

VII.FOLLOW

66. Give up your life to follow Jesus. Read Mt 4:18-22, Mk 1:16-20, 2:14-15, Mt 9:9, Mt 13:44-46

For many years I have dread the day when Jesus will tell me to leave everything I have and go somewhere to do His work. So what really bothers me about this?

I think that Jesus will call me to go work for nothing leaving me nothing to support my family with. At the same time I need to support them. My children are now adults and though they are not independent they certainly have what it takes to be. How would I take care of my wife? She might find gainful employment, but she won't be able to keep this house. On top of this I have my parents and no siblings. Who will take care of them. So far they are taking care of themselves, but...It is important to remember that God is righteous *all the time*. Why would God trap a person trying to follow Him in a box where he can't do what is right? The problem is me. I don't totally trust Him if I think that He would do such a thing. But this is not to say that He would not put me in situation where I might have to choose between Him and something else.

Then there is the fact that I am not a good traveler. I can keep from getting lost but I don't really relax away from home. I am too conscious of what can go wrong when you travel. On top of this I only speak English. But, the Lord will always do what is right. He might think it right that I up and go, and up and go I must.

When God the Father spoke to His people in the past, they never had doubt that it was Him, And they never misunderstood what He wanted. You will read no where in the scriptures, someone saying "I didn't know it was you!" or "I didn't know that was what you wanted!" or words to that effect. If He speaks to you, you will know it is Him and what He wants.

Now there is some question as to whether we always recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit. See First John 4:1-6. We need to know the scriptures. A voice that contradicts them is not God.

We also need to know the difference between what God has said is right and what God's people have said is right. The Pharisees added their own laws to God's. How dare they do this. Then they condemn those who did not keep their laws. But, modern Christians have done this also. Where in the scriptures does God say: Don't smoke, don't drink, don't dress the way other people do, Read only the King James translation, don't dance, don't play musical instruments, don't go to the doctor, don't go to the theater, don't eat meat, don't marry, home school the children. That's all I could think of in two minutes. It is hard enough to keep God's law: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, love your neighbor as yourself, forgive your brother from your heart, give to him who asks, teach them to obey everything I have commanded. We don't need more laws certainly.

So Jesus told many men to follow Him leaving behind whatever had to be left. And Some did. Where would we be if they had not?

If God tells me to do something and I am certain it is God then I will understand what He wants and I need to do it, whether I'm suited to it or not. Once you know God has told you to do something it has the same authority as if it were one of the Ten Commandments.

67. Let the Dead do it... Read Mt 8: 18-22 and Lk 9:57-62

Jesus probably invited many people to follow Him. We know He invited the first four disciples and Mathew. He later chose the Twelve. Later still He chose the seventy-two. We elsewhere look at the rich young man. Here we hear two of the responses.

First, "Let me go bury my Father." It is not likely that his father had just died and needed burial. In the middle east to this day they bury people the day they die. Most probably the man's father was old and

would be gone soon. The man wanted to care for, and honor his father. Jesus' response is outrageous. He suggests that those who stay behind are not dead physically but dead spiritually. He says the spiritually dead are capable of burying the physically dead, but that only the spiritually alive can proclaim the Kingdom of God.

What I hear in this is "Don't ever let any work that the unbelievers can do distract us from the work that only the followers of Jesus can do." I also apply this to charitable giving. The unbelievers will give money to many worthy causes such as overcoming cancer, poverty, illiteracy etc. The unbelievers will not support Christian missionaries and evangelists. Therefore we must support these

things related to the Kingdom of God. I also extend this concept to spiritual gifts. At present I am the only Bible teacher at my church, whereas there are some number of people who can work on the church repairs and fund raising events. I must not let church repairs and fund raising events distract me from teaching, whereas I am the only one who does it. If I am doing all I can to teach and still have time and energy left over then I can do these other things.

God made this clear to me during the following events: I had been invited to help with a youth ministry. I have never thought myself gifted to work with youth. I had not committed myself to attend all the meetings etc. A meeting was planned to follow right on the heels of the Bible study I lead. The time came for this meeting to start, but I sensed that the Bible class was not ready to end. So I blew off the meeting and lead the class for another 40 minutes. During this time several people opened up and shared some things from the heart. This is both rare and needful and thus precious. But, it would not have happened had I left to attend the other meeting. I consider this a sign from God not to let even good, needful Christian work distract from the work I am gifted to do. The logic is simple enough. The work that God has gifted you to do is the work that God has chosen you and told you to do. Do what God has chosen you to do.

Second, "Let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus' answer is again outrageous. You can't plow a field by looking back. You must look forward to keep the plow on course. You can't be distracted by what is behind you and properly perform what is before you. If you must say goodbye to your family before you start God's kingdom work, then your family is more important to you than God's kingdom. God will find someone more worthy to do His work. Another way to see this: You have had your whole life to be with your family. You finally have, for the first time, a chance to do kingdom work. If you do not have a greater desire to begin God's work right away then you do not have desire enough.

68. Deny Yourself. Read Mt 16:24-28, Mk 8:34-38, Lk 9:23-26, 12:4-10, 14:27-33, 17:33, Jn 12:23-26, Mt 10:38-39

What does it mean to deny ourselves? I think of it as abandoning your self interest. You no longer look out for number one. Or you have a new number one to look out for. Not only this but you deny your impulses and desires. You put to death the old selfish human flesh self and all of its ways and live a new life in the Spirit, doing what the Spirit desires.

Why must we deny ourselves? How did it come to this that we need to die in order to live? The problem was the way we were living. We were getting by maybe. It was as if we were eating too much, drinking too much, smoking, using drugs, sitting on the couch watching TV all the time. Never going to the doctor or the dentist, eating nothing but snacks and those off the floor. We were French

kissing everyone we met. We worked in chemical plant where we never received any safety training at all. We were working around open vats of flammable liquids while smoking cigarettes. Sometimes for fun we played in traffic or Russian roulette. That is what our lives were like. We were sinning almost all the time and sin will kill us. Is it any wonder everything needs to change for us to live with and

belong to Jesus?

But someone will ask, isn't there something good in my old life? But the best things we did we did in such a bad way they were no use at all. Someone will say "I'm a family man." But examine your relationships with your wife, children and parents. Are not all these relationships selfish insensitive and undisciplined at best and controlling, demeaning and toxic at worst? Every facet of our lives can be improved therefore it must be improved. God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. How could He ever say, "A little sin is OK, A little darkness is OK. You still do some things not as well as you can but it is OK you are trying hard enough." Not likely.

What if Jesus took some of the penalty for your sin say a half. He did enough to subject Himself to getting betrayed, arrested, falsely accused and tried, mocked, insulted, beaten, flogged, dragging the cross. What if when He got to Golgotha He said, "Well, I did enough don't you think? I did plenty. All those sinners will just have to spend sometime in hell. They can spend every other day in the lake of fire."

69. Testify. Read Jn 15:27, 17:18, 20:21, and 21:18-19.

What does this mean? We have experienced God in our lives. We need to share with other people, as many as possible, what God has done. It is not our problem whether they believe it. That is their problem. But how can they believe if the followers of Jesus will not tell them what God has done. They can read the Bible for themselves, but will they believe that all those miracles really happened? Not likely. They will think that they are just fairy tales. We need to tell them what has happened in our lives.

It is a strange thing, but when you tell someone your story they may think you are crazy but they will keep it to themselves and they will listen. Part of it is they are being polite. Part of it is that calling someone a liar is bad for your health. And part of it is that they may want for themselves what you are describing even if they don't believe you actually have it.

Jesus said that no one can come to me unless the Father draws Him Jn 6:44. Perhaps the Father will begin to draw someone just as you share your testimony with them.

So what is our testimony? It is everything you know that God has done for you. It is every experience you know you have had with God. It is like legal testimony. You are prepared to swear under oath that God really did those things and to describe how you know it is so. You are a legal witness. But what if someone says they will kill us unless we admit it is a lie. What better way to convince them. "I would rather die confessing that these things are true than to live and deny they ever happened." Our word martyr comes from the Greek word meaning witness. The witness would rather die than admit that this is all a lie. Why is that? Because it is the truth. Not many of us will have to die for the truth, but we all will have to live as if these things are true or we will die.

Now for some tips regarding our testimony. Go over your testimony in your mind so that you can share it without taking up a lot of time. Provide the details of where, when, how, who, etc. Keep the story of how you found salvation under two minutes and everything else shorter than that. You need the permission of your listener to share these things. Ask, "Do you want to hear how...?"

One way to have someone be interested is when they say something to you about some aspect of life or spiritual things. You share how you used to think before you became a believer. You say, "I used to think such and such about this, but then something happened." If they ask what happened you share your testimony about your salvation. When you are done you share your new opinion about the topic you were discussing. If you get a chance you can ask "Has anything like that ever happened to you?"

Now with your salvation testimony you need to know what is required to be saved. I believe you have

to repent, that is admit you were wrong and turn away from your old worldly way of doing things. Then you have to ask Jesus to forgive you and to save you. Then you have to resolve that you are going to live the rest of your life His way because He is now your savior and Lord. This is the gospel in a nut shell. You need to put together when you did these things. If you never did you don't belong to Him.

70. Do what you see God doing. Read Jn 5:16-21.

What precedes this passage is the healing of the man who was an invalid for 38 years. What follows is a discourse on how the Father has given authority to the Son.

In v 19 Jesus says that He can do only what He sees the Father doing. Now let's apply some logic. Jesus is greater than us. It follows that Jesus is more potent than us. It follows that we can not do anything that Jesus can not do. Therefore if Jesus can do only what He sees the Father doing. We can do only what we see the Father doing.

Jesus intends that we be like Him as much as possible. See Mt 10:24-25. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher. Disciples were students of the man discipling them.

See Mt 20:17-28. Jesus came to serve. The greatest among us will serve the rest. Therefore to be great serve as Jesus did. Be like Jesus.

See Jn 14:12-14. If we have faith in Jesus we will do what He did. Therefore we will do everything that Jesus did, but only what we see the Father doing. Therefore we must do everything we see the Father doing.

In Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby states that if see God at work it is an invitation to join in that work. I would say it is required that we join in that work.

Will we know what to do? Perhaps not or perhaps always. I remember a large group of teens going to the altar doing an altar call. One of the old pastors at that camp went down to do something, but what, there were teens everywhere. It was impossible to even tell which of them they were praying for. So he knelt by them raised his hand and silently prayed for the whole lot of them. I think he did what he was to so and that the Lord was moving in that event.

We will know better what to do if we have been diligent to read, to study, to learn, to serve, to love, to follow, to walk hand in hand with God. If we do everything that we can, will not God do everything needful that we can not?

See Jn 11:34-44. Only Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead. He gave the people the work that they could do. All they could do was believe and take away the stone. They did and a great work of God was done.

In v 17 Jesus says that His Father is working to this very day, which is the Sabbath. Therefore the Father works on the Sabbath. Jesus is also working and on the Sabbath. We are Jesus servants. It makes sense that being His servants we should work while He rests. The servants do the work the master gives them. If our mater sees fit to work on the Sabbath we also should work. But, we should be careful to do His work on the Sabbath not ours. That is the work He gave us to do not the work we think we need to do.