

## FOLLOW JESUS

READING: SUE BOCK

**Matthew 4:**<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

So my son Deacon is at that wonderful age when He's just absorbing everything in the world around him like a sponge. It's so fun to watch him learn things so quickly. I'm always impressed.

One of the things he LOVES is music - he catches onto songs super quick - and I love music too, so I've been trying to teach him some songs. This week was "My God is so BIG, so STRONG, and so MIGHTY - there's nothing my God cannot do."

Deacon is still working on it though - right now he calls it the "My God is TOO big" song.

I thought it was a great song to follow up on last week's message about fearing the Lord - understanding that God's awesome might and power is matchless, and yet we can take comfort in His presence because He is decidedly FOR us and longs to draw us in in love.

As I sang this song over and over with him this week, I was slowly drawn into worship myself. There's something powerful about kid's songs. They can distill so much truth into such a simple package.

This is our 2nd week in a series called BASICS where we're revisiting some of those simple, basic, foundational truths for the Christian journey. And there is POWER in that simplicity.

And that POWER is multiplied when we live it out and teach it to others.

My hope is that as we revisit these basic concepts it would not end with you all nodding in agreement or mulling it over for a few hours after church. I want you to be thinking how you can model it and teach it forward.

The message I have for us today is not a complicated message. It's really very simple. But that doesn't mean it's easy.

In fact it's so difficult that many churchgoing people just don't do it. They may not admit to it, but they'll just decide not to do it and that's that.

I'm talking about following Jesus.

What does it mean to "follow" someone? There's all sorts of answers to that:

- Keep up-to-date on what's happening with them: social media, news, sports teams, fandoms.
- Stalking - intimate knowledge and obsession devoid of any actual relationship.
- Being guided - voluntarily putting yourself under the tutelage of a teacher, coach, or mentor.

This last meaning is the sense that the Gospels are getting at. Not being a fan. Not obsessing over a person without any real relationship. But actually journeying with them because you trust they'll lead you to a place that is better for you, that you just can't get to yourself.

We ALL follow someone or something - the question is who or what. Last week I argued that when the Bible tells us "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" - that is a way of saying that TRUE WISDOM starts by recognizing there is nothing and no one greater to submit to than God.

Yet we submit to other things all the time.

A common refrain of our culture is that we should follow our heart. The problem is that our hearts are generally pretty fickle and often deceptive. I used to joke in youth ministry that you'd be better off following your farts - cause they'll at least be consistent.

Some people's lives are guided by their **pain**.

Some people are guided by their **desires**.

Some are guided by **fear and prejudice**.

Still others are guided by **noble concepts like love, joy, peace, or sacrifice**.

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, it's a call to trust His leadership over all others.

#### I. FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS LEAVING OLD GUIDES (20, 23-24).

**Answering Jesus' call to follow means leaving everything else behind - both the good and the bad.**

For many in the crowds, initially following meant leaving behind sickness, pain, and spiritual affliction to find healing and new life.

For the disciples, it involved leaving behind a family business and trade. For some others, it meant leaving behind comfort and status.

Following Jesus is ALWAYS worth it - it's the only way to a life that is TRULY life. But for some it is much harder than others.

**In Mt 19:24, Jesus says "it's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than a rich person to get to heaven."**

**That's not a critique of the rich. It's an observation.** If anything, it's a statement of sympathy. Those with wealth in their life are clouded from discovering what is truly valuable.

The sick, hurting, poor, and forsaken - those at the bottom of the barrel - they can easily see the weight of sin and brokenness in life and they WANT Jesus. They WANT a new guide.

I was talking to a teenager once who was a really bright kid. Incredibly smart, athletic, personable, and came from a wonderful Christian home. But was starting to question the whole Jesus thing...not even necessarily because he had any serious doubts about the existence of God.

He just didn't feel like he needed Him. Everything was pretty much going well in his life, so why should he spend any time trying to live his life differently?

At a different time, I once got into a conversation with a couple of young guys and one of them mentioned his pinky had been broken, so my friend and I offered to pray for him.

He said sure, and halfway into our prayer he stopped us and said, "Hey, what'd you just do to my finger?" He said, "Do you have some weird lotion or something?" My friend and I just looked at each other confused, and he said, "It feels better."

We're like, "Nah man, that's just prayer! That's what God does!" And as we continued talking we got to share the Gospel with him. And you could see the gears turning in his head - because he and his buddy were there with a girl, and they'd been making some comments before that were...less than pure, we'll just put it that way.

And you could tell he's realizing that if what we're saying is really true, then he's gonna have to change something about the course his life is headed...and he did not choose Jesus. At least not that day.

Jesus' grace and forgiveness for us is completely free...but it costs you everything.

To follow Jesus means that you have to give up everything that previously led your life.

You give up control of your life so that you can go where Jesus goes and do what He does.

Have you ever heard the saying, **“What would Jesus do?”**

**I hate that saying.** I mean, I get it, and it’s in good intent. But it’s worded all wrong. It makes it sound like Jesus did stuff and then he was done. But Jesus IS ALIVE and His Holy Spirit is living and moving and active in our world.

We should instead be asking, **“What IS Jesus DOING?”** And we follow Him in whatever that is.

Following Jesus is saying, “My life is not my own, it belongs to Jesus, and I’m going to go wherever he leads me and do whatever he asks of me.”

Ironically, one of the first things Jesus leads us to do is to invest in others.

## II. FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS LEADING OTHERS (19).

From the very outset of His call for the disciples to follow, we see the message that they will lead others. Jesus tells these fishermen that they’ll be fishers of men.

It’s a clever wordplay that implies something important - following Jesus means gathering others to follow as well.

This isn’t just about our duty as a Christian. Following Jesus reorients our entire life. When He saves us from sin, He gives us something completely new to live for - and that’s news that is meant to be shared to bring more peace, and love, and joy into the world.

One of my favorite movies is a Jimmy Stewart classic called *Harvey* - anyone here seen it?

Jimmy Stewart plays Elwood P Dowd, an infectiously kind gentlemen whose family and friends are trying to have committed to an insane asylum because he won’t stop talking about his best friend Harvey.

The problem being of course that Harvey is a 6’ 3.5” talking rabbit that nobody else can see.

But to Elwood, well Harvey is just the most wonderful person that he’s ever met, and he can’t wait to introduce everyone he meets to his best friend. It’s embarrassing to his family, but he doesn’t notice or care. He’s having the time of his life.

A lot of people think Christians crazy because believe that Christ’s Spirit lives in us, and we can actually have a relationship and communicate with the real, living God - even though we can’t see Him physically.

I’ll tell you what - Jesus is a heck of a lot more impressive than a tall rabbit, and He’s real to boot.

Why wouldn't anyone who knows Jesus want to introduce everyone to him?

It IS true that not everyone is naturally as outgoing as Elwood Dowd - and not everyone is gifted in such a way that it's easy to share their faith with people they've just met.

But it's also true that Following Jesus means following His command to preach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations.

That doesn't have to mean missionary work in a foreign country or full-time ministry as a preacher or evangelist. But it DOES mean each and every follower of Jesus should be living their life in such a way that others come to know Him.

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Some of you may be feeling a little convicted that you don't share your faith enough. Or maybe you don't feel convicted and you're already listing in your head all the reasons why it's OK you don't share with others.

But let this sink in for a moment: You are ALREADY leading others.

The question is not whether or not you will lead others with your words and actions, the question is where and how you're leading them.

People are already looking at your life. You already have some people looking up to you and others observing the choices you make. And if they know you call yourself a Christ follower, then the WAY you live that out says something to them about who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

You are ALREADY leading others.

Are you leading them to Jesus? Or away from Him?

Are you leading them to Jesus? Or to whatever version of Jesus you've replaced Him with?

That responsibility can be a terrifying thought - but it shouldn't paralyze us into inaction.

Jesus doesn't call perfect people, and He doesn't expect us to lead others perfectly. He just expects us to lead others as we follow Him.

There's a famous quote that "Christianity is just like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

As you learn, teach it forward.

As you make mistakes, let others see you repent, apologize, and change.

As you follow, let others see and invite them to follow too.

So following Jesus means leaving whatever we trusted as our guide before...and it means inviting others to follow as well...

But most importantly it means following Jesus where He goes. And that's where the whole Jesus thing really gets difficult on a whole different level... because if you know the Gospel, you know where Jesus went...to the cross.

We love accepting the gift of forgiveness that Jesus gave for us on the cross...but for whatever reason we like to ignore the bit when Jesus asks us to follow Him there.

### III. FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS DENYING YOURSELF (16:24).

**Matthew 16:**<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

And then all the disciples respond with, "Say what now?"

This verse actually comes as Jesus is explaining to the disciples in plain language exactly what's going to happen - He's going to Jerusalem, and everyone is going to turn against Him and decide to have Him killed, and that it's all necessary because He's going to overcome death and rise again on the third day.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, they don't understand. Raising from the dead isn't exactly a thing they'd seen before, and seemed a bit far fetched.

So Peter says, "OK but how about this BETTER plan - You DON'T go there and DON'T get killed."

And what does Jesus say?

*[huh, I hadn't thought of that...yeah maybe]*

Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan!" - Straight up calls Peter the devil and calls him out for trying to derail God's plan.

And THAT's when Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple, you've got to deny your plans for your safety, take up your own cross and follow me there too."

Jesus will go on to say that whoever seeks to save His life will lose it, but whoever loses His life for the sake of Christ will find it.

**This is a recurring principle in Christ's teaching:**

Whatever you hold onto...that's all you get.

Whatever you release into His care...it multiplies.

You can live your life for yourself and it may be pretty good - but that's all you'll get. But if you release your hold on your life and give it up to Jesus, you'll find a life that produces joy abundant.

It will involve denying comfort, safety, and could even mean physically laying down your life. But in doing so you will receive wonder, beauty, and a life that is TRULY life.

Life with Jesus is a life truly worth living. It reminds me of that Alicia Keys song...

Some people want it all - I don't want nothing at all - if it ain't you Jesus  
Some people want diamond rings - some just want everything - but everything means nothing  
If I ain't got You

Following Jesus means following Him through death so that we can find TRUE life.

Jesus' cross isn't just about forgiveness - IT IS ABOUT THAT - but it's also about leading us to confront death so that we can find His resurrection life on the other side.

John 1:14 tells us that Jesus came and dwelt among us - literally pitched His tent to live with us here - but He didn't stay here.

In John 14:2, Jesus tells us that He's not sticking around after the resurrection, but instead that He's going to prepare a place for us.

He's gifting us with His Holy Spirit to live within us as a guide and advocate - but Jesus, in His bodily form is going to the right hand of the Father to get things ready for a new place for us. A new heavens and a new earth. And we will be reunited with Him and follow Him there.

When we face death, we don't have to fear, because we know that death is not the last word. We'll be following Him to a new blessed home, a perfect marriage of heaven and earth with no sin and no separation between God and humanity.

**Jesus came here so that He could go. And He went so that we could follow.**

The ONLY way into that real, true, eternal life is by following Him.

I thought hard about how to conclude the message this week, and there is really no other appropriate response to call for in a message about following Jesus other than a call to come and follow Him.

Many of you already are following. Some may still need to make that choice. Others may need to recommit themselves. But many of you, I believe, need and encouragement to keep on following with endurance.

So. **[Listen carefully because I'm going to give some instructions right now]**

I actually don't want to do an altar call this morning. I want to do a commissioning service.

Jesus is calling each and every one of you. And He wants to send us out into the world to follow His lead wherever we go.

If you will continue to answer that call today, I'd like to pray a blessing over you this morning.

In **Matthew 28:18**, Jesus says "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus says come to me all you weary and heavy laden and I'll gift you rest. I'll lead you to quiet waters. My burden is easy and my yoke is light.

Jesus says come follow me and I'll make you fishers of men - I'll lead you to lead others into life everlasting.

Jesus says come take up your cross and follow me - Deny yourself, because when you let go of life the way YOU think it should go, you'll find a life truly worth living.

Jesus says come follow me and teach others to do the same. Baptize them and welcome them into this wild and wonderful family and teach them the ways of life. Follow me and I'll be with you always.

May we follow Him with peace, joy, and love.

Let's pray.