

On the Way to the Cross – Follow Me

We are doing a new series titled “**On The Way To The Cross.**” The purpose of this series is to examine some of the pertinent and profound things that Jesus spoke about during His time on earth. If we accept that Jesus was thirty (**Luke 3:23**), and that His ministry started 40 days after He was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted (**Luke 4:14**), we can begin to plot a chronological course from that point of reference to the Cross. Note, we will be walking this road with Jesus and paying attention to what He says along the way (not to what He does).

We know that shortly after turning the water into wine (**John 2:1-11**), Jesus cleansed the temple court in Jerusalem (**John 2:13-17**), and then taught Nicodemus on the importance of being Born Again (**John 3:1-14**). A few months later Jesus met the woman at the well (**John 4:23**), and after leaving Samaria He entered Galilee where He healed the nobleman's son (**John 4:43-54**). Next, Jesus left Galilee and travelled to His hometown of Nazareth. There, He preached in the Synagogue from the Book of Isaiah (**Luke 4:16-21**). All this took between 9 and 10 months!

Matthew 4:13 tells us, “After leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea.” “...And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen” (Verse 18). Let us now take up the story from Luke's account in Chapter 5... “So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Genesareth (Sea of Galilee), and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch’. But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net’. And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. (**Luke 5:1-7**)

It's worth noting that each of the Gospels gives an account of Jesus calling His first disciples, and each writer portrays it a little differently. Some were mending nets, while others still trying to catch a few fish by casting their nets from the shore (**Matthew 5:18-21**). Only Luke's gospel goes into detail about what happened that day and only Luke's Gospel records the miracle catch of fish. Here, Simon Peter had been washing and mending his nets, while at the same time, listening to what Jesus was teaching. After all he had other responsibilities and duties to perform. He had to fish to make a living and feed his family.

After addressing the crowd, Jesus asks Simon to launch out into deeper water. This is an analogy of what Christ wanted to do in Simon's life. Jesus was intending to take Simon to a deeper, more personal commitment to Himself. So He asks Simon Peter to do something contrary to his own professional expertise. Peter is reluctant because he can't see why it would work! The best fishing on the Sea of Galilee was at night, close to shore. Yet Jesus asked him to launch out into the deep in the middle of the day. This was asking a great deal of Peter. Jesus was asking him to trust His Word - simply take Him at His word!

The Lord was in effect asking Simon Peter to try again even though he had failed. God may ask you to try again even if you have failed in the past. The circumstances of the past evening indicated that further fishing would be fruitless. Yet Jesus was asking them to take the freshly cleaned nets and row out to the deep water and go through the strenuous process of letting out the nets (and taking them in), all over again. These future disciples needed to learn that obedience to Jesus should not hinge upon favourable circumstances. Do you allow circumstances to dictate your obedience?

Simon Peter knew in his own mind that there was no reason to expect a catch where Jesus had told him to let down the nets. But even so, Peter's respect for Jesus caused him to obey. Notice, Peter let down "the" net (singular). But Jesus had said, "nets" (plural). This was a partial obedience. Nevertheless even Peter's partial obedience was greatly rewarded. The result was truly staggering. There was such an immense catch that it was straining the capacity of the net and Peter had to seek help from his fishing partners in the other boat. Probably several tons of fish were hauled ashore that day (in the midst of a roar from the delighted crowd).

However, the effect on Peter was profound! This miracle forever changed the way he viewed Jesus. Earlier we heard Peter addressing Jesus as "master", but here he uses the word "kurie", which means "Supreme Lord." It's a word reserved by the Jews for describing the Lord Almighty. Before Jesus called these disciples, He revealed His true identity. Suddenly, their eyes were no longer on the miracle but on the 'miracle-worker' - the Lord Supreme! *"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men'."* (Luke 5:8-10)

Matthew 4:19 conveys the Lord's declaration differently, *"Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men."* What was their response? *"They immediately left their nets and followed Him"* (verse 20). Let's continue... *"When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him"* (Mark 1:19-20). A few weeks later, this happened, *"Jesus went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. As He passed by, He saw Levi (Matthew) the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me'. So he arose and followed Him"* (Mark 2:13-14).

What's interesting here is that two different Greek words (or phrases) are used for **"follow Me."** When speaking to Simon Peter Jesus says, "follow Me" which literally means "come behind me" or "come after me." But later, when addressing Matthew the word's meaning changes to "become a follower", which suggests "union or likeness." Therefore, the first statement is telling Peter to "follow in the Lord's footsteps," and the second is telling Matthew to "become just like Him." Another noteworthy point is that the second word is used 77 times in the Gospels, of "following Christ," and only once otherwise!

I really believe that when Jesus calls us, He calls us to follow in His footsteps, but also to become just like Him. Both these characteristics are part of being a true disciple! And according to the Great Commission we are all called to "make disciples of all people." In other words, Jesus wants to replicate Himself over and over again! Just listen to His words, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father"* (John 14:12). Isn't this "following in His footsteps?"

In **John 17:22-23** Jesus makes another astounding statement, *“The glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”* Here, Jesus is expressing perfect and complete “unity” - being one and the same!

When Jesus Christ calls us He doesn't say, “Do your own thing.” He says, “Follow Me.” Become just like Me! When we join His church – we sign up to be part of a movement that is based on the idea that there is something much more interesting in the world than ourselves. By becoming a disciple of Christ we are chasing a cause far greater than our own ambitions. In the face of voices that tell us we're not being true to ourselves if we do not run off and do our own thing, Jesus says, **“Follow me.”** In the midst of economic collapse and moral confusion, Jesus says, **“Follow me.”** As Christians, that is exactly what we must do! We must follow Jesus!

As true disciples of His let's consider this: The call comes directly from Jesus. By that I mean, the initiative lies all with Him, not with us. Jesus went walking along a lake and He found disciples. He met them when they were going about their business - not looking for Him. They didn't do a thing to merit or earn His attention. And there was nothing about them that was special. They didn't seek Jesus, He sought them! The Lord simply said, **“Follow Me.”** He took the initiative!

Likewise, when Jesus goes walking, He sees us. He finds us where we are! He then speaks clearly to us (words of love, life and forgiveness), because it is the ‘divine call’ to follow Him. For those original disciples who were also apostles (for Peter and Andrew, James and John), the call to discipleship meant becoming full-time fishers of men. But for most of you, the call to discipleship means living out your God-given vocation wherever He has placed you. The key to your success is simply to follow Jesus wherever you may be.

So remember;

- (1) the call comes directly from Jesus,
- (2) the initiative lies with Him,
- (3) the call is surprisingly simple.

It is simply Jesus calling us to **follow Him**. And that call is profoundly life-changing in its effects. It transforms us and gives us a life that is filled with peace, joy and abundance. Therefore, keep listening as your Master calls, day after day, **“Follow Me.”** Never cease to respond quickly to His voice and His call - **“Follow Me.”** It's an invitation from Jesus that may demand everything from you. However, it is also the most rewarding commitment you will ever make.

Jesus only asks us to give Him what we know. Each new day there will be another opportunity to say, “yes” (once again). To choose to **follow Jesus** with everything we are and all that we know! For in tomorrow's knowing – no matter how difficult it is, there will be adequate grace to continue to follow Him. Remember how Simon Peter obeyed the Lord's voice in spite of all that he knew professionally and all that he had just experienced. So respond to the love the permeates from this personal invitation every day - straight from the Mater's voice - **“Follow Me.”**

- Following Jesus means becoming just like Him!
- Following Jesus means doing the things that He did and even more!

- Following Jesus means experiencing the greatest Love that ever lived.