

# Follow Me 3

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John 8<sup>25-36</sup>/ Isaiah 53<sup>2,3</sup>/

Can we handle the Truth...? It's a good question for we who call ourselves Christians because in many ways our main claim and currency is precisely this – the Truth. We **claim** to have a truth that isn't just specific but, in fact, covers all of life and all of Creation. And that Truth is largely about what or should I say **Who** is behind all this – from where it began and, perhaps even more to the point, where it is all heading. We **claim** that Jesus Christ is the key both to the origin of life and the goal of life and also that this same Jesus came to make it possible that we might know this Truth in person. And in the Gospels we find that Jesus is, Himself, very concerned with this same Truth. Indeed His claim is that our life is bound up with this Truth in every aspect whether or not we are aware of it; whether or not we believe it. But how shall we know this Truth. How do we come to understand it?

Jesus provides the answer to this question in our reading today and it may surprise you. In John 8 we read these words.

**“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8<sup>31</sup>)**

**“If you continue in my word...”** This is John's rephrasing of Jesus' very first command to the disciples to 'Follow Me!' In other words, **when** you continue to follow me **then** you will know the truth and the truth will make you free. Here we learn two vital things about the Truth Jesus speaks of. The first is that knowing it requires us to be following Him and the second is that the nature of this truth is that it brings freedom. I will say something about both of these this morning but I want us to note just how revolutionary these words are for us today. Basically Jesus is saying this: to know the Truth you must be actively following Me! Following Jesus is a prerequisite for knowing the Truth.

Our theme for the last three weeks has been that of 'Following Jesus.' If you want perhaps the most potent and evocative picture of what it means to be a Christian you have it in these words of Jesus' to His disciples – 'Follow Me!' If you want to sum up in as few words as possible what it means to love God you have it in these words... 'Follow Me!' If you want to analyse the Christian life – this phrase contains the baseline against which all comparisons can and should be made. The command of Jesus to follow Him calls us back time and again to both the pace and the grace of the Christian life.

The disciples were those **who followed Jesus**. Often they didn't do it well; often they struggled to understand where He was going and why – **but they followed!** At times they stepped off the path of 'followership' and both disobeyed and, tragically, betrayed their Lord and yet Jesus came back not with a stinging tongue or a furious telling off but with those simple words again – 'Follow Me!' You see, 'Follow Me' isn't a law – it's a life. It isn't a measure of our worth but a mark of Christ's Presence amongst us. As we follow, Christ becomes present in our situation. As we give ourselves over to obedience, His power attends our situation. We don't make the running – He does.

And we were reminded last week by Helen that 'followership' will inevitably lead us outwards – away from what we've considered to be comfortable and familiar. This was always the case in Jesus' earthly ministry. He didn't stay around the comfortable and familiar cities but He went where the need was – into the poor areas, the broken communities, the alien places. And as He went into these places He took His disciples who followed despite their discomfort.

Today I want to bring another aspect of followership to you – one that plagues our faith today and which we need to get into perspective. And I want to bring it to you by asking you that question again; can you handle the Truth?

What we learn today from our passage in John is that this Truth comes to us in a special way. It is not simple self-evident. It is not something that is obvious to all. Rather it requires something of us. It requires us to be **following Jesus**. Let's look at what this implies.

1. **Truth is more than doctrinal.** It implies firstly something about Truth; that it is more than a doctrine or a precept; that **propositions**, no matter how powerful or true in themselves, **do not constitute the Truth Jesus speaks of here**. Truth is more than a line in the sand or a rule or a law. We may know the **theory** of Christianity backwards – but we will only know it completely **when we follow**. The days when we could be confident of being a follower because we knew things about the Bible or about God are gone. Intellectual knowledge is no guarantee of Truth telling or knowing because it is no guarantee of followership. A deep history in the Church is just that – a deep history in the Church. It is no guarantee of holding or knowing the Truth Jesus speaks of here. We know the Truth when we are following Christ, when we are on the road, when we are walking with Him.

And yes, we will muck it up, stray from the path, get it completely wrong at times. That is not the point. The disciples made almost every mistake in the book and yet they were still called 'Followers' by Jesus. The place where the Truth is known is on the road with Jesus and if we're there we will know it.

2. **Truth is personal:** Jesus says, 'You cannot stand back from Me and know the Truth. You must draw close to me – close enough to follow. You must commit yourself to me before you will discover the Truth. Up until recently most theories of truth involved a thing called 'objectivity' which is a word that describes the distance an observer must have from the thing observed in order for them to be able to perceive and understand it. In other words

truth requires distance – it requires a step back from the thing observed. Not so with God’s Truth. This Truth requires the kind of self giving which seeks personal involvement and personal risk. This Truth is far more like developing a relationship with someone. Usually a relationship requires personal commitment; time spent with another person, communicating, learning, understanding.

And this is what we see with Jesus and His disciples. Truth wasn’t learned in the classroom even though Jesus did have teaching sessions with them. Many of not most of these revolved around experiences they’d had with Jesus on the road. So learning the truth involved their following Him to places they would not normally have gone. It involved them leaving their businesses behind in order to “catch men.” It involved them forming relationships with a group of other people they would not normally have related to. And all of this required personal risk and personal commitment. I want to ask, are we being lead this way today? Have we allowed God to challenge our lives in this manner? Even developing a church community will require such commitment. Many of us here would not normally relate to one another were it not for our commitment to church. Sometimes that feels frustrating and at other times just empty. Relating to people we are not instinctively drawn to is difficult. But this is precisely where the Truth of Christ is to be found. It is fascinating to me that Isaiah hints that even relating to Jesus was a bit like this. In the passage read out for us today Isaiah clearly acknowledges that there was nothing particularly attractive about Jesus. Nothing particularly charismatic about Him. And yet the disciples were called to relate to this strange teacher and in Him they found... **the Truth.**

3. **Truth is self-revealing:** One of the most uncomfortable and yet freeing aspects of following Jesus is that it will force us to confront ourselves. This is again an aspect of God’s Truth which is considerably different from what might be called truth elsewhere.

The story is told of a Swiss pastor on the verge of a breakdown who was urged to see the psychiatrist Carl Jung. When asked how many hours a day he was working, the pastor told Jung “about eighteen hours a day.” Jung advised him to cut down to eight hours a day and spend the time thus released in quiet relaxation on his own. The pastor did this: the first day he sat down in a comfortable armchair to listen to Mozart and read a novel. The second day Mozart gave way to Beethoven . . .and so on. After two weeks or so the pastor felt, if anything, worse and returned to Jung, who asked him how specifically, he was spending his time. When the pastor described his leisure hours, Jung said, “That is not what I meant; I want you to spend time quietly with yourself.” The man replied, “I could not think of anything more appalling.” Jung said, “Well, that is the person you have been inflicting on your people eighteen hours a day.”

While other truth may reveal general ‘truths’ about ourselves it seldom calls us to account in the way God’s Truth does. Hebrews says this of God’s Word...

**<sup>12</sup>Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. (Hebs 4)**

This is not comfortable. Often we confront truth about ourselves which is really quite distasteful and yet if we look at how Jesus worked with His disciples we see that God does not do this to alienate us or belittle us but to help us live lives we can be proud of. Imagine how different things would be if the Financial Houses of North America has confronted the truth about the sub-prime market a year or even 2 years ago? Imagine how different life would be if we, as a race, had confronted the truth about racial prejudice centuries ago? But pride and the desire for wealth or power so often prevents us from confronting these sorts of truths. Those who follow Jesus cannot help it! They will be called into relationship with One whose very Presence challenges every and any aspect of their life which is sick or damaged. Yes, He does this gently, but He does do it.

The question is, are we prepared to accept the work of Christ in this way. You see I suspect many rejoice when they find God's Truth until it becomes a little uncomfortable to live with, until they realise what the light of God's truth is beginning to illuminate. How many people stay in Church thinking that somehow we will put the world to rights when God's Truth is really calling for us to be put right first. I'll say this now and I've said it before – when we become the people God means us to be we won't be able to build churches big enough to hold those who want to be with us and to know the Lord who made us like this. Let me finish with this little story...

Follow Me says Jesus, then you will know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free.