

Jesus Said, "Follow Me"

Sunday, February 11, 2018, Matthew 4:18-22

1. Jesus' call to multiplication.

This morning I would like to begin my sermon with a little math quiz. This is in honor of all you accountants out there who are busy with tax season. Thank you all very much for all your hard work.

The quiz is this...which kind of addition will produce greater results over time. Adding by 100's or working with one at a time. Let me show you what I mean.

If I have some important information I want to pass on to others. I could gather 100 people together, once a week for one year and teach them this information. At the end of the year I will have 100 people who know more or less what I want to share. They all go home and then the next year I have 100 more students and so on and so on.

In 30 years, 100 students a year – how many students will I have taught in my classes? ... 3,000. That's a lot of people to share my important information with. That is good progress.

But what if I just started with 1 student. What if I spent a whole year teaching just one student. And the difference here is, what if my goal was not to just pass on the information to that one student, but to prepare that student to also pass it on. So, at the end of one year I don't have 100 students who have learned what I have to say. I have just 1.

But then the next year I take on another student. And my student from the first year also takes on 1 student. So, at the end of the second year instead of having 200 people who know what I taught I have 3. But remember, all three are also capable of taking on their own students, whereas in the 200 – they are not expected to do so. I was the teacher and they were always only the students.

As the years go by my students who teach others keep going. By year 7 we are up to 96 students who are capable of teaching other students. Not quite as many as 700 classroom pupils but still growing.

By year 10 my duplicating students (1 at a time) now number 768 and my classroom students number 1,000.

Now by this point in my sermon the accountants have already fallen asleep because they see where this is going. When you deal with one teacher and a classroom full of students you are only dealing with addition. When you teach duplicating students – students who go out and teach others – even if it is only one student at a time – you are dealing with multiplication.

In year 10 I only have 768 multiplying students but in year 11 that number is 1,536. By year 14 that number is 12,288. By year 20 I am up to 786,432. By year 30 – when the classroom model finally gets to 3,000 the one-on-one method has raised up 805,306,368 students who have gone out and also become teachers.

This is discipleship. A disciple is a student who is learning from a teacher in order to go out and teach the same thing and make more disciples.

In Jesus' earthly ministry we see that He employs both models of teaching. In Matthew chapter 5 Jesus sits down on a mountainside and he teaches crowds. This is the general teacher – student model.

What I am doing right now, preaching; what we do in Bible studies and in Sunday School classes – this is very biblical. The Church is called to have teachers who teach crowds – classes of people who will take that knowledge home.

But that is not all that Jesus did. In our text for today Jesus calls 4 men, the first of what would be 12 disciples and then He spends lots of one-on-one time with them for about three years.

Those men (except for the one who betrayed Him) then go out into the world and build the church.

But Jesus was one man. He sent out 12 disciples. Today there are supposedly 2.5 billion people on the planet who claim to be Christian. Now I know, there are many who claim to be Christians who do not know Jesus, but 2.5 billion is way more than just 100 people every year for the past 2,000 years. Straight addition just will not cut it. There must also be multiplication.

You and I, and you and you and you and him and her, every disciple of Jesus must be discipling other disciples to then in turn go out disciple more.

In America today it seems that the most popular way to be the Church is to be attractational, to hold services and classes and events, do lots of advertising and wait for people to show up. Jesus did some of that. But the way He really grew His kingdom was through one-on-one discipleship. He gathered followers whom He would teach by living life together and then they would go out from Him and do the same thing for others.

Who are the disciples in your life? Who are you teaching so that that person can also go out and teach others?

2. Jesus initiated the call.

You may say, "But no one has ever asked me to disciple them."

But what has Jesus modelled for us. We can see in our passage from today that **Jesus** was walking and **Jesus** saw the fisherman and **Jesus** said "Come, follow me."

Yes, as we read through the Gospels we do come across incidents where people will seek Jesus out, but often in these situations He will be very difficult with them. Many of the people who come to Him end up going away. Why? Because they came to Him with the wrong motives. So, Jesus is tough on them to purify their intentions.

But when it comes to choosing His disciples, **Jesus** is the one who seeks them out. **Jesus** came to Peter, Andrew, James and John and told them to follow Him.

Are we as a church sitting in this building on Ridge Rd. and waiting for people to come to us? Why would they? Jesus sought out His disciples.

And let us not think that evangelism and discipleship are really two different things. Evangelism is simply the first part of discipleship.

In Matthew 28 – the great commission, Jesus doesn't say, "Go into all the world and make converts and then just leave them hanging."

And He doesn't say, "Wait for people to come to you and then disciple them."

He says, "**Go** and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Generally, the one who is going to evangelize and disciple seeks out the ones to be disciplined. Jesus called Peter. Peter didn't call Jesus.

Can I just say, as a quick aside? Are you waiting for something? Are you waiting for a friend? Are you lonely? Are you sitting around waiting for someone to invite you to something? Don't wait. Seek. Ask. Knock. You initiate.

You be somebody's friend. You invite people to your house for dinner. Don't wait for them to invite you to their house. You go rake someone else's leaves. Don't wait for them to rake your leaves. You go ahead and invest your talents into people rather than waiting for someone else to come along and to engage you.

In the commentaries I read there was an interesting comment made that Jesus came and found these fishermen who were busy. He didn't go and find loafers or people waiting around.

If you don't know God's plan for your future – keep moving forward with what you do know. There are many things God has already made clear and then while we are moving ahead with those things be flexible to let Him change your direction.

Peter didn't wake up one morning and say, "Well, I'm going to leave everything tomorrow morning and follow Jesus. So, I'm not going to go out and fish tonight. I'll just sit around and do nothing."

Peter went about with the work God had already given Him and while He was doing that work Jesus stepped in and changed the direction of Peter's life.

3. Jesus called regular folks.

And notice who it is that Jesus is seeking out. As far as we know Jesus' disciples were not the religious leaders. They were not the wealthy class. Probably the only rich disciple was Matthew, the tax collector. And he got his money by being a traitor to his fellow countrymen and cheating them of their money.

James and John were probably middle class. Their father could afford servants to help with the fishing business and they had some connections in Jerusalem. But most of the 12 were probably poor men like Peter and Andrew – fisherman.

I think we are tempted to seek out people whom we think of as cool or impressive in some way. But Jesus called regular folks who did not stand out for their own abilities. That's why you're here, right? That's why I'm here. Jesus called you. He called me. Not because of anything special we have done but because of His grace.

2 Timothy 1:9 says:

“He has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time...”

Jesus sought me and I was nothing more special than anyone else. It is only by grace that He sought me, not of anything I have done.

And lets drive that point home even more. God can do everything directly and only by Himself, but for some reason He chooses to use people. God uses **people**.

Think through every story of the Bible that you can think through – and yes, sometime God uses angels and sometimes God uses burning bushes and locusts and frogs and talking donkeys – but most of the time God uses people.

God didn't need Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. He is more than capable of doing it Himself. God didn't need David to sit on the throne of Israel and rule His people. God was Israel's king.

God didn't need King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to punish His people for their sins. He could have done it Himself.

God didn't need King Cyrus of Persia to send His people back to the promised land. He didn't need Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the temple and the city walls. He didn't need Queen Esther to prevent the Jews from being killed in a mass genocide by Haaman. He could have done it Himself.

And to be sure, all of those things were only accomplished because of His acting...through people.

But all along, God chose to use people. And ultimately, there was no human who could rescue us from our sin, and so He Himself became a human in order to save us from our sin. Because God uses people.

And so, here in our passage for today we have the Gospel of Matthew telling us that Jesus is calling a few more people, people that He is going to use to take the important news about our salvation to the whole world.

And He is still using people today. I am people. You are people. He calls us disciples. Jesus did not stop saying, "Follow me" way back here in Matthew chapter 4. Jesus is still today looking at you and me and saying, "Follow me."

Name...follow me.

4. Jesus' call requires action.

In my research for this sermon I came across a video conversation between Pastors Francis Chan and David Platt. They were discussing discipleship. David Platt started out saying that disciples are people who make disciples. He started out saying that when he and his wife were first trying to have a baby they were unsuccessful. There was something unhealthy in their bodies that prevented them from reproducing. In a similar way, Christians who are not reproducing other Christians are also unhealthy in some way.

Did you know that in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John the word "Christian" is never used. Anyone who believes in Jesus, anyone who is listening to His

teaching, anyone who is following Him is simply called a disciple not just the 12 whom we also call apostles.

We should probably use that word more - disciple. We are not just "Christians". Like I said 2.5 billion people call themselves "Christians". We are disciples. And like I also said, disciples are those who are students because they intend to take what they learn and go and teach others also.

Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John and said "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Follow me, because I have a job for you to do.

In that video with David Platt and Francis Chan, Francis joined into the conversation and he said that he thinks it pleases the devil very much when Christians sit under biblical teaching and are convicted and do NOTHING about it.

We attend class, we listen to sermons and then continue doing the same things we have always done. The more we do that, the more we sear our consciences, the more we get used to being convicted and doing nothing.

But when Jesus told Peter and his friends to "Follow Me" they had to physically respond. Because Jesus wasn't going to stand there and hangout on the shore. As long as He stood there on the shore they could pretend they were following Him. But Jesus did not leave them that option. He was busy teaching, preaching and healing.

He was on the move, so they had to decide and go. To not follow Him would be to reject Him completely. To obey His call and to follow would be a radical change in their life trajectory.

5. Jesus' call has a cost.

As we see they chose to go. But what did going mean? What would they be leaving behind if they went?

They had houses and boats and businesses and careers. We know Peter had a wife. We know James and John left their father and the servants.

And because we know the end of their story. We know Peter eventually lost his life – he was crucified, upside down on a cross in Rome. His brother Andrew, was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Greece.

James was the first of the 12 to be martyred. King Herod had him killed by the sword. And John, though he died of old age, spent a period of time in exile on the island of Patmos.

Jesus told His disciples, “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master...all men will hate you because of me.” When Jesus called them, they left everything behind and followed Him.

What do we have that we could leave behind if Jesus called us today? I have a family. I have an amazing wife and three amazing children. Do I love them more than Jesus?

I have a great church family and a wonderful place to work. I live close to my parents and in-laws and my brother’s family. Compared to many people in the world I have a really great house, good neighbors and a really nice part of the world to live in.

I also have pretty good health, a sound mind – most of the time. What do you have?

Are you willing to give it all up, to follow Jesus. Because Jesus is calling.

Name...follow me.

I know that some of you here today think that you **are** following Jesus, that you **are** His disciples, and I can plainly tell you that you are not. I am not saying this to be unkind and I am not thinking of anyone in particular. I just know statistically that it is true that there are some people in this room who believe that they are followers of Jesus and they are not.

How do I know this? Well Jesus said so, in Matthew 7:21 – 23

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Wow, did you hear that. Some people will prophesy in Jesus name. Some people will heal people in Jesus name. Some people will perform miracles in Jesus name. And yet, they are not truly His disciples?

We know that there were many people who followed Jesus when He was on the earth who truly did not have faith in Him as their Savior. At one point Jesus challenged them with their own motives and expectations, and many of them left.

John 6:66 says: "From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

"Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God."

Do you believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God?

Because Jesus is calling.

Name...follow me.

Now that you have heard the benefits package that Jesus seems to be offering...hatred, abuse, being disowned, losing things you love, death...you may wonder: "Why is anyone following Jesus? When Jesus tells me to follow Him, maybe I should just say 'No'?"

Well, Peter had a moment when he was thinking that same thing. Hey, Jesus, we left everything for you – what's in it for us?

Matthew 19:27-29

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have

followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

What does one get who leaves everything to follow Jesus? You get Jesus. You and I were made for God and without Jesus we are left without God.

I think we like to think there is a neutral option. I can be a good person and get to heaven and still get God without bothering with Him too much while I'm here on earth.

Ravi Zacharias has said something to the effect of, "If you live your life apart from God, you will spend your eternity that way too."

Being a disciple of Jesus is not an extra level of Christian commitment. It is the only level.

Jesus didn't only tell the 12 to follow Him, as if they were some sort of professional class of Christian. He told the rich young man to "Sell his possessions, give them to the poor...and follow me." (MT. 19:21)

He told one potential disciple who asked Jesus if he could wait until a more opportune time to follow Jesus, He told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, follow me." (Mt. 8:21-22)

"Still another said, 'I will follow you Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.' Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Lk 9:61)

Matthew 16:24-27

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

A call to salvation is a call to discipleship. Discipleship is learning from the master teacher so we can go out and do what He did and teach others to do it as well.

There are many other things I could say about this passage, but the most important is this. Jesus is calling.

Name...follow me.

6. Jesus' call requires American Christians to sacrifice too.

I did not pick this text for today. Pastor Jeff assigned these texts. From the first time I read this text I knew that I was not qualified to preach on it.

Now you might say, "Oh, that's ok, none of us are qualified either." But I know some people who are qualified. Quresh is qualified to preach this sermon. Maria is qualified to preach this sermon.

I was born into a Christian family. I grew up with Christian teachers and Christian friends and godly Pastors. I live in a country where just over 70% of people claim to be some sort of Christian.

For me to work full-time in Christian ministry brings honor and great pleasure to my family. It garners approval from my friends.

Quresh was born into a Muslim family in a country where only just over 2% of the people are Christians. When Jesus called to Quresh to come and follow him Quresh obeyed. But his family felt dishonored by that. His friends and neighbors disapproved so much that they beat him. Quresh's daughter felt so dishonored that she tried to get him killed by tricking him into telling her where he had gone into hiding.

Quresh is qualified to preach on leaving everything behind and following Jesus because he actually did leave everything behind. And because he was following Jesus, he brutally suffered and died.

God has not yet asked me to give up everything in the same way that He has asked Quresh to do so. But He has called me to follow **Him**.

And since I do not live in heaven I know that there are things in my life, in our American evangelical culture – what one pastor calls Churchianity – there are things in our Churchianity that we hold onto and don't realize that we should surrender. We have ways of being "Christians" that may not be the way Jesus would be a Christian.

Because whether you are born a Muslim, an atheist, a Hindu or a particular variety of Christian – Jesus is calling, "Come, follow me." He is not asking us to follow some cultural version of Him. He wants us to follow Him.

And since it becomes rather difficult to do Jesus' work while we are still carrying the fishing nets of our former lives – the personal and cultural baggage we have received from the world, even from our American Christian world – at some point we need to lay it down. We need to surrender it all.

7. Conclusion

If you are old like me / and yet still young like me... you might remember this song by Steven Curtis Chapman.

*We will abandon it all for the sake of the call.
No other reason at all, but the sake of the call.
Wholly devoted to live and to die for the sake of the call.*

*Nobody stood and applauded them
So they knew from the start this road would not lead to fame
All they really knew for sure was Jesus had called to them
He said come follow me and they came
With reckless abandon they came*

*Empty nets lying there at the water's edge
Told a story that few could believe and none could explain
How some crazy fishermen agreed to go where Jesus led
With no thought for what they would gain
For Jesus had called them by name
And they answered*

*We will abandon it all for the sake of the call.
No other reason at all, but the sake of the call.
Wholly devoted to live and to die for the sake of the call.*

*Not for the sake of a creed or a cause not for a dream or a promise
Simply because it is Jesus who calls and if we believe we'll obey.*

So, what have I said? A disciple learns from the teacher so that he can teach others who will also teach others...multiplication.

We cannot be passive students. We need to be active disciples. Disciples who initiate. Who are you discipling today?

God uses people – regular, ordinary people – whom He has chosen not for any good in them but simply because of His grace.

And when we receive this call – by His grace – we need to respond. What is it that we tell our children – “Delayed obedience is disobedience.” Or we could say, “faith without works is dead”.

If you do follow Him all the way, you will suffer for it. No student is above his teacher.

And even though we think we are safe, here in America, and we may feel we are doing Christianity the right way, we still have fishing nets, cultural baggage, that we need to lay down, in order to follow Jesus well.

Jesus has called us because He has work for us to do. He wants us to be fishers of men.

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed Him.