

Follow Me

Week 3: Stop, Drop, and Let's Roll!

I. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

A. That's the unifying question we're wrestling with these days. We easily forget that God has sent His Son Jesus to bridge the gap of sin that we couldn't cross. He was resurrected and extends new life to us. For some of us, maybe all of us, new life in Christ will still lead us through physical death. Perhaps some of us will be that generation that experiences the return of Christ, but either way, faith in Jesus gives us citizenship in His Kingdom. His Kingdom was inaugurated when Jesus walked the earth and defeated death on the cross. One day, His Kingdom will be consummated (take full effect) on earth as it is in heaven!

1. Jesus paid the full price for our Kingdom citizenship. His sovereign plan will be done on earth as it is in heaven, though for now, we live in a world impacted by sin.

We get the wonderful privilege of following Jesus in between the:
Already but not yet!

2. The penalty of sin has already been paid. Death has already lost its sting. The Kingdom of God expands with every heart that turns to Jesus, even as we experience the battle against sin and evil. Not yet, but one day soon the Kingdom will take full effect and every square inch of earth will experience the rule of Jesus that He already possesses. That is what we live for. We live today in preparation for that Day when Jesus saturates all creation with His rule: A rule of love and peace.

B. The invitation that Jesus has extended to us in the already that will continue for eternity is an invitation of: Relationship.

1. He's done everything already so that we can be in a relationship with Him.

We simply accept the invitation and we:
Follow!

2. Not by our own strength or accord. We follow through the empowerment of His Spirit within us that opens our eyes, ears, minds, and hearts to what Jesus is doing in the world and we follow Him there. Jesus has now given us the charge to expand His Kingdom by "going and making disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28)

3. We talk about cheap grace mostly in terms of receiving the forgiveness of God but still living our own way. I'd like to add that one way we cheapen God's grace is by turning the relationship He's extended to us into a moral checklist. So many Christians never get around to following Jesus and that's precisely what the invitation is! We don't read the Bible like it's a fun fact book. We read the Bible to download our map on where and how we'll be following Jesus today! It's a daily, dynamic relationship that spills over into the relationships with those around us. We don't get to know Jesus through understanding the facts of the Bible. We grow intimate with Jesus when we expose our lives to His Word and the Word of God intersects with the Spirit of God and we follow Him out into the world.

II. Today, I want us to consider 5 people that Jesus looked at and said:

"Follow Me!"

A. I know, I know! It sounds like a long sermon, but it isn't. Out of the 5, there are 2 sets of brothers. The same invitation has been extended throughout the centuries. Let's look at the original invitations and consider what it means for us to be a follower of Jesus.

Mark 1:16-20 - 16 As he passed alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother, casting a net into the sea- for they were fishermen. 17 "Follow me," Jesus told them, "and I will make you fish for people." 18 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 Going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat putting their nets in order. 20 Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

I'd like us to go ahead and look at Mark 2:13-14 as well. When we consider these 3 invitations that address 5 people, there is a pattern that emerges. We need to be aware of the pattern because the invitation hasn't changed. It's still an invitation to follow Jesus.

Mark 2:13-14 - 13 Jesus went out again beside the sea. The whole crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 Then passing by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the toll booth, and he said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him.

B. What does it mean for us to follow Jesus? Let's look at the pattern that emerges to see what it means for us to follow.

- 1. Jesus isn't much of a sit and wait kind of guy! He is actively engaged and the One who:
Seeks us out!**
- 2. Jesus found them; they didn't find Jesus! Isn't it wonderful that God cares for us so much that He seeks us out. God isn't distant; He never takes His eye from us. He's a God that takes note. He's the God who sees. In Genesis 16:13, God is given a name by Hagar: El-Roi -The God who sees me. Jesus, the invisible God made visible, is often on the move in the gospels and He's always doing what?
Seeing people!**
- 3. He takes note of them, and He sees what they're doing. Jesus still sees and takes note today. He meets us where we are! Jesus met Simon, Andrew, James, and John at their fishing boat. Jesus met Levi at his toll booth. Maybe you're in a place today you'd rather not be. Maybe a series of decisions have landed you in a place that had you known from the start, you would have avoided.
Here's some really good news: Jesus will come to you!**

C. Here is the invitation that Jesus will extend:

Follow Me!

- 1. Jesus will meet us where we are, but He doesn't negotiate the terms. He invites us into a relationship, but it isn't a partnership. He loves us and He also leads us. We align our lives to Jesus and He determines the path forward. That invitation is full of grace, and it is also full of truth. It's a personal invitation to submit our lives to the King of kings, but our lives are under His authority. We follow Him.**
- 2. Some people think God is egotistical in His call to be served. Let's not be foolish. What kind of egotistical God wraps on flesh and does exceedingly more, even to His own death on a cross, for those He now summons to follow? He's much more worthy than our lip service; He's worthy of our very lives!**
- 3. The invitation to follow Jesus implies that there will be things that must go. However, Jesus didn't tell any one of the 5 that they had to give up anything. Do you see Jesus telling them to give up anything?**
- 4. Why would Jesus find it sufficient to give a simple invitation to follow Him? Circumstances come and go. This is the case for all of us. There will always be a sacrifice for following Jesus, but the reward will always be greater. Jesus promises for this to be true!**

Matthew 6:33 - 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.

- 5. Jesus didn't tell these guys they had to give up anything. Jesus simply extended an invitation to follow Him which put each of these fellows right smack in the middle of a decision to make. One decision (and direction) aligned their lives as followers of Jesus. The other decision (and direction) would have aligned their lives with an endless possibility of other things.**

Here's the decision behind the invitation to follow Jesus:

Will you prioritize your life around Me?

- 6. When we do that, the focus isn't on what we give up but rather what we gain in return. Just like Jesus did with these 5 followers, He takes their personalities, their gifting, their experiences, and He leverages them for His glory (His honor and power). We get the delight of doing what we were created to do from the beginning: leverage our lives for the very purposes of God! Wow! What a deal!**

D. If we look at the 5 examples from the text today, we can see what decision Simon, Andrew, James, John, and Levi made and how they prioritized their lives to follow Jesus. Let's consider these for a moment and let the text speak for itself. There's a misconception that easily happens and it goes something like this, "I don't want to get too crazy about this following Jesus or I might end up in Africa, in a monastery, in a pulpit somewhere, or heaven forbid the public school system." The invitation isn't to follow Jesus to arrive at some destination or some specific opportunity in life. That would make Jesus the means to an end. The invitation is to simply follow Me. That means we must prioritize our relationship with Jesus and everything else must align behind that commitment.

- 1. What did Simon and Andrew align behind their decision to follow Jesus? They prioritized following Jesus over their:
Possessions.**

Mark 1:18 - 18 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Those were their nets and it's how they made their living. That's an important possession. I do a lot of reading and writing as a part of my role at Tab. If I had to give up my books, that would be hard for me. But even my books must fall behind my commitment to Jesus.

- 2. At first, it seems like James and John had to make the same decision as Simon and Andrew but look more closely at the text. Speaking of James and John:**

Mark 1:20 - 20 Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

James and John prioritized following Jesus over their:
Parent.

The expectations of family relationships were extremely important in 1st Century Israel as it is in a significant part of the world today. James and John were at least 2nd generation businessmen, and it was probably a lucrative business. They left their father in the boat along with the hired help. Zebedee had some expectations on his boys. You work hard to build the family business and the sons are expected to take over. James and John decided that day to prioritize their relationship with Jesus over their parent.

- 3. Levi is a bit of an outlier. He doesn't have a brother that we know of. He might have but by virtue of his position as a tax collector, his family would have disowned him. To be a tax collector in that day was to make a deal with the devil. They were scum in the eyes of the Jewish people. Levi's dad Alphaeus (if he was alive) would have been ashamed of his son so there was no prioritizing of family for Levi. But this reveals to us where Levi's priority lies when Jesus locked eyes on him that day.**

For Levi, he prioritized following Jesus over his:
Position.

We might also say Levi prioritized Jesus over his profession. But why would Jesus lock eyes on Levi and give him an invitation to follow? Because Jesus would leverage the relationships that Levi had with an entire segment of society to indicate that He didn't come for those who were well, but those who were sick.

E. Why do I use the word prioritize? To follow Jesus is to prioritize our lives around our commitment to following Jesus not to disconnect from our lives. After these 5 guys are given the invitation, and they accept, we see then bringing Jesus back home with them. We see Jesus using a lot of boats over the course of His earthly ministry. We see Levi taking Jesus to a party with his co-workers. Jesus is now the priority over their possessions, parent, and position.

- 1. Jesus calls the shots on how our possessions are leveraged.**
- 2. Jesus is now the priority over family relationships. To follow Jesus, we put Jesus first in our marriage. We put Jesus first in our parenting. We put Jesus first in how we serve our aging loved ones.**
- 3. We follow Jesus in our positions, and we honor Him with everything we have. If our job requires us to be unethical than we follow Jesus and we let Him lead us into somewhere that is God-honoring.**

F. What does it mean to follow Jesus? One day God might just call you to go to the ends of the earth and tell someone about Jesus. I hope that He does! But that's not really what it means to follow Jesus. That's a destination not an invitation. To follow Jesus simply means this:

He gets first place!

- 1. We make the decision to follow, and we keep living out that decision to follow. When we fail, we fail forward. If we aren't experiencing God, perhaps it's because we're asking Him for advice; we're not offering our bodies as a living sacrifice.**

G. I'll close with just a few questions that we should regularly be asking:

- 1. What does it look like for You to be the priority in my family?**
- 2. If we're single, what does it look like for You to be the priority in my dating relationships or the way I interact with my parents or siblings?**
- 3. What does it look like for You to be the priority in my profession?**
- 4. What does it look like for You to get the priority in this paycheck?**

H. I can't answer those questions for you, but I know where you can find the answers. When the Word of God meets the Spirit of God in a human heart our lives are transformed. Jesus too will summons us:

Hey you, yes you, come and follow Me!