

"Following" Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2015

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] There's a phrase that you will hear often if you're in Christian circles for any amount of time. It's often bandied around, and it's the phrase to follow Jesus. You heard that before, the phrase to follow Jesus?

I'm a follower of Jesus. Are you following Jesus? You often hear it in Christian circles. That's really how Christians define themselves. At its most basic, a Christian is someone who follows Jesus. But what does that actually mean, to follow Jesus? I mean, he's not here physically. We can't physically follow him. So what does it mean to follow Jesus? What do we mean by the word follow? Think about it.

How do you use the word follow in a sort of metaphoric sense? I mean, we follow the news, don't we? Have you been following the news lately? Have you been following that story?

And by the word following there, we mean, have you been keeping tabs on? Are you interested in this particular story? That's what we mean by the word follow. It's the same as when we follow a person today.

[0 : 58] On social media, on something like Twitter. For those of you who have no clue what I'm talking about, Twitter is a service on the internet where you're able to follow particular people that you're interested in.

You can subscribe to their feeds, it's called. And then whenever they do something or say something, when they tweet, when they share it on Twitter, you get informed if you're their follower. That's what it means to follow someone.

And if you think you're too old for that kind of stuff, then it might come as news to you that last October, Queen Elizabeth, at the age of 88, sent her first tweet. See, you're never too old, are you, to try something new.

So maybe you want to follow Queen Elizabeth or sign up for your own Twitter account so your friends can follow you. But I want to ask a very important question this morning. Is that what it means to follow Jesus today?

Is it like Twitter? That you subscribe to his account, you call yourself a follower, then you get regular updates of what he says in the Bible, and maybe you share it every now and again if it's particularly inspiring.

[2 : 00] You see, for many Christians, that's all it means to follow Jesus. Is that what it means to follow Jesus? Is it like following someone on Twitter? Or is there more to it than that?

That's a question I want us to look at this morning. And we find the answer to that question here in this story that Nick read for us earlier. It's the story of Jesus' first followers.

And it's here in this little account on the shore of Lake Gennesaret or Lake Galilee that we learn what it really means to follow Jesus. And so let's look at the story together.

It starts with Jesus preaching to a crowd of people. It was a big crowd. By this time in his ministry, he had gathered quite a following. There's that word again. He had done some amazing miracles already.

And just from the wisdom of his teaching, he had become hugely popular. He was a sensation at this time. People from all over wanted to follow him and listen to what he said. And on this occasion, there are so many people in this crowd that he had to teach them from the front of a boat.

[3 : 01] He asked the fisherman to put the boat out a little so he could stand in the front and teach this big crowd without being swamped by them. And the boat that he used belonged to a fisherman, a local fisherman called Simon, who was also a supporter of Jesus' ministry in the region.

And then Jesus goes on and he teaches. And then he finishes teaching. And that's really where the story picks up. He does a very strange thing after he's finished teaching. Look at it from verse 4.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into deep water and let the nets down for a catch.

How is that strange? Well, you see, it's strange because these fishermen, what we see in the very next verse in Simon's response, these fishermen had been fishing all night and they hadn't caught a thing.

I just want you to put yourself in their shoes for a second. And just listen in their ears what Jesus' request sounds like. These were professional fishermen. They fished for their livelihood.

They had fished since they were yea high. They knew how to fish better than most people. They knew when to catch fish. They knew that night time was the best time to catch the fish that they were looking for.

[4 : 11] But they had a really bad night. And despite them going to the best time and despite all their skills and all their equipment, they came up empty. There were just no fish around. They were probably quite grumpy the next day. Probably quite stressed because they relied on this for a living.

And it's not the best time to say, hey guys, let's go fishing. All right? Especially if you're not a fisherman yourself. But that's exactly what Jesus the carpenter does.

Hey guys, let's go fishing. Now imagine how you would have felt as one of those grumpy stressed fishermen. Now you've got to admire Peter, Simon rather, for his patience. Verse 5, Master, this is his reply.

Master, we've worked hard all night and we haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let the nets down for a catch.

Now look what happens next. Verse 6. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners and the other boats to come and help them.

[5 : 13] And they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that this was the worst time to catch fish.

He knew that they had caught nothing in the previous night. And he does this deliberately because he wants these fishermen to realize something about him that they had never realized before.

You see, they knew a lot about Jesus. They knew that he was a great miracle worker. He was a great teacher. But at this point, they start to see much more than just that.

Look at verse 8. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. You see, Simon suddenly sees Jesus in a whole new light.

He'd known him for months, but he never seen him in the way he now saw him. Because he realizes at this point that Jesus is much more than a great teacher, much more even than a miracle worker.

[6 : 11] Jesus is someone who is divine. You see, no more was Jesus just someone who was interesting to listen to and to follow, to keep tabs on.

No, he was a man who had power over Simon's will. And Simon realized that for the first time. And he responded accordingly, just like Isaiah responded earlier. Woe to me, I am a sinful man.

And it's also at that point when Simon realizes that about Jesus, that he changes inside, deep inside. Something changes in him.

And Luke is very clever as an author because he hints at that in Simon's name. Notice Simon's name. In verse 8, he's called Simon Peter.

He wasn't called that before. Now he's called Simon Peter. Before this event, in fact, this is the only place in the entire Gospel of Luke where he's called Simon Peter. Before this event, he's called Simon.

[7 : 08] After this event, he's called Peter. Luke is emphasizing this is the point at which Simon was becoming Peter. Peter, you see, was the new name that Jesus gave him as a true follower, as a disciple.

And so we see at this point in Luke's narrative, Simon is changing from Simon the fisherman who listened to Jesus to Peter the disciple who followed Jesus in the true sense.

And because Simon is becoming Peter the disciple, Jesus calls him to do what disciples do. In the very next verse, verse 10, Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid.

From now on, you will catch men. You see, now that Simon had begun to realize for the first time who Jesus really is, he's now called to join the mission that Jesus came to do, to bring people into God's kingdom.

And so what happens? The very next verse, 11, so they pulled their boats up on the shore, they left everything, and they followed him.

[8 : 13] You see, it was this event that changed these men from listeners to followers. Which one of those are you, I wonder?

Are you a listener of Jesus or are you a follower? Are you a Simon or are you a Peter? Because that's what the story challenges us to consider, each one of us.

You see, because this story teaches us what it really means to follow Jesus, as opposed to just listening to him. And what we see is that truly following Jesus really has three main elements that we see in the story, which I want to summarize in three phrases, which are grasp, go, and give up. They all start with the same letter so that you can remember them easily. And I want to go through each of those briefly. Firstly, you can only truly follow Jesus if you grasp who he really is.

You see, these men only really started following Jesus when? When did they become his disciples? When they grasped who he was. They wouldn't have been willing to give up everything which they did.

[9 : 20] They wouldn't have been willing to do that just for a teacher or even a great miracle worker. You see, these men, these fishermen with their calloused hands and their years of fishing experience, they weren't very religious types.

They were quite real, practical men. They lived hard lives fishing for their living. They weren't the types of people to go off on some religious quest. But they left everything to follow this man because they realized this man controlled their world, the world that they lived in, the world that they worked in.

He controlled what they did for a living. And so for the first time, they could stop concentrating on their daily grind because they found who was in charge of it all. You see, it reminds me actually of when I used to play with my son, Alex, when he was just a little toddler.

You know how people, when you get a laser pointer, and you play this little game with your cat or your dog where you move the point of light around with your laser pointer and the cat chases after it and thinks it can catch it and just when it's got it, it opens its paws and it's not there anymore. Well, we didn't have... You know the game I'm talking about. We didn't have a cat or a dog. We had a toddler. So I used to play that game with Alex. And so I had this laser pointer. I still got it in my drawer.

[10 : 34] And I used to shine this on the floor. And Alex used to toddle after it and crawl after it. But toddlers are a little bit more intelligent than dogs or cats because it didn't take long for Alex to realize where this point of light was coming from.

He looked at me, he saw this thing in my hand, and he worked it out. He realized I was controlling the light. And from that point, he stopped concentrating on the point of light and he came and attacked me and tried to get this thing out of my hand.

You see, Alex realized something about what he was chasing after. And that's what's happening with these fishermen in the story. They are concentrating on something. They're chasing after something, earning a living, getting on with their life.

And Jesus is somewhere in the background until they come to the point of realizing that he is actually in control of the very thing that they're chasing after. And it's at that point that they stopped chasing after that, and they went after him.

That's the turning point. Jesus was no longer a part of their life just to listen to, just to slot into some religious box. But now they realized he was the master of their lives, and he deserved every waking moment of their lives, every day.

[11 : 41] That was their turning point. Have you experienced that turning point yet? Because not every Christian has necessarily experienced that turning point in their lives.

Has Jesus moved from the religious part of your life to be involved in every part of your life? Has he moved out of church and into the workplace yet?

Has he moved out of morning devotions and into the classroom, into the car, into the business meeting? Have you realized that he controls every aspect of your daily life? So much so that you can stop concentrating on your daily grind, and you can start concentrating on him who's in charge of it all.

Have you come to that turning point yet? Because that's the turning point each of us need to come to if we're going to truly follow Jesus. You need to grasp who he really is as the Lord of your life.

Secondly, you need to go. You need to go on the mission that he's called you to. You see, because what we see in the story is that following Jesus is joining a mission.

[12:46] No sooner do these fishermen realize who this man is than he commissions them to do something. He employs them for a particular task. Following Jesus doesn't mean just them going back to their homes and being interested in him.

It means actually going on the mission that he's called them to. So, verse 10, we see that. Don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men. See, he wants them to know, and he wants us to know this morning, that if they're going to follow him, it means taking on a new job.

It means getting a whole new occupation. They had to stop catching fish and start catching men and women. The word used there for catch in the original, it literally means to capture alive, like one would do in a war scenario, to capture the enemy alive, or to catch for life.

That's what the word literally means. And so he's telling these fishermen that their new job is to catch people for life, to bring people into life. Instead of bringing fish from life into death, because that's what fishermen do, so that we can eat hake at the restaurants and at home and whatever, they take fish out of their habitat where they have life and bring them into death so we can eat them. No, the fishermen now, as disciples, needed to do the opposite for people. They had to bring people from death, which they're currently in, into life. That's what their new job was, to show them the way into eternal life.

[14:16] And they did that by pointing people to Jesus and who he is and why he came to it, because that is the way that we find eternal life. And they go on to realize later, these disciples, that the way that people are saved into life is through what Jesus did when he went to the cross to die and take all our sins, which you remembered earlier in the service, take all our sins and give us his righteousness so that all who trust in him can find eternal life, a way back to God.

And he now calls everybody who has found that life to show other people the way to that life, to catch people out of death and into life.

That's our mission. Here in Plumstead Southfield, there are thousands of people who are in death. They're living in the shadow of death. They're heading for judgment. And we have an opportunity to bring them out of death and bring them into life, a new living relationship with God that will last forever and eternal life and righteousness and forgiveness for their sins.

That's our mission. That's the reason we're still on earth. That's the reason Jesus hasn't taken us home yet. All right? Because we've got a job to do while we're here as followers of Jesus. We've got a mission to do.

And all of us are called to that mission. All of us. Not just people like Rod and Glenda who go to other countries. Not just people who are paid by the church to preach and teach.

[15:42] But all Christians are missionaries. All Christians are missionaries. Every one of us is called to that mission to show other people to life. And for some of us, that might be in another country.

But for others, it might be right in our place of work. Right in the neighborhoods that we're living. But wherever it is, it is an incredible mission. The job that we have, it's the best job in the world to call people into life.

To see people coming from a hopeless life into a life of hope and joy and fellowship with God. It is the best, most amazing job that we can be called to.

That's what should get us out of bed in the morning as Christians. But so often it doesn't, does it? You see, because so often we get, we just get caught up in the ordinary day-to-day life.

We forget the mission that we're called to. You know, waking up, going to work, paying the bills. It just becomes humdrum. And you might, that might happen because you might think, well, I'm not really up to that mission.

[16:47] No, there's much better people out there to do that. There are preachers and evangelists and missionaries. I don't have the skills to do that mission that he's called me to. But you see, I want you to realize something about this story.

The whole point of Jesus calling these ordinary fishermen is that they weren't skilled religious teachers. He could have gone to the synagogues and to the temple and called these people who were trained in the law and in the scriptures and called them to be his disciples, but he didn't. He called ordinary people out of the humdrum, ordinary lives. You see, he calls people who know that they don't have what it takes. Peter knew that he didn't have what it took.

He said, go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. He knew that he wasn't up to this task. But Jesus goes on to show them and to show us that it's not about what they can do, but it's about what he can do through them.

That is the whole point of the catch of fish. You see, this miraculous catch of fish that they tried to catch the night before and they couldn't with all their skills and all their expertise, now they're caught, but it had nothing to do with how skilled they were.

[17 : 55] It had nothing to do with their fishermen's skills that caused this catch of fish, but it had everything to do with whether they listened to Jesus or not, whether they followed him, whether they obeyed what he said. And he's saying the same with the mission that he's called you and me to.

It's not about how skilled you are to do it, but it's about how much you're willing to listen to him and to do what he's called you to do in his power to catch people for life.

See, it reminds me of the song we sang earlier, Praise to the Lord the Almighty, that old hymn. The third verse, Praise to the Lord who doth nourish thy life and restore thee, fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee.

fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee. As we follow the tasks that he's laid before us, he fits us well for them. He gives us what we need to do them just like he gave these fishermen. And the task that he's laid before us is to catch people for life as a local church.

Now, you might be asking, well, all very well, yes, but how do I do that? How do I go about that mission that Jesus has given me? Well, you see, that all depends on the gifts that God has given you.

[19 : 07] Scripture tells us that every Christian, every follower of Christ has been given gifts to contribute to that mission. He doesn't just send us on this mission and wish us on our way. He gives us everything we need.

He fitteth us well for the tasks that he sets before us. He gives us gifts, spiritual gifts, to contribute to the mission of the church. And the Bible goes on to say that we need each other's gifts, whether they're upfront gifts or whether they're behind-the-scenes gifts.

We need, as a body, needs all the different parts of the body. We need everybody's gifts to be contributing to the mission of the church. Ephesians 4 says, the whole body grows and builds itself up as each part does its work.

As each part, not just, you know, 20% of the parts. Imagine your body, but only 20% of it was functioning. You wouldn't be able to do much. And as a church, if only 20% of us are functioning, which is often the case in churches, we won't be able to do much.

Every part needs to be doing its work, no matter how small that might seem, it's important. And that's why, if you look in your bulletins, you'll find a printed sheet that is listing all the areas of service that we still need filled as a church.

[20 : 21] And if you're not yet contributing to the mission and you want to know how you can do that, then here are some excellent ways you can do that. Please consider which of these areas that are listed in that sheet that you'll be able to get involved in so that you can also contribute to the working of the body.

And so take this sheet. There's some tick boxes that you can tick if there's any areas that you're interested in, you want more information on. It's not a commitment if you tick them. It just means you want to talk to someone about how you might be able to contribute to those areas.

Take that home, pray over it, and bring it back next week and give it to one of the stewards. And put your name on it as well so we know who wants to do what. Because you see, to follow Jesus means not just to grasp who He is in your life, but also to go and to do the mission He's called you to do in the way that He's gifted you to do it.

And if you're a Christian, you are gifted in some way. You've got to discover what that is. And if you need help discovering that, then try some stuff. Try getting involved. And God will use the opportunities and the people in the church where you're involved to guide you to where He wants you to be.

Trust me. But just get involved. Because to follow Jesus means to go, to get involved in the mission that He's called us to do. And then thirdly, it's to give up. To give up everything for Jesus.

[21 : 41] You see, you can't just give up a part of your life to follow Jesus. You can't just say, okay, well, there's my religious part of my life and Jesus, you can have that. I'll give that to you.

No. To be a follower of Christ, to be a disciple of Christ is all or nothing. Nothing. Look at verse 11 again. So they pulled their boats up on the shore.

They left some things and followed Him. No. They left everything and followed Him. You see, they knew that they weren't able to go on this mission and stay in their ordinary lives at the same time. They had to choose. They had a choice before them. Either to stay behind with everything that they were used to in their fishing business and say to Jesus, sorry, you're looking in the wrong place. You've got the wrong people. We've got to fish. They could do that, stay behind. Or, they could leave everything and follow Him to who knows where. And that's what they did. But it wasn't an easy choice.

[22 : 43] Don't think that, you know, people were just in the habit of leaving their jobs that they had done since they were children to follow this man that they had only recently met.

It wasn't an easy choice to leave their homes, to leave their friends, to leave their jobs, and not to mention to leave the biggest catch of fish that they've ever caught. But they did. Why?

Because they realized that this man was in control of their lives. And he would give them what they needed to do what he had called them to do. And so they left this huge catch of fish in their boats. I don't know who got it. Maybe the villagers had this big fish braai on the beach afterwards. But they left this huge catch of fish to rather follow the man who gave it to them.

And each of us have the same choice. You can stay where you're comfortable, living the life you want to make for yourself, or you can go where Jesus is going and do the work that Jesus is calling you to.

[23 : 44] You can either chase after things in life, or you can follow the one who gives you those things. But to do that, to follow Jesus, you need to leave your ordinary life behind.

And that doesn't mean that you have to give up your job, but it does mean that you have to give up your job. Now what do I mean by that? Well you don't literally have to resign your job or leave where you're living necessarily, but you do have to start doing your job for a whole new reason.

And you do have to live where you're living for a whole new purpose, which is for the mission that he's called you to. Let me share with you just the conflict I had as a young Christian.

When I was at university, and I was just recently a Christian, I was studying a business degree, and I thought I was a Christian. I went to church for years before this, and I thought I was a Christian until I really realized what following Jesus was all about, going and giving up and grasping who he is.

And when I grasped who he is, I was already studying business, and I had this conflict because the reason that I went to study business was to get rich. I wanted to get rich. I wanted to make lots of money. I wanted to drive fancy cars.

[25 : 01] I wanted to live in a big house. And then, when I became a true follower of Christ, suddenly, I had a whole different, my life turned around. I had a whole different reason for living, reason for doing what I'm doing, and I had this conflict.

Now I'm stuck in this business degree. Must I drop out? Must I drop out of this because I came into it to get rich, and I don't want to do that anymore. I want to follow Jesus. And I had weeks of kind of battling through this and working through it and praying and reading the Bible, and then I realized that Jesus doesn't want me to drop out.

Rather, he wants me to carry on studying, but for a completely different reason than I did. He wanted me to carry on studying so that I could get a degree and enter into the business world and catch people for life by living in that world and making money to support that mission, but living in that world for the mission, not for myself.

And that's what started to get me up in the mornings. And I loved my business degree after that. It was weird. All the people around me were studying because they wanted to get rich. I was studying for a totally different reason, and I think I enjoyed studying economics and finance more than they did, because I had a real reason to do it, a reason that lasted for eternity, an important reason.

Not to study business to get rich, but to study business as part of my mission for Jesus. And so you don't have to literally leave what you're doing to join in that mission, but you do have to leave it in terms of making it secondary to that mission, making it serve your primary mission.

[26 : 33] And if you find that you can better fulfill that mission by doing another job, then you've got to do that. But if you find that God has called you to do the job you're doing, but to do it for Him, and you can find ways to do that for the mission that He's called you to, then do that, wherever it is, because that's what truly following Jesus is.

You see, what I'm trying to say is, it's not a matter of giving up just a few things, following Jesus. It's not giving up a few things. It's not about asking, you know, what am I giving up for Jesus? How much money am I giving up for Jesus? How much time am I giving up for Jesus? No. It's giving up everything and asking, am I living my life in everything, in every area for the mission that Jesus has called me to?

And so, I'll leave you with three questions. Have you grasped who Jesus really is as the Lord of your life, in control of every aspect of your life? Have you, will you go on the mission that He calls you to?

And are you willing to give up ordinary life to do that? Because I promise you, there's no better way to live, and there's no better work to do.

[27 : 46] Someone who knew that was David Livingston. He was a missionary, a follower of Jesus, and his mission took him away from the comforts of ordinary life in England to Africa, of all places, to live a very hard life.

He lived a very hard life. He didn't have the comforts that he had back home, and people were quite amazed that he would go through all this, and he was once asked by the press in an interview why he was willing to give up so much and make all the sacrifices he made to do this mission.

You know what he answered? He answered this. He said, All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us and for us. I never made a sacrifice.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, when we think of the difficulties of life, when we think of the trials of being called as followers of you, we know that it doesn't mean being called to a comfortable life.

But we do pray that we, like David Livingston, would be able to say that all these are nothing when compared with the glory that is awaiting us and awaiting those who put their faith in Christ.

[29 : 00] Help us to also say we never made a sacrifice. Lord, I do pray that you would give us as a church, give us a new, renewed fire and vigor for the mission you have called us to do.

Help us all to every day see who you are and not just put you on the shelf, but give you everything in our lives. And help us to go and be equipped, equip us and gift us for the mission that you have called us to do.

And may we go out as this church into the workplaces, into our schools, into our business meetings, and may we be the people that you've called us to be. Strengthen us for that and encourage us and help us to encourage each other in that mission.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.