extended the same call to you/me to follow Him upon our salvation – and the same expectations apply to us that applied to them – **total abandonment into intimate fellowship.**

Yet today, there are many ideas of what it means to follow Jesus. This has been true ever since Jesus was here. While there's no *perfect* way there's a right way.

- **CAUTIOUSLY** – Out of Curiosity
- **CASUALLY** – from a Distance
- **RELIGIOUSLY** – Out of Habit
- **CONVENIENTLY** – When it's Beneficial
- **NEVER** – Out of Ignorant or Rebellion
- **FAITHFULLY** – Out of Surrender/Conviction

Don't Miss – Ultimately, no matter how you follow Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.

Back in January, we took time in **Matthew 28:16-20** to look at the 5 Marks of a **disciple**. To summarize:

- A Disciple is **AVAILABLE** to God
- A Disciple has **AFFECTION** for God
- A Disciple Submits to the **AUTHORITY** of God
- A Disciple Lives for the **AGENDA** of God
- A Disciple Relies on the **ASSURANCE** of God

Starting today – I want to take 5-weeks to take a deeper dive into these **5 Marks** to help us to realize both our calling/identity as Jesus-followers. Today, I want to discuss what it means to be ***available*** to God.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the H.S., and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely, I am w/ you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20

The greatest ability of a Christian is his availability.

One Friday evening as a freshman in high school, I was invited to dress out for the varsity football team. Now before you get too impressed, I wasn't the only freshman invited to practice w/ the team, attend the sacred pre-game meal, and put on the red-on-red, monochromatic uniform. Also, our varsity team was terrible, so it was as much a death wish as it was an honor. Nonetheless, I thought I was big stuff playing on the varsity team under the Friday night lights.

Now in the history of football at CKHS, I doubt any freshman had ever actually played in a game under the lights, but I was determined to change that legacy. Throughout the week in practice I worked hard to prove to the coaches I was capable of playing; yet like Dan "Rudy" Ruettiger for Notre Dame, I was high on hopes yet lacking the size/experience to play. Nonetheless, I pressed on – and I had a plan.

When it became obvious, I wasn't making the depth chart and my night of fame/glory was to be nothing more than being a spectator, I decided to spring my plan into action. I knew the best possible chance I had to play would require the coach know my whereabouts thru-out the game. So, while my friends were picking splinters and guarding the water-bucket, I positioned myself next to the coach, and no matter where he marched up/down the sideline, I wasn't about to leave his side. I was determined he was going to know I was available to get into the game. And my plan worked!

After 3 quarters of play and chasing the coach for what seemed to be miles along the sideline, he apparently grew weary of bumping into me, b/c he put me into the game. Yep – all 138 lbs soaking-wet was in the game b/c I made myself **available** to play.

In **Matthew 28:16**, we find the first major quality of a Jesus follower – they're **available** to God.

The disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

To appreciate this verse, we need a little context. The region of Galilee is found in the northern portion of Israel encompassing the area just south of the Sea of Galilee (*lower* Galilee) and extending some 45 miles north to the headwaters of the Jordan River at Mt. Hermon (*upper* Galilee). Jerusalem was 80 miles which required a 5-7-day journey by way of Jericho.

In considering the timeline after the crucifixion and resurrection, scholars believe this event likely took place some 15 days after the resurrection.

The question that piques my interest is which mountain did Jesus invite the 11 to meet Him? Tradition holds it was Mt. Arbel which rises some 700 ft to overlook the Sea of Galilee. This would be a logical place for Jesus to give the G.C. as the western road of the *Via Maris* ran alongside of Mt. Arbel providing the opportunity for travelers to carry the news thru-out the world.

After my visits to Israel and personal study, I can't help think that the mountain where they met was on Mt. Hermon in upper Galilee some 45 miles north where I believe the **transfiguration** took place. If this was the case, it reveals an even greater effort on behalf of the disciples to make themselves available to Jesus. Not only would they have to trek up Israel's highest peak from which they could see the nations around them, but their commitment to follow would also underscore the magnitude of their belief in the resurrection. Would you travel

an additional 45 miles and hike a 9,000-plus foot mountain to meet Jesus if you weren't convinced of His resurrection and deity?

Also, by leaving Jerusalem after the resurrection and returning to Galilee to meet Jesus on the Sea of Galilee for Peter's restoration and then returning the Mt. Hermon, the 11 would've had to walk past nearly all of Jesus' teachings thru-out their 3½ years. Then after receiving the G.C. they would've walked back to Jerusalem only to have time to reflect on all of Jesus' teachings in light of this commission.

In either case, the effort put forth to make themselves available to Jesus speaks volumes of their belief and commitment to surrender their lives to Christ.

Which brings us back to the 1st mark of a disciple. The first mark of a disciple of Christ is that he *listens* and *responds* to God's leading – They're *available* to God.

In reflecting on **vs. 16**, we have to acknowledge the reality that the disciples didn't have to go to the mountain; and yet b/c they were *convinced* of Jesus' teachings/resurrection, w/out hesitation, they made themselves available to Him. *My suspicion is once you have put your fingers into the nailed-scarred hands of a man raised from the dead that it has a profound effect on your willingness to respond to his request.* I'm reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15:

For Christ's love compels us, b/c we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 4:14-15

As believers, we should be compelled by our *absolute conviction* that Jesus is who He claimed to be (God in the flesh) and that He did what He said that He would do – die on the cross and arise from the dead to atone for our sin. In other words, the evidence that a person is abandoned to following Christ is that they readily make themselves available for His divine purposes.

We become available to God when we put ourselves in a position for God to work in and thru our lives. We do this by uploading His Word into our minds while we strive under the influence of the H.S. to remove the obstacles, issues, and ambitions that inhibit Him from having complete access to us.

Meaning – following Christ begins w/ our surrender and not w/ our effort. It doesn't matter how talented, gifted, wealthy, or smart a person might be – if we haven't made ourselves available to be used for His purposes then we'll be useless to God.

Certainly, all of us acquire, cultivate and demonstrate great abilities, yet as it pertains to God there's only one ability that's the greatest ability of all. And it's not our sociability, compatibility, accountability, adaptability, or reliability? The greatest ability is our *availability*. If we're not available to God, it doesn't matter what other abilities we might possess or have access. Why? It is b/c **ability w/out availability is a liability**.

To be available means we place ourselves totally, absolutely, and completely at God's disposal for Him to do anything/everything He wants to do in us, thru us, w/ us, for us, and in spite of us whenever/however He chooses. Anything less would be to put restrictions on God. It'd be to write in self-serving exclusion in the fine print of your commitment contract to Christ.

NO ONE will make themselves available to God so long as they're concerned/consumed w/ their own comfort/convenience. This is the challenge we all face in following Jesus – especially as American Christians. We have to decide if we're going to live for ourselves or His life-giving mission! **We have to decide how much access we're going to give to God.**

It reminds me of a problem Meg and I had to deal w/ when we gave our kids phones for the first time. When we handed them their phones, we clearly explained that the phones belonged to us and they were allowing them to use them. We also explained that they were not to go to places on their phone that they knew we'd neither go nor approve and that if we ever wanted access, they had to give it to us. Of course, what happened was – the first time we wanted access to their phones, they didn't want us to know their passwords – and we were like – NO! Make it available to us and make it available NOW!

The simple yet profound truth is we will never develop a willing/available heart until we know genuine humility and a dependence on God. **We can't live our lives password protected refusing to give God the password.** We must make our lives available to Him.

Consider Isaiah. In *Is. 6*, Isaiah has a close encounter w/ God where his life was shattered by God's glory. He saw himself in light of who God is – and his response, *“Woe is me. I'm undone.”* Interpreted – **“God, I am nothing; I need you.”** Then God sent an angel to extend grace to him, and upon experiencing God's forgiveness, He hears God call, *“Who will go for Me?”* Isaiah said, *“Me! Me! Me! Here I am Lord, send me.”* Why? **Isaiah's only response was to make himself available to God.**

After spending the last 8-weeks looking at the amazing men/women of faith in **Hebrews 11**. What we learned about them applies here. It wasn't that any of them had any great quality/skill – in fact, in most instances, they lacked the necessary skill to accomplish God's work and will – but b/c of faith, when everyone else was drifting, these faith heroes made themselves available to God b/c they were convinced God was true and that His way was better than their way.

Faithful followship doesn't begin w/ knowing where you will be serving the Lord or in what capacity. It doesn't start w/ having a clear calling to a certain ministry, occupation, or even in a definitive direction. It begins, and only really begins w/ making yourself available to God by surrendering your will for His will setting aside all reservations and preconceptions.

God can use no one greatly for His will/work – for His glory – until they willingly make themselves available.