

Following Jesus

Luke 9:23-25

INTRODUCTION

Last week we finished up two series. One on the Model Prayer and the series within a series on Spiritual Warfare. Now we press on to today's subject of what it means to follow Jesus.

We speak of following Jesus, and I believe many of us do, but I hope today we pause and reflect on what it costs to be a follower of Jesus. We need to realign discipleship as the central focus of the activities of the church verses church activities or culture giving us a false sense of what is our church identity.

Robby Gallaty, Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples

“When the church becomes an end in itself, it ends. When Sunday school, as great as it is, becomes an end in itself, it ends. When small groups ministry becomes an end in itself, it ends. When the worship service becomes an end in itself, it ends. What we need is for discipleship to become the goal, and then the process never ends. The process is fluid. It is moving. It is active. It is a living thing. It must continue to go on. Every disciple must make disciples.”

We must take a fresh look at what it means to follow Jesus, and the person of Christ Himself, rather than the cotton candy idea of Christianity within the church today where it looks good, tastes good, but has no sustenance to sustain.

N.T. Wright

The longer you look at Jesus, the more you will want to serve Him in His world. That is, of course, if it's the real Jesus you're looking at. Plenty of people in the church and outside it have made up a 'Jesus' for themselves, and have found that this invented character makes few real demands on them. He makes them feel happy from time to time but doesn't challenge them, doesn't suggest they get up and do something about the plight of the world. Which is, of course, what the real Jesus had an uncomfortable habit of doing.

Churches who only focus on evangelism (often it is an evangelism into the culture like their own not evangelism into actually following Jesus) may not have discipleship in their structure, therefore, they grow into huge nurseries of baby Christians. Churches, on the other hand, who focus on discipleship grow leaders for tomorrow in their church, community, and country, and who can't help but want to evangelize because that is part of discipleship. We must get beyond the idea that the end goal is only conversion, but rather conversion is just the beginning of the journey in teaching people how to follow Jesus.

David Kinnaman, unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters

“Most people in America, when they are exposed to the Christian faith, are not being transformed. They take one step into the door, and the journey ends. They are not being allowed, encouraged, or equipped to love or to think like Christ. Yet in many ways a focus on spiritual formation fits what a new generation is really seeking. Transformation is a process, a journey, not a one-time decision.”

When we follow Jesus we are declaring that each day we are following Jesus. It is not a one-time decision, but declaring that decision for a life time which produces overtime a life being transformed into the life of Christ.

Luke 9:23-25

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

I. The Desire to Follow

John 6:43-44

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.

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

"If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."

II. Deny Ourselves

Notice the difference:

"Prosperity Gospel" televangelist and preacher Paula White

Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is from Satan.

Jesus

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.

Zack Poonen

God is looking for men and women who will never be content with mere experiences and "blessings," but who will take up the cross daily and follow Jesus and thus manifest in their lives and in their service the reality of those words, "It is no longer I, but Christ that lives in me." This, and this alone is the Spirit-filled life.

III. Daily Devoted to Sacrifice

A.W. Pink

The first step toward a daily following of Christ is the denying of self.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

IV. Decision to Discipleship

To make a decision is to call your behaviors and future choices into a present accountability.

Tim Keller

“Discipleship is not an option. Jesus says that if anyone would come after me, he must follow me.”

Dallas Willard

“Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you.”

CONCLUSION

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.

My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
No turning back, no turning back.