

Follow Jesus: He Has Been There

Joe Slater

“And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony” (John 3:32).

So said John the immerser to his disciples. John had plainly pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Messiah; yet many of his disciples didn't understand. John lamented, *“No one receives His (Jesus') testimony.”* John used “no one” as a figure of speech for emphasis; there were a few who received Jesus (John 1:11-12), but the vast majority rejected Him, including some of John's own disciples.

If you want someone to guide you to your destination, wouldn't it be best to follow someone who has been where you want to go? We want to go to Heaven. Jesus came from there. He knows the way. In fact, He IS the way! (John 14:6).

Since Jesus came from Heaven, He gives to us a more complete understanding of God than anyone before or after Him. Now, to be clear, the prophets (including John) were inspired by God. They spoke truthfully what God's Spirit told them or showed them in dreams and visions. Jesus, however, testified of what He had actually seen and heard. The point is not that the prophets were bad, but that Jesus is better!

Jesus saw and heard directly. He had co-existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity, so He was uniquely qualified to help us understand what God is like and what He requires of us. As John 1:18 says, *“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten of the Father, He has declared Him.”*

Jesus is supremely qualified to tell us about God and lead us to Heaven. Follow Jesus! He's been there!

WHAT IS REAL FELLOWSHIP?

We don't really understand the concept of fellowship as early Christians did. We talk about “fellowship meals” and “a fellowship hall;” however, just eating together is not the only aspect of Christian fellowship. Just being together in the same place at the same time does not necessarily constitute fellowship.

The word “fellowship” originates from a Greek word that indicates a joint participation and having something in common. The early Christians understood this in a special sense.

The first time the word is mentioned after the death of our Lord is in Acts 2:42. There Luke records that the disciples continued in “fellowship, breaking of the bread and prayers.” When we consider that the church in the first century had no sign in front of their building, fellowship takes on a different meaning. When we note that early Christians went through persecution from certain groups, fellowship becomes more beautiful. When we look at early Christians relying and depending on one another, we see the depth of real fellowship.

Today, many of us don't know the other members of the congregation where we attend. We don't know where they live. We don't participate in events with them. Our Sunday and Wednesday gatherings are often the only time we meet other Christians.

Let us become more like the church of the New Testament. Let us reach out more to others. Let us be more willing to share our lives with those we love. Let us rediscover the beauty and joy of fellowship as the New Testament church did. Why not visit someone this week and get to know them better? You will get a great blessing and understand better the joy of real fellowship.

--Bill Brandstatter (Marion, IL) via Bulletin Gold

SINGING PRAISE AND LOVING IT

The other day in services, after a song was announced, I heard a youngster a few rows behind me exclaim excitedly, “Yes! My favorite!” That made my morning. I couldn't help but smile while we sang that song – and the feeling even carried into the next song as I thought, “This might be someone else's favorite too.”

I don't know about you, but from time to time I need to be reminded of why we sing. If you're a regular church attender, it's easy to dismiss singing as just something you do. It's even easier to become distracted by criticizing songs. Maybe it's a song you don't know or don't like. Maybe you feel like we have sung it a thousand times, or that we just don't do a good job with this one.

Singing just for the sake of singing, no matter how good it may sound, is simply empty and hollow. We sing first and foremost because God is worthy of our praise. *“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being”* (Psalm 146:1-2).

Another reason we sing praises is to encourage each other. *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:18-20).

So let's not get caught up in a routine or our personal preferences when we sing. Instead, let's get lost in our praise to God. He deserves all that and more! May our singing also greatly encourage one another and strengthen our fellowship.

--Luke Bower (Abilene, TX) via Old Paths