

“Follow Me!” Matthew: Life and Words of Jesus, Part 45 – Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21 – Ben Wikner – April 14, 2013

Introduction

1. When Jesus speaks about following him, the more common word that Jesus uses combines the prefix indicating “union” and the word meaning “path or road”, which also means “voyage or journey”. So when Jesus says, “Follow me” he is saying “join me in my path, my journey.” It’s the idea of walking with Jesus, being near to him. It’s highly relational and communicative, but with the clear understanding that Jesus is the leader; he is setting the course.
2. So what does it mean to follow Jesus?

Following Jesus is...what being a Christian is all about

1. This is the most basic command; it encompasses all the others. If we follow: we love, forgive, serve, etc. To be a Christian is to be united to Christ, to walk with Him, to imitate him.
 - a. If you boil down Christianity to it’s essence, it’s about Jesus. If you boil down the Christian life to its essential element, it’s about following Jesus. Everything else flows out of following Jesus. Do you want to simplify your Christian life? Follow Jesus. Do you want to live in God’s will? Follow Jesus. Do you want ultimate meaning and purpose? Then follow Jesus.
2. Our tendency is to want to live according to a list or by a set of rules. We can get so caught up trying to follow Christianity (the religion) that we forget to follow Christ. And when it’s about Christianity (religion, rules, and lists) more than about Christ (relationship, communion, and discipleship) we will focus on doing and not doing things, rather than on walking with Jesus.
 - a. For example, consider our call to holiness. Holiness is good, even necessary. However, if holiness is understood through the lens of the religion of Christianity, it inevitably becomes about doing good things and not doing bad things. It becomes a checklist of rules through which we determine if we (and others) are living holy lives. This mindset breeds self-righteousness and self-condemnation. It leads to a spirit of judgment toward others. Because of this, the call to holiness will be undermined, even rejected, giving way to license – we are free in Jesus!
 - b. We must not reject holiness, but rather, rule-centered religion. The right way for holiness and sanctification to flourish in our life is to follow Jesus – his way, his path – in growing our relationship with him. If we get this right, the Christian life follows.

Sermon Outline

Following Jesus is...about the cross

1. Following Jesus is more than just believing in Jesus. Following Jesus means following the path of the cross. "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38). "If anyone who would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Following Jesus is our death sentence: to die to ourselves and the way of this world.
2. In this world there are 3 primary sources of power: military, financial and intellectual. Jesus didn't reference or appeal to any of these. He accomplished his work through the cross. And so must we, if we are willing to follow him.
 - a. If we don't want to live in the shadow of the cross, we don't want Christ. If we are not willing to live in the light of the cross, we cannot be Christ's disciple. The cross is the path of humility, weakness, selflessness and suffering. But it is also the path that leads to resurrection – to life. Whoever follows Jesus, who takes up his cross and follows him, will truly live.

Following Jesus is...about Jesus

1. It's so simple and yet, how quickly we forget. We lose sight of the Savior and start to focus on ministry, theology, efficiency, programs, and policy – all good things. But we lose Jesus in the busyness and clamor of good things.
 - a. Losing sight of what is of primary importance is what Jesus meant when he gently corrected Martha, *"You are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken from her"* (Luke 10: 41-42). Mary, unlike Martha, had positioned herself at the Savior's feet. She represents the wise disciple who understands that it is all about Jesus.
2. While following Jesus is simple, it's not necessarily easy. It's hard because the call is to *follow*. We are not in charge. Jesus is in charge. He calls the shots. It can be hard both on account of where he takes us as well as where he keeps us. We don't know what tomorrow brings. We don't get to choose how we will glorify God. We are called to simply follow.
 - a. What following Jesus looks like will be different for every person. Some might be like Peter, called to serve Jesus at home in the neighborhood, at the school or in the job in which the Lord has placed us. Some might be like Paul, called to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. What is important is that we follow Jesus – wherever he leads, wherever he calls.

Sermon Outline

3. According to God's Word, following Jesus will be meaningful, exhaustingly refreshing, powerfully unimpressive to the world, and ultimately glorious. Indeed, our suffering is not worthy to be compared to the glory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

1. The following is a letter to new employees of a technology company:

"There's work and then there's your life work. The kind of work that has your fingerprints all over it. The kind of work that you'd never compromise on. That you'd sacrifice a weekend for. You can do that kind of work at [this company]. People don't come here to play it safe. They come here to swim in the deep end. They want their work to add up to something. Something big. Something that couldn't happen anywhere else."

2. If a technology company, which will eventually fizzle and die as all things in this world do, can sincerely say the above to their new employees, how much more can and does the Lord of Lord, the King of Kings, the resurrected Savior of the world promise this and so much more to us who follow Him? Let us follow Jesus.

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read the various passages in Matthew referencing "follow me".
2. Why should the entirety of our Christian life flow out of following Jesus? How could obeying this simple command reorient your life and priorities?
3. What's your tendency – to follow Jesus or live according to a set of rules? If you tend to live by rules, what happens in your heart when you either keep or fail to keep the rules?
4. Ben stated that following Jesus means following the path of the cross – humility, weakness, selflessness and suffering. What does it mean in your life to take up your cross and follow Jesus?
5. Why is following Jesus so simple and yet so hard? Are you willing to follow regardless of where he leads and calls you?
6. Do you tend to lose sight of Jesus in the busyness of ministries, programs or activities? Is your life characterized more by being a Martha or a Mary (see Luke 10:38-42)?