

A Disciple is Someone Who Knows What Time It Is

You can't obey Jesus' command to go and make disciples if you don't know what Jesus means by "disciple." And you won't know what Jesus means by disciple unless you watch the way He portrayed discipleship in His teaching, particularly in His parables.

What do we find when we examine the portrait of a disciple in Jesus' parables? A consistent emphasis on the disciple's need to do two things:

1. Understand the current eschatological moment.
2. Live accordingly.

In other words, discipleship is portrayed in terms of "wisdom," and wisdom is defined by living in light of "what time it is."

Take a look at some examples...

The Wise and Foolish Builders ([Matthew 7:24-27](#))

The parable that closes Jesus' most famous sermon ends with a vision of discipleship that places final judgment front and center.

The contrast between the wise and foolish builders is the climactic finale to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, because it demonstrates the seriousness of what is at stake. The storm that threatens the two buildings is divine judgment.

Rarely do we begin our explanation of "making disciples" with the idea of final judgment. This element of Jesus' teaching is often shuffled to the side as an unpopular component of our theological confession. But the parables of Matthew challenge viewing discipleship in these terms: knowing what time it is and bringing one's life in line with eschatological reality.

Human lives matter. Human choices matter. Eternity hangs in the balance.

The Foolish Bridesmaids ([Matthew 25:1-13](#))

Just as the two builders are contrasted in terms of wisdom and foolishness, the bridesmaids are also contrasted in the same manner.

The disciple of Christ is not the one who self-identifies as a Christian, but the one who is prepared for Christ's coming. One of the lessons here is that discipleship cannot be summed up in appearances, but in the exercise of wisdom that leads one to live in light of the kingdom of God.

In both stories, judgment exposes foolishness, both the faulty foundation of the foolish builder and the lack of preparation from the foolish bridesmaids. Discipleship is formed and described

within the context of eschatological preparation.

The Parable of the Talents ([Matt 25:14-30](#))

A disciple must be a good steward of the gifts of God in the present while waiting for the Master's return. The disciples commended as "good and faithful servants" are those who live with eschatological anticipation, choosing to invest in ways that maximize the king's resources. Even though the primary point is stewardship, discipleship is seen through the lens of eschatological anticipation.

The Unmerciful Servant ([Matt 18:21-35](#))

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant is prompted by Peter's question to Jesus about how many times he is obligated to forgive someone who wrongs him. Jesus' reply of "seventy times seven" is not a rhetorical trick, but rather a reference to the end of exile, the "seventy-times-seven" years prophesied in Daniel (9:24-27) before God's deliverance will take effect.

So, a disciple forgives not only because he has been forgiven, but also because of *what time it is*. In the eschatological day of jubilee, debts are released and debtors are freed from their burdens. The kingdom changes everything.

New Wine in Old Wineskins ([Matt 9:17](#))

Jesus' analogy of putting new wine into old wineskins is a reference to the overlap of eras, referring to the coming kingdom which will no longer be contained by the exclusivistic tendencies of God's chosen people who have lost their saltiness and who have failed to be a light to the nations.

The Faithful Servant ([Matt 24:42-51](#))

Jesus speaks of a faithful servant whose anticipation for his master's return leads him to alter his priorities. In this analogy, discipleship is not a generic faithfulness to God's commands, but a specific faithfulness formed by the disciple's understanding of what time it is and what the future holds. The vision of the future affects the disciple's actions in the present.

Two Implications for Church Leaders

1. *Eschatology gives eternal significance to our ethical choices.*

Too often, disciple-making is reduced to information regarding the *ethics* of the kingdom. Moral formation is reduced to making proper ethical choices as laid out in Christ's straightforward teaching.

However, the parables of Jesus focus on ethical choices made in light of the eschatological reality of God's in-breaking kingdom. Wisdom is defined in large part by the proper understanding of "what time it is."

Unfortunately, church leaders often relegate the study of eschatology to timetables and charts that lead to endless debates on the details of Christ's second coming. Though end-times speculation should be avoided, the vision of final judgment, Christ's return, and the promised new heavens and new earth must be ever before the eyes of believers. When we divorce ethics from eschatology, we fail to communicate the eternal significance of the disciple's choices.

2. Eschatology gives eternal significance to our missional activity.

Fundamental to one's view of any number of contemporary debates over holistic mission, social work and evangelism is one's view of eschatology. To neglect the unpopular teaching about the wrath of God, Christ's many warnings against hell, or the role of works in final justification is to settle for a shrunken view of ethical choices and a moralistic understanding of religious identity.

The reality of final judgment keeps a holistic view of disciple-making truly holistic in that it protects social work from degenerating into nothing more than seeking to make the world a better place, and it keeps evangelistic efforts from neglecting the social responsibility to live in ways that demonstrate submission to King Jesus.

Read more from Trevin [here](#).