

# When Jesus Said; Follow Me

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Scripture Matthew 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 19:21, 16:24

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:17-21

INTRO:

If I were to ask you the question here this morning, what are the first words of Jesus ministry? After His baptism and temptation in the wilderness.

*Repent,*

*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

And maybe a harder question, what are the second words of Jesus ministry as recorded in Matthew and Mark?

*Follow me,*

*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*

This is what Jesus said to Peter and his brother Andrew as He was walking by the Sea of Galilee at the start of His ministry.

And 5 times in the book of Matthew, Jesus uses the phrase ‘follow me,’ and each time He uses the phrase, He brings a different reason or purpose from the command. And what begins to emerge from these different accounts, is a collage, of different applications for our lives, in what it means to follow Him.

Jesus after all, is our example to follow, as Christians we are to be imitators of Christ. As Paul says in Ephesians 5:1;

*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*

And as Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 2:21;

*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*

Jesus is the pattern we are to follow, He is the one who we are to model our life after, the one we are to present to the world by being the same light as He is. Paul says in Romans 8:29, that we are ‘to be conformed to the image of His Son, that is Jesus,’

Oswald Chambers is quoted as saying;

The one striking thing about following is we must not find our own way, for when we take the initiative, we cease to follow. In the natural world everything depends upon our taking the initiative, but if we are followers of God, we

cannot take the initiative, we cannot choose our own work or say what we will do; we have not to find our way at all, we have just to follow.

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

There is set before us a pattern of Jesus Christ from the words of scripture. And when He says to those in the New Testament ‘follow me.’ Then, there must be a personal application to these events as well. One that can be directly applied to our own life. For if we are truly born-again Christians, we should have a desire to follow our Savior, and to be like Jesus.

Even Paul repeated this by saying in Philippians 3:17;

*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

And why do we have Paul and his companions as a pattern? Because they followed Christ, who is the original pattern. And as we look at each one of these verses, I'm asking each one of us here today to look at Jesus words, and ask yourself, am I following Him in the way He wants me to follow? Am I doing the things my Lord and Savior is asking me to do?

If we go to the first reference in Matthew 4 verse 19, the words of Jesus when He came across Peter and Andrew and starting in verse 18 of Matthew chapter 4 it reads;

*18 ¶ 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.*

*19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

*20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.*

And starting with point number 1, we begin with the fact that Jesus, has a job for you.

#### I. HE HAS A JOB FOR YOU (v. 4:19)

When Jesus told Peter and Andrew, ‘follow me’ and I will make you fishers of men. Not only did Jesus intrigue them with their occupation as fishermen, but also related to them the occupation they would be entering as disciples, that they would become fishers of men. That instead of going out to sea with nets, they would go out into the world with the gospel. Instead of bringing home fish to sell and eat, they would bring lost souls home to the Father to find salvation and peace in Jesus.

Now this job, if I can call it such, is a responsibility He has given to all of us who claim to be Christian. When we follow Christ, as scripture tells us to, He is asking us to follow His commands in reaching the lost. This is a job for every believer.

And just a note here, even when we take the normal literal approach to scripture, we must process it as a message that is applicable to our own lives. If you are a husband and father or a wife at home, with children, He is not calling you to drop everything as Peter and Andrew did and run off to some far part of the world to become a missionary on your own. You have a mission right here in your own home.

Why else would Paul, Peter and John, speak so much about the duties of the home, about husbands, and wives, and children. Marriage and family is God's design for man. The gospel is Gods mission.

Even Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, talks about these different rolls of service for all men and women, and he starts verse 32 with these words;

*But I want you to be without care.*

Now this is a very important phrase, as he is about to give us two different facts, and one is not better than the other. There is no superior state of one or the other.

The phrase ‘to be without care’ is defined in the Online Bible Greek Lexicon as, ‘free from anxiety’, meaning that if you are in one position or the other, you are not in an inferior position or status within Christianity. These are equal positions with equal purpose in life. Verse 32;

*But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.*

*33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.*

*34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband.*

God has given each of us a job, and that is to spread the gospel, weather traveling across the world in missions, or as a person standing in line at the grocery store with your children.

The gospel is just as important to the lost cashier behind the till at the grocery store as compared to the lost tribes of the world. Both are lost, both need the gospel, and the Lord has given each of us that job, and that is to follow Him in spreading the good news.

Follow me for I will make you fishers of men, is a command that may be carried out halfway around the globe, or within the realm of your own home and community.

The second point is titled 'now is the time.' And is taken from Matthew chapter 8 verse 22.

## II. NOW IS THE TIME (v. 8:22)

In Matthew chapter 8 reading verses 21 and 22 it says;

*21 Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

*22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Now this sounds harsh coming from our Lord, and one might think He sounds uncaring, heartless, indifferent to the cares of life. But there are actually two very important aspects of this verse that Jesus gives us here.

Many commentaries believe that the father had not yet passed away, and therefore, the disciple wanted to remain with his father until his death and burial.

This of course would take time, time in waiting for this situation of life to come to a close and pass, giving the man time for a fresh start. But by then, he may be out of time. Jesus said to him ‘follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead,’ now... is the time to follow Him, there is no time to put things off in light of eternity.

If you hear His calling, and invitation to go, then go. Are you waiting for, a situation to pass, a more convenient time to follow? Are you like the governor Felix, who told Paul to ‘go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’

As far as we know that convenient time never came for Felix. Every day you wait to follow Jesus is one more day that it may be too late, and you run out of time.

The second aspect that could be taken from this verse is that Jesus says ‘let the dead bury their own dead’, meaning that the old ways of Jewish religion and worship are passing away. If you go back to the old it will not be compatible with the new. There is nothing in the past of Jewish worship that will be comparable to this new way.

Yes, Jesus’ ministry and all of Christianity is of the Jews and is based on the foundation of the Old Testament, as we have heard the phrase ‘the new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed.’ But what did Jesus tell the woman at the well?’



*"Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.*

*"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.*

There is no physical place Christians need to go to worship, it is from within that we worship God, as Paul says ‘you are the temple of God’, the temple is within us, and we worship the Father in spirit, and truth.

Jesus also gave the examples of the un-shrunk cloth on a garment, and of new wine in old wine skins, as illustrations of how the old ways of Judaism will be different, when compared to the new way of following Jesus. But not just different, they will be incompatible.

Warren Wiersbe writes in his commentary regarding this incompatibility by saying;

Jesus came to usher in the new, not to unite with the old. The Mosaic economy was decaying, getting old, and ready to vanish away. Jesus would establish a New Covenant in His blood. The Law would be written on human hearts, not on stones; and the indwelling Holy Spirit would enable God's people to fulfill the righteousness of the Law.

And then speaking about the Christian he says;

Salvation is not a partial patching up of one's life; it is a whole new robe of righteousness. The Christian life is not a mixing of the old and the new; rather, it is a fulfillment of the old in the new.

‘Follow Me’ are Jesus words, and follow only ME is the implication, nothing of this world will be compatible or comparable with Jesus when we follow Him. Well onward, point number 3, is titled ‘do not worry about your profession.’

### III. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR PROFESSION (v. 9:9)

In Matthew chapter 9 verse 9 it says;

*As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.*

This is probably one of the hardest things to think of in North America. And it goes against every grain of what we have been taught in society, to what the world calls the American dream. And I lump Canada into that category as well, because our societies and personal aims and social drive and abundance of everything is the same as the US.

Imagine that, you have built up a company, you have a healthy clientele, endless supply of income, and you are doing very well for yourself, 'living the dream' as the world says. And then one day a man walks in, nothing fancy, nothing to set him above the crowd, no prestige to his name, and he says to you 'leave all of this and follow me.' I can just imagine what Kevin O'Leary would say to that business plan or model.

But that's what Matthew the tax collector did.

Are you fearful of what following Jesus will cost you? Afraid that following Him and trusting Him will not be sufficient for your financial needs, or wants? How focused are you on making a living as opposed to making a life. Are you willing to follow Jesus as long as it does not affect your pocket book or bank account?

Look at Matthew the tax collector, a lucrative business owner in Jesus' day, income without end, as tax collection never ends. And then Jesus walks into his life. And says follow me.

This Matthew, who became one of the 12 apostles, and wrote the gospel of Matthew, didn't want to toot his own horn. And what I mean by that, is listen to Luke's words of the account, Luke chapter 5 verse 27 and 28;

*27 After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me."*

Now listen to verse 28;

*28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.*

Did you catch the difference? Luke says ‘so he left all, rose up, and followed Him.’ Now again, it’s not an instruction to run out and quit your job tomorrow morning, but that we would look to ourselves in what is more important to us, this worldly American dream we are chasing or follow Jesus and heed the reality of eternity?

Did Jesus Himself not tell us in Matthew chapter 6;

*~~"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"~~*

*26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"*

*27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"*

*28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;*

*29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

*30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

When Jesus says we are to follow Him, it means we are to live by faith, the more we follow, the more faith we will have, the more faith we have, the more we will follow. There are countless stories of men and women inside the bible and outside in the world, that when there was no possible means for them to go further... that they prayed and put their faith in God... and miracles happened, answered prayer happened. If we are humble people and we follow Jesus in faith, He will do amazing things for us. ‘Will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?’

And this point ties directly into the next one, point number 4, which is titled ‘do not worry about your possessions.’ And is taken from Matthew chapter 19 verse 21.

#### **IV. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR POSSESSIONS (v. 19:21)**

In Matthew chapter 19, we read of a man who came to Jesus, and asked a question he really did not want to hear the answer to.

The man comes to Jesus and asks;

*‘good teacher, what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?’*

And Jesus tells him that he must keep the commandments, pointing him to the scriptures and of what God has said in them.

To which the man replies;

*‘which ones?’*

And I want to add a little side note here, a rabbit trail before we go on with the rest of the text. You see, this is an age-old question, ‘what must I do to have eternal life’. Answer... keep the commandments, and then people will ask, ‘which ones?’ Most times they are not asking what commandments they need to keep, but rather which ones they can ignore, or get away with, and still go to heaven. What things can I get away with and still make it to heaven. That... I think is the hidden or deeper question of the question, because just as Jesus knew the one thing that held this man back, and that is, his love of his possessions, Jesus knows the one thing that is holding us back from following Him as well.

When Jesus said; Follow Me

Going back to the verse, Jesus gives him a list of commands, the young man says; ‘all these things I have kept from my youth’ and asks ‘what do I still lack?’ thinking that maybe he has a clean slate, a clear conscience. Surely Jesus wouldn’t bring up anything else, would He?

Knowing the heart of this man Jesus tells him;

*~~Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."~~*

listen to how mark records it by saying;

*Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."*

But what happened to this man?

It says;

*But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

There was one thing that hindered this man from following Jesus, one thing. And that was the love of his possessions. And this should speak loudly to any Christian, it only takes one thing in our lives to chain us to this world and keep us from following Jesus. And if Jesus tells you to go, and get rid of that one thing, that you may follow Him... and it makes you sad, sorrowful, you are in trouble.

For if Jesus asks you to give something up and follow Him, don't walk away from Him sorrowful as the rich man did, but rather rejoice, that He has shown you this thing that is holding you back from following Him.

Never think that hanging onto the things of this world is worth more than following Jesus, because look at what the text of the verse says; 'Looking at him He loved him,' Jesus knew what needed to be done, and the man did not want to do it.

This is where many people come to when they hear the gospel or hear of the commands they must obey in order to follow Jesus. They count up the cost, looking at it from a worldly, earthly, materialistic perspective. And believe that it will cost them too much.



Jesus asks in Matthew 16 verse 26;

*"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Why is Jesus even asking such a question? Would men exchange eternity for earthly possessions? Yes they would, they are like the man who came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, and when he was told what to do, he walked away sorrowful.

What about me? Am I living my life hanging on to all my possessions with a tight fist thinking this is all mine, and nothing will take them away from me. I have worked for them, I have earned them, I have built this all up for myself, and no one will part or take them from me.

Or am I living my life with an open hand, believing that the Lord has blessed me with all of these things, but He can also take them all away, for no matter what happens to my possessions I will still follow Jesus. Can I say with Job, that the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Can I be like Job in that no matter what happens, I will not deny Him.

Listen to the tax collector Zacchaeus when he met the Lord'

*Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."*

Which probably took care of the other half. Are we ready and willing to part with all we have if the Lord would call us to do so? If that's what it took to follow Him? Are you willing to deny every right you have in order to be a follower of Jesus?

Because that is the message of this final point. The most important point of them all and that is to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow him.

#### V. TAKE UP YOUR CROSS (v. 16:24)

Matthew 16:24.

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."*

Step 1 you must have a desire to follow Jesus.

Step 2 you must deny yourself.

Step 3 you must take up your own cross.

Step 4 you must follow Jesus.

We have already looked at steps 1 and 2 in a roundabout way in the first 4 points of the message. Step 4 is what this whole message has been about, about following Jesus that is. And it is step 3 that we want to look at in this last point, in taking up your cross.

This is Good Friday, the day we commemorate the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. A day that we acknowledge His death on the cross, the time when He gave up His life, so that we may live. And He did this, so that He could redeem us by His own blood, through His own sacrifice. It is the cross that cost him everything, so why should it cost us anything less. Paul says in Philippians chapter 3 verse 8;

*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*

You see, the cross is a symbol of death; people did not come back from the cross. And it is the very same cross Jesus is speaking of in the verse when He says ‘take up *your* cross and follow Me’

It is this same cross that we ourselves must bear in order that we can follow Jesus. Not that we need to die physically on the cross, He did that for us, but that we must die to self on our cross.

Because where is the place Jesus went after He took up His own cross... the place he was crucified... anyone... Golgotha, which is translated... 'the place of a skull.' It was to this place that Jesus took His own cross to be crucified. This is where His cross lead Him too.

This place, which is called the place of a skull, is named this because it was probably what the rock formation looked like in Jesus' day. But perhaps I can give you another thought, one that would speak to us today.

You see in roman times criminals were often left hanging on the cross for days until they died, and then their bodies were left to rot in the elements as public examples to the population. Their flesh would be at the mercy of the bugs and birds for the taking. Implying that once the cross, and Golgotha, was truly done with you, all that would remain of you, would be bones and your skull. That sounds gruesome, but so was our Lords crucifixion.

And I ask us, is this what my cross is to do to me, strip me of my flesh, metaphorically speaking. To take me to that place where the sinful flesh is all removed by the word of God and crucified. Is this the picture we are to have in bearing our cross?

When Jesus said; Follow Me

For Paul says in Romans 7:18;

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;*

Romans 8:13;

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

And in Galatians 5:24;

*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

For we;

*all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*

Ephesians 2:3

Do I allow the cross to strip me clean? Do I allow it to crucify my flesh, as Paul says it should? If the cross means death to my flesh, am I still willing, as Jesus was willing?

The verse says, if anyone, anyone desires to come after Me, then let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.

Denying myself, denying the security of my profession, denying the security of my possessions in thinking they can somehow save me. And take up my cross and follow Jesus. Because He says in Mark 10:38 and 39

*38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*

*39 "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*

CONCL;

And so in conclusion, when Jesus says ‘come and follow me,’ we must ask ourselves, do I really want to? Do I really want to walk that path? Because to follow means to be like Peter and Andrew who left their nets and followed Jesus for the job He had in store for them. It means that now is the time to go, not tomorrow, not sometime in the future, but now, before its too late. As Jesus said to his own disciple; ‘let the dead bury their own dead, and follow Me.’

It means we are not to worry about our financial stability, our source of income, or put our faith in the many possessions we have. But to follow Jesus like Matthew the tax collector did, that when Jesus says follow, he left all and let God take care of the rest.

When Jesus said; Follow Me

Because Jesus said; ‘he who does not take his cross and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me.’

That means that we must take up our own cross, and follow Him. We take up our own cross, to Golgotha, that place of a skull, to die to self, to die to sin, to die to everything that is contrary to God and become like Jesus, so that I may be worthy of Him. We need to come to a place where I am ready, and willing, to give up everything for Jesus Christ, and follow.

Years ago, Pastor Phil gave us a task to prepare for a sharing time in which we were to share ‘what the cross means to us.’ I wrote a poem, and so for a close I want to read that poem, I have made some minor word changes from the original but it’s still the same poem;

What does the cross mean to me  
Come and listen and you will see

The cross is a place where we all must come  
There a decision is laid for everyone

It is a place we all come and ask the question why  
We should accept the crucified Christ or deny

To accept is no promise to a straight and smooth road  
Nor will the path always be covered with gold

It is no guarantee that it will be a life of ease  
There is no mention of a soft and gentle breeze

It may be a path filled with snares and weight  
As the world looks upon you with disgust and hate

And you find yourself asking doesn't anyone care  
That even though this cross is almost too hard to bear

That life on this earth is so short so vain  
And yet so very few decide to board this glory train

You find yourself shouting into the darkness of night  
Why doesn't anyone want to hear these true words of life

For it is not for this darkness that we toil and strive  
But for the glorious promise to one day be alive

For to choose the Christ who hung on this tree  
Is the promise of life He will soon give to me

But alas for many this truth falls on deaf ears  
And once too late they will weep with great tears

The cross for me is a choice I have made  
It is the choice for everyone that should never be delayed

The cross for me is His life for mine  
And to be exalted in glory in His due time

The cross for me is most precious in my journey  
For it is the only way to live life with Jesus eternally

What does this cross mean to me  
Come and follow and you will see