

Russell Kelfer

The Bus is Leaving

970-A

Series: Let God Be God

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

The Bus is Leaving

What a day it had been! Watching in amazement as the Master's popularity seemed to grow, His little band of disciples saw the crowds multiplying and the miracles mushrooming, as milling crowds on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration gathered around to see what this man named Jesus would do next.

The crowd grew larger and larger as the people, fueled by curiosity, climbed the hill to see whom He would heal and to hear what He would say. Suddenly, the Master stopped teaching and turned to Philip. He tested him by asking him, "How will we feed so many people?" For by now there were more than 5,000 men not counting women and children. You know the story...five loaves and two little fishes. Everyone ate until they were full, and five baskets of scraps were left over.

Gradually the crowd realized what had happened. In awe, they began to exclaim, "This man must be a prophet! He must be the one we've been waiting for!" So Jesus' rating in the "Gallup" poll jumped to its highest point since His ministry began some three years before. And why not? He spoke with such eloquence. He healed with such tenderness. He fed the multitudes as though it were nothing at all. No wonder they wanted to seize Him and make Him their king. Was not this man Jesus the one they had been longing for these many years?

Night falls and the disciples wait for the Master on the seashore, but He does not come. Not knowing where He is, the twelve get into a fishing boat and head across the sea back to Capernaum. But soon, gale-force winds sweep across that little stretch of water, and there He comes, *walking on water*. Truly, this is a day to remember and a night to remember, as well. No doubt it would be only hours before He would be drafted as king and they, His inner court of counsel, would no doubt become His cabinet of officers. What a day! What a night! What an exciting time to be alive!

The Bus is Leaving

It seemed only natural that He would tailor His messages in this critical stage of building a constituency to convincing the people of what He could do for them. A few promises of more miracles. An end to hunger. Zero unemployment. That ought to do the trick. After all, the disciples must have surmised, if He can do this now no telling what He can do, once He becomes king. The thought was mind-boggling.

It is now the next morning; the people are amazed to find Jesus on that side of the sea, and they begin to question Him. The story is found in John 6. In the NIV it says,

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they asked Him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”
(John 6:25-29 NIV)

You can almost feel the disciples cringe a little at Jesus’ honesty with His infatuated followers. When your popularity is on the upswing as His was, you don’t go around rebuking people. After all, they are just looking for a few signs anyway, Right? Wrong!

Jesus begins building a case for one of the most amazing statements He would ever make. He begins by differentiating between the kingdom they thought was real and the Kingdom that really was! He said, “Would you like to be approved of God? Then stop pouring your life into things that perish. Pour your life into things eternal.” Of course, they didn’t understand. They wanted a physical king to deliver physical blessings and save them from physical discomforts. They still do.

They persisted. “Then how can we do the works of God?” they asked. Jesus responded with this amazing reply,

“The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”
(John 6:29)

The Bus is Leaving

God is not impressed with what man can do. God is only impressed when man is impressed with what God has already done. Continue on,

So they asked Him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do?"

Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.

But as I told you, you have seen Me and still you do not believe."
(John 6:30-36)

You can almost feel the tension in the air. You can almost expect Peter at any moment to step in, rephrase what the Master just said in more palatable terms and encourage the masses to come back tomorrow afternoon for the big tent meeting on the hill overlooking the ocean. "Outstanding sermons! Come one! Come all!" I said, you can almost hear him.

What is about to happen can well be marked as a turning point in Jesus' life. Maybe the turning point. When Jesus was in Jerusalem, many had seen His miracles and believed on His name. In Samaria, great things had happened. In Galilee, the crowds had been beyond the disciples' understanding. What Jesus knew that His followers didn't, is that it isn't hard to draw crowds if you are giving people what they want and telling them what they want to hear. Jesus' credibility up until now had been based, not upon who He was, but rather upon what He was doing to make the people happy. He had two choices: He could build His theology, and thus His church, on the foundation of what a relationship with God could do to make the Christian's lot easier, or He could tell them the Truth, that the kingdom was a battalion of believers armed for spiritual conflict, enduring suffering, victorious in warfare, being changed by the very conflict itself. It was not a Christianized country club where men

The Bus is Leaving

and women come together to hear what God could do to make their lives more exciting and enjoyable.

Nobody on Madison Avenue would have approved of the Master's approach. He had the multitudes captive at the moment. They wanted what He had. The problem is they did not yet understand what it was He had. Now He was about to draw a line. It was to be God's "Alamo." He was going to paint a picture so graphic no one could miss it.

You see, the question that initiated this portion of the conversation was no different than the one you hear in many circles today. "Lord, what miraculous thing will You do today so that we can keep believing in You?" That's what they asked. And to make sure Jesus understood what they wanted, they reminded Him that their God, Jehovah, was a miracle-working God. He had even fed them with manna in the wilderness, in case this carpenter turned Rabbi didn't know His Bible. What they intentionally overlooked was the fact that that was the only time God ever fed His people with manna. It had been a special time for a special reason. But they wanted more of the same, so they designed a religion based on what God could do to vindicate His deity on a day-to-day basis, and then they said to Jesus, "If You can measure up to this standard, we'll go along with You."

He could have. He could have asked His Father and there would have been golden arches and a McManna Burger stand on every hillside. But there were two flaws in their rationale. Number one, Jesus reminded them, it wasn't Moses who gave them the manna, it was God. You see man wants to restrict God's best to a given place or given people. Jesus wants to be sure we understand that God does what He chooses when He chooses, using whom He chooses. It happened to be Moses. It could have been Abraham or anyone else.

Then He corrects their most vital error. He tells them that the bread God sent in the wilderness was a preview of reality. It was the negative that was yet to be developed. God sent physical bread to meet their needs, so that when the real bread come down from heaven, the Bread of Life, arrived, they would recognize God's purpose. In other words, the physical miracles were pictures of spiritual miracles and unless they were able to make the spiritual switch, they would get hopelessly entangled in a religion of experience and miss the experience of knowing

The Bus is Leaving

the Living God.

So Jesus explains the real difference. Real bread is eternal. When you eat of it, you never go hungry again. Now they could relate to never getting hungry again; they just couldn't relate to what the word "spiritual" meant. So He rebukes them in love. He says, "You want the true bread? You have it, and still you do not believe."

With that arresting statement, the Living God in human form now turns to His astonished crowd and proceeds to describe for them what Christianity is, and what it isn't. Then He will offer them the greatest challenge ever given to "religious man". One by one, He removes everything man can do to take glory from God.

All the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (John 6:37 NIV)

The Living Bible reads this way,

But some will come to me—those the Father has given me and I will never, never reject them. (John 6:37 TLB)

If you remember the difference between religion and Christianity, the first difference is that man is not seeking God; God is seeking man. The very act of salvation is initiated by God. He has come to seek and to save that which was lost. The natural mind hates that, and well it should.

Then in verse 38, Jesus strips away the next vital point of self-glorification available to man, that he can do something for God. Jesus answers it this way,

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38 NIV)

It wasn't in man to determine his destiny and favor God with His interpretation. Man was created in the likeness of God and as He is being recreated back into His likeness, it will be accomplished only as He does exactly what God tells Him to do. In other words, we are under divine authority, and we will only be happy and please God as we obey. That simply is repugnant to the natural man. So be it, Jesus said. Those are the facts.

Then He quickly goes on to say not only is your salvation totally dependent on God, not only does your victory stem from total obedience to God but your security, your ability to complete the course and enjoy the benefits of the kingdom you think ought to be here and now is totally dependent on the same God who

The Bus is Leaving

saved you.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39,40 NIV)

Here was God's will for Jesus — to harvest the crop of souls given to Him by the Father. That crop, according to verse 40, was to include all who look to the Son, and no one who didn't. The Son was to deliver those lives intact at the end of the age into the bosom of the Father. None was to be lost. None could be lost if Jesus was who He said He was. That was the clincher. For tucked in the context of this amazing series of cataclysmic Kingdom statements was the fact that this carpenter's son before whom they stood was claiming to be the Son of God.

That was too much and then we read their response,

At this, the Jews began to grumble about Him because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" (John 6:41,42 NIV)

Do you see the real issue? God had just spoken. 1) They didn't like what He said. 2) They didn't want to believe it was God who said it. These are the two greatest stumbling blocks to salvation. What He said was, "It isn't up to you to find God. God has found you. It isn't up to you to make your way into God's favor. God has already given you to Me. It isn't up to you to become religious so that God will keep you. It's My job to keep you, and I won't lose a one who comes to Me in faith." Beloved, that is not what man wants to hear. It takes from man all of his stepping stones to glorifying self. Some of you who are listening have rejected the gospel, perhaps unconsciously, for the same reasons. You don't want God to have done it all. You don't want to need Him. You want Him to need you. You want to create a God in your image. The truth is, He is the Creator, and He has already created you in His image. Man simply wants to be God, and religion is simply his tool to accomplish that. So God will let you be your own god, if you insist. You'll just never know the True God, the One who came down from heaven, the One who will become to you Living Bread and Living Water.

The Bus is Leaving

Suddenly, in a matter of minutes, the entire tone of the Master's Kingdom campaign had taken a different turn. Instead of telling them what they wanted to hear, which was just how important they were, the carpenter's son had just told them that they were nothing, and God was everything. He had capped it all by declaring Himself to be...God.

Now you might expect Jesus to apologize at this point for having ruffled their theological feathers and gone about the business of gaining their favor once again. You might expect that, but don't. Jesus is not running for public office. Jesus is God. Oh, that we could remember that! He is not campaigning to become a king. He is the King of Glory! Therefore, He need not change His message one iota to make it more palatable or less demanding; neither need He dress it up with spiritualized promises to attract the multitudes. He is the attraction. You need nothing else, and neither does the church.

Not only does Jesus not conform the message to their desires, He confronts their objections head on. Listen as Jesus is speaking,

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.”

(John 6:43,44 NIV)

Then in verses 45-58, Jesus reiterates with uncompromising boldness, the truths He has presented so clearly up until now. He reminds them that they cannot come except the Father draw them. He reminds them that they cannot learn anything spiritual except the Father teach them. He reminds them that no one has even seen the Father except the Son. He reminds them that their forefathers who were so proud of eating manna were all dead. He then shocked them by adding that if they were to eat the Living Bread, they would never die. Then the grand finale,

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. “

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

(John 6:51-53 NIV)

The Bus is Leaving

Then in verse 57 Jesus gives to man the essence of Christianity. Memorize it. It says this,

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.

He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.
(John 6:57-59 NIV)

Do you understand what Jesus just said? Be sure you do, because your response to that statement will well determine the depth of your walk with God. You may well decide, once you understand it, that this matter of discipleship is not for you. That's your prerogative and mine as well. But be sure you grasp it so that you will be making an intelligent decision.

Jesus is simply saying that He, the living Son of God, while on this earth as a man, had absolutely no power, no wisdom, no might, no authority and no fruitfulness apart from that which He, as man, derived from His Father. To whatever degree He remained totally in harmony with and in subjection to the will of His Father, He would demonstrate the life of God. Were He at anytime to act independently of the Father, He would cease demonstrating God and would have at that point sinned. He never did. But the reason He never did was because He never at any point departed from the posture of total, absolute dependence upon the Father for His every breath. Never did He act independently of His Father's will. Never. You say, "Was He a puppet?" Quite the contrary. He was constantly, second-by-second, having to choose whether or not to let God be God in Him or whether at that moment to be less than godly by withholding from God at that moment His right to be Himself.

This lesson and the next are foundation stones upon which the next series will be built. It will be the study of the Life of Christ. It is entitled, "Let God Be God." So these truths will be explored through the lens of the life of Jesus Himself, again and again. For now, however, just accept the Word for what it says, whether you understand it or not. What it says is that never at any time did Jesus sin, for never at any time did He act independently of His Father. He was totally dependent on the Father for every thought, every attitude and every action. It was,

The Bus is Leaving

therefore, the Father living His life in and through that human body that demonstrated in that human body the life of God.

Now listen carefully. Jesus did not stop there. Having made two mind-boggling statements, 1) that He was God in human form and 2) that as God in human form, He never at any time acted apart from total reliance on and obedience to His Father, He now completes the circle with this amazing statement,

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

(John 6:57 NIV)

Jesus said, “If you want God to live in you, then you will have to take your every breath from Me just as I take My every breath from the Father. And only to the degree that you are totally dependent upon Me will you have the capacity to demonstrate the life of God. In other words, apart from Me ye can do nothing.” Let’s continue in John 6,

On hearing it, many of His disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you?”

What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”

From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

(John 6:60-67 NIV)

Jesus laid it on the line. He defined discipleship. Discipleship, He said, is nothing more and nothing less than dying to yourself and letting God be God in you. God doesn’t need you. You need God. You aren’t seeking God. God found you. You won’t earn God’s favor; you can’t. You won’t keep God’s gift because you try. God keeps you because He’s God. You can’t live the Christian life. God has to live it. Therefore, all He’s asking you to do is to

The Bus is Leaving

let Him. There is no glory in that, save the glory that goes to God.

“Now,” Jesus says, “those are the parameters of the Kingdom. Now how many followers do I have?” One by one, then later, group by group, Jesus watched those who had been called “His disciples” search their hearts and walk away. “If this is discipleship,” they surmised, “then it’s not for me. This is too hard, too difficult, too demanding.”

I cannot help but wonder what was going on in the minds of Peter and the others as the Master, at the very peak of His popularity, looks those in the eye who claimed to be committed to following Him and says to them, “You want to follow Me? Then be willing to die.” Can’t you imagine the twelve, in absolute awe as the masses began to depart in droves, muttering, “If this is discipleship, I can’t handle it.”? No doubt the inner circle must have thought, “Lord, ease up! Tone it down a little. Tell them a little more of what they want to hear. Lord, You’re losing Your team. You can’t win the game without a team! Lord, go get them and beg them to come back!”

Instead, Jesus turned to the twelve and said, “How about it, guys, do you want to go with them? The bus is leaving. There’s room for you to go, too. The bus is leaving for Egypt. You can go back to where you were. You can go back to mediocrity, back to the land where you lived life according to your plans and fit God in wherever it was convenient. You can go back to the land of compromise, back to where you were in control and God was a resource you called on to bail you out of trouble when physical circumstances got too heavy. Oh, you’ll still be saved, but it will be as one who is saved from a fire, who loses all his possessions but keeps his life. Do you want to go back, too, guys? The bus is leaving.”

Jesus made no effort to dilute the message or change the rules. He just made their choice even clearer. And as those twelve disciples watched the multitudes line up, as it were, to board the busses back to the village of partial commitment, make no mistake about it, they had some tall thinking to do, and fast. God had appeared to them in the form of His Son and had told them what He wanted from them, if they were to reign with Him. Suddenly, there vanished before their eyes the hopes of Jesus sitting on the throne of Israel with His twelve assistants at His side, ruling a physical kingdom with physical benefits. Suddenly,

The Bus is Leaving

all that was left was a choice of whether or not to follow the crowds who were returning *en masse* to a life of mediocrity, or take a stand to stand with Jesus who had, in essence, just called on them to stand alone.

The bus was leaving. The question they had to face was whether or not to get on board. It was decision time at the O.K. Corral. It was High Noon. It was their moment of truth. To climb aboard Compromise Express meant they would never have God's best. Never. But to remain and walk with Jesus meant that they must forsake all that they had, or they could not be His disciples. That was not an easy choice. It wasn't then and it isn't now. But, my friend, it is that choice and no other that God is calling on us to make.

So in John 6 Jesus defined discipleship. But it is in Luke 14 that He clearly admonishes us, as He did the twelve that day, to sit down today and count the cost before we decide whether or not to get on that bus back to Egypt. I want to read verses 25-32 as they are paraphrased in the Living Bible,

Great crowds were following Him. He turned around and addressed them as follows:

Anyone who wants to be My follower must love Me more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers or sisters, yes, more than his own life, otherwise he cannot be My disciple.

And no one can be My disciple who does not carry his own cross and follow Me.

But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if he has enough money to pay the bill?

Otherwise, he might complete only the foundation before running out of funds and then how everyone would laugh.

"See that fellow there?" they would mock, "He started that building and ran out of money before it was finished."

Or what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of 10,000 is strong enough to defeat 20,000 men who are marching against him?

If the decision is negative, then while the enemy troops are still far away, he will send a truce team to discuss terms of peace.

The Bus is Leaving

So no one can become My disciple unless he first sits down and counts his blessings and then renounces them all for Me. (Luke 14:25-33 TLB)

You have just read God's definition of a disciple. A disciple is one who is so committed to the person of Jesus Christ that he or she honestly sits down and recognizes intelligently that to be a disciple, he or she must be willing to let God determine what is or isn't good for their life, and in that process realizes that following Jesus may well mean giving up everything they had once considered essential, if the losing of those things means the gaining of God's mind.

Jesus is saying, "This isn't a game we're playing. It is a spiritual conflict that's taking place in the heavenlies between God and Satan." It is intense warfare, bitter conflict. God isn't looking for interested by-standers to call the play-by-play. He is looking for men and women who are willing to enlist in God's army and go out where the bombs are falling and the bullets are flying and forsaking all that they have, make themselves available for frontline combat duty. It will cost something. No, it will cost everything. He is also saying that it is painfully apparent that once the cost has been counted, not too many stay behind. Most turn around and, seeing the busses parked in the parking lot of eternity marked Back to Egypt, quietly steal on board. In doing so, in essence, they are saying, "The cost is too high. I'm going back."

What about you? Did you, like those disciples, begin your walk with God not knowing just what it was that God was calling you to do? Did you assume the world's posture that God in you would now rescue you from what the world calls trouble? Did you assume that now you could buckle down and do great things for God? Has the reality been dawning on you of late that God isn't calling on you to do great things for Him? God is quite capable of doing great things for Himself. What He is calling on you to do, you are realizing, is to free Him in you to do whatever He wants to do, even if it means forsaking all that you once considered dear.

Sure, you want to be God's man or woman, but a cross? A broken marriage? A lost job? A wounded friendship? An empty pocketbook? "Lord, if it means this, I want out!" Softly, Jesus is whispering to each one of us, "The bus is leaving. Do you want to go back? I won't hold you." He's saying, "I won't tie you to the

The Bus is Leaving

altar. I won't force you to go deeper."

Count the cost. Decide for yourselves. If you want to go back, the bus is leaving.

It was an occasion such as that, you recall, in Joshua 24 when Joshua called the people together and simply informed them that God had not authorized any detours to discipleship. They had two choices and only two. It was at Shechem. The nation was gathered together to hear from their leader in his closing days. After a healthy history lesson that served to remind the people just what their great God had done, Joshua gave them a clear-cut choice,

And now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and truth. Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt and serve ye the Lord.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell. But, for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:14,15)

I trust you remember the story. The people answered, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods."

Joshua reminded them once more of the cost and of the consequences of saying they would do one thing, while doing another. And again they responded, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord."

That's the choice Jesus offered the twelve that afternoon in Capernaum as they watched the multitudes board the bus of life to go back to the land of self-reliance. He said, "The bus is leaving." And lovingly, He pointed to those hypothetical Greyhound busses and said, "Do you want to go, too?"

May we never forget their memorable response.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."
(John 6:68,69 NIV)

Lord, to whom shall we go? To whom shall we go, indeed.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

(03.10.15)