

John 1:35-51

Following Christ

And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus – 1:37

In a sense you could say that the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry was about as inconspicuous as many church planting ventures go. Some denominations have certain minimal requirements for starting a church. They might require as many as 5 to 10 families which would have to include at least a couple of men that would be qualified to hold office.

I don't know that Christ began even with that although we do have to acknowledge that the way was prepared for His coming through the powerful ministry of John the Baptist. It's as John the Baptist proclaims *Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world* that we go on to read in v. 37 that two disciples of John heard him speak and then they followed Jesus. And a few verses later we have the account of Jesus calling Philip to follow him. Not long after that Philip finds Nathaniel and brings him to Jesus and so it seems that a core group is brought together made up of those that would follow Christ.

Did you see the number of times the text we read made reference to following Christ?

- Joh 1:37 *And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*
- Joh 1:38 *Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?*
- Joh 1:40 *One of the two which heard John [speak], and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.*
- Joh 1:43 *The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.*

This trend of Christ gaining followers continues to grow all the way to 6:2 where we read: *And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.*

This idea of following Christ is something so basic to being a Christian that you could go so far as to say that it defines what it means to be a Christian. Listen to Christ's words in Jn. 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* And in Jn. 12:26 Christ equates following Him to serving Him. *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*

We recognize, of course, that in our day of easy believism it's not hard to find those that profess to believe in Jesus who know little if anything when it comes to following Jesus. Some (perhaps most) of you are aware by now that R.C. Sproul has gone home to glory. You might well imagine that the internet is filled with glowing tributes to this unusual

scholar and theologian who did so much to promote the Reformed faith. As I tuned in to some of these tributes I noted especially a video clip in which Dr. Sproul was stating how that almost every week in his pulpit he was criticizing the idea of easy believism. He referred to the doctrine of the carnal Christian as being a heretical doctrine and yet one that is widespread in many evangelical circles. In a sense Dr. Sproul's emphasis ties directly into the point that I'm now making which is that there's really no such thing as a Christian who doesn't follow Jesus Christ.

Having said that, however, I must acknowledge that there are times when even believers, indeed even Apostles, like Peter follow afar off. Mt 26:58 *But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.* The question, then, that arises from our consideration of this idea of following Christ is simply this: What kind of a follower are you? Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? How close do you follow Christ? Do you stay near to Him or would you, like so many in this day of ours be characterized as someone who follows afar off – afar off perhaps to the point that it should make you wonder whether or not you are truly a Christian.

I want to deal with that question, this morning – the question of what kind of a follower of Jesus Christ are you? And in order to answer that question I want to refer you to the portion we've read this morning from John 1 and in our analysis of these verses I want to draw your attention in particular to:

The Characteristics of a Follower of Christ

There are a number of things in our text that are implied and that are associated with following Christ. I'd like to consider a number of those things this morning. Think with me first of all that:

I. Followers of Christ Behold Him

Notice the words of vv. 35-37 *Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; 36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! 37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*

I have to admit here that upon a first and second reading of this text I initially thought that the verse was stating that these two disciples of John heard Jesus speak and as a result of hearing Jesus speak they followed Him. I'll show you that there is some truth to that notion in just a moment but upon more careful examination of v. 37 I believe the verse is referring to what they heard John the Baptist say.

They heard John the Baptist say *Behold the Lamb of God* and upon hearing John say that we go on to read that these two disciples of John followed Jesus. When you consider, however, what is involved in beholding the Lamb of God I think you could say that beholding Him takes into account a number of spiritual factors which includes hearing Jesus. You cannot truly behold Him and be deaf to what He says. So we read a little later in John's gospel Christ's statement in 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,*

and they follow me. Now in the gospels we have the accounts of at least two of Christ's disciples that heard His voice audibly and arose and followed Him.

So in v. 43 of Jn. 1 we read of Philip *The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.* Philip heard Jesus audibly speak these words and hence Philip followed Jesus. And in Matthew's gospel we have the account of Matthew's call to follow Jesus and in that instance Matthew would have heard Jesus communicate with him audibly. Mt 9:9 *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*

We do not today hear Christ speak with an audible voice. In fact you should be leary of anyone who makes such a claim that they've heard Christ audibly, the way you and I hear each other. The sure determining factor for those that make such a claim very often would be when they claim to hear Christ say something that is contrary to what He's already said in His Word. He would not and does not speak, you see, in such a way as to contradict His Word. And even in instances where His word is not necessarily contradicted you can find those that want to attribute various internal impulses to the voice of Jesus when those impulses may come from any number of sources including the devil or the flesh.

The point I'm driving at just now, however, is that even though a follower of Christ does not hear an audible voice of Christ, there is a hearing of faith. There is, in other words, a spiritual and effectual hearing of Christ. And what this effectual hearing amounts to is a hearing within your soul that you find so compelling that it enables you to follow Christ wherever He leads you because you recognize that in hearing Christ you hear the words of life.

There were many, you see, that followed Christ for other reasons. There were those that were dazzled by the miracles He performed and followed, you might say, to see the show. So we read in Jn. 6:2 *And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.* In that same chapter you have the account of Christ feeding the 5,000 with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fishes. Following that miracle the disciples and Christ Himself withdraw and cross the sea of Galilee. The next day when the multitude discover that Christ and His disciples have withdrawn they cross the sea of Galilee as well and come to Capernaum seeking for Jesus.

And when they find Jesus He exposes them for their carnal motivation in following Him. Joh 6:26 *Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.* There are many even today that seek Jesus for the same carnal reasons. They're told by false teachers that Jesus will heal them and Jesus will feed them and Jesus will basically make sure that you live a comfortable life that is free from trials or hardships and as soon as they discover that the Christian life is filled with trials and hardships they become disappointed in Jesus and leave off following Him.

In John 6 when Christ turns their attention to their spiritual needs and exhorts them to *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life* (v. 27) they eventually become disappointed with Christ especially when He makes reference to His flesh being meat indeed and His blood being drink indeed. You see a definite pattern, therefore, in the gospel of John of a multitude following Christ that seems to get bigger and bigger until at last you come to the words of v. 66 which says *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*. It seemed that everyone quite suddenly was leaving Christ and so great was the number of departures that Christ would say to His disciples in v. 67 *Will ye also go away?* It's as if Christ is saying to them *everyone else has gone away, will you also go away?*

But then Peter makes a statement that enables you and me to discern who has really heard Christ and who hasn't when he says in v. 68 *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*. There's the mark of a man who has spiritually heard the voice of Christ and become a follower of Christ. He's heard the words of eternal life. And if you've heard the words of eternal life it won't matter that everyone else has abandoned Christ. It won't matter that the world rejects Christ and scoffs at the very notion of an atoning death of Christ. You'll continue to follow the way the disciples followed.

You'll follow not only because you've spiritually heard the voice of Christ but you'll follow because your eyes have also been opened to behold the truth of Christ that He is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. What happened to a couple of blind men literally happened to you spiritually when we read in Mt 20:34 *So Jesus had compassion [on them], and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him*.

Have you received your sight and resolved to follow Him? Have you heard His voice, spiritually speaking, communicating to you to the words of eternal life? This is the mark of a follower of Christ – He beholds Him in such a way that He sees Him for who He is and He hears Him when He speaks words of truth and life.

But not only is the follower of Christ characterised as one who beholds Christ but next we see that:

II. The Followers of Christ Abide with Him

Look at the words of vv. 37-39 *And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? 39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day*.

Out of these words there comes a very encouraging lesson and that lesson is this – when you follow Christ, you gain His attention. That might not be the case with every leader who gains a following of men. There may be those, I suppose, that are so focused on

what's before or ahead of them that they pay little attention to what's behind them. We count a soldier to be a courageous leader who charges into enemy fire with no regard for who else is following him and hopefully his bravery inspires other soldiers to follow but he takes no account of who follows and who doesn't he simply charges ahead.

Christ takes note of His followers. So we read in v. 38 *Then Jesus turned, and saw them following*. And by the time you get to the end of v. 39 you have the account of these two disciples (that we take to be Andrew and John) being hosted by Christ and spending the rest of the day with Him. I wonder if they knew how great an opportunity had been given to them?

Can you imagine such a thing – spending such a day with Christ? The things they could have learned, the questions they could have asked, the fellowship they must have enjoyed. It strikes me as being perhaps an early version of those Emmaus Road disciples who had Christ open the Scriptures to them and show them how all things pointed to sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow.

Now we know that when it comes to following Christ the believer is willing to go anywhere with Christ. And it is often the purpose of Christ to lead His followers into warfare or to lead them across stormy seas. He leads some to the tops of the mountains and He leads others into deep valleys. And in all of these leadings we acknowledge that as a follower of Christ, He is the leader, you are the follower which is just another way of saying, I suppose, that He is your King and you are His loyal subject.

But He also leads His followers into restful communion with Him. The privilege of those two disciples, you see, is also your privilege and my privilege. And unfortunately for many it's a privilege that we neglect. The cares of this world demand our time and effort. And the allurements of this world entice us to think that there are better and more enjoyable things to do than to abide with and commune with Christ.

Listen to what A.W. Pink says about the impact of Christ on these two followers:

When Christ conducted these two men to His dwelling place, would a brief visit suffice them? No, indeed. Mark the remainder of the verse, "they came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour." So fully had He won their confidence, so completely had He attracted their hearts to Himself, that though this was the first day of meeting with the Savior, they abode with Him. Yes, they "abode" with Him. This is the word which uniformly speaks of spiritual fellowship.

There's your privilege and mine – the privilege of spiritual fellowship. Just as Christ turned to take notice of these two followers so He turns to take notice of you. He would have you abide with Him. You may have noted from the narrative that we're not told where the actual place was where Christ abode. The place wasn't as important as the person. They abode with Him. So can you and I abide with Him in our homes or in the car on the way to and from work. You can and should abide with Him when you're on vacation or when you get a snow day.

And the way you abide with Him is through His Word and through prayer and through worship. This place of worship where we meet week by week is a place where you can abide with Him. It's in such restful places of communion that you draw strength for your souls. It's while you abide with Him that you gain the refreshment you need. Can you hear Christ this morning inviting, indeed commanding you to abide in Him? He places a strong emphasis on it in Jn. 15 and also explains why it's so necessary:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

He makes it pretty clear, doesn't He, that abiding in Christ is characteristic of the true follower of Christ? I hope and pray that in this new year we will learn in much greater measure how to cultivate this spiritual art, as it were, of abiding in Christ. It's really an exhortation to rest in Christ and enjoy Christ and commune with Christ. And the wonderful result of availing ourselves of this privilege is that we bear much fruit for Christ.

So we have these two marks of a follower of Christ. He beholds Christ and in so doing hears His words and sees His glory. And He abides in Christ by resting and communing with Him. There is one more mark of a follower of Christ that the text brings out very plainly and that is that:

III. The Followers of Christ Seek Out Others to Follow Christ