

Follow Me... (1)

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1 Cor 10³¹-11¹/ Matthew 4¹²⁻²⁰

Have you ever had someone try to explain to you the game of cricket or, for that matter have you ever tried to explain it to someone for whom it is completely foreign? It's really quite hard! Here's one attempt...

Cricket: As explained to a foreigner...

You have two sides, one out in the field and one in. Each man that's in the side that's in goes out, and when he's out he comes in and the next man goes in until he's out. When they are all out, the side that's out comes in and the side that's been in goes out and tries to get those coming in, out. Sometimes you get men still in and not out.

When a man goes out to go in, the men who are out try to get him out, and when he is out he goes in and the next man in goes out and goes in. There are two men called umpires who stay out all the time and they decide when the men who are in are out.

When both sides have been in and all the men have been out, and both sides have been out twice after all the men have been in, including those who are not out, that is the end of the game.

Swimmers swim, don't they? If you want to be a competitive swimmer you get in that pool, you swim for miles and you perfect your stroke until you can swim faster than anyone else. Academics read and think. If you want to be an academic you have to know things and be able to think clearly and logically about those things and the best way to do that is to read about what other people think and to think about their thoughts. Business people work to make businesses profitable. They learn about how to make things and sell things and turn a profit. They understand markets and taxes and balance sheets. But what, friends, do Christians do?

We make a huge mistake when we think that all that Christianity is mostly about knowing something. Paul says to the Corinthians— imitate me! Do what I do and you'll be OK because I have given my life to imitating Christ. Our faith requires more than mere thought. Theory alone will not bring us to maturity just as one explanation alone is usually not enough for us to truly understand a game like cricket.

So where do we start with our faith? Swimmers swim and runners run but what do Christians do? Let me offer this answer; **Christians follow!** We are **followers of Christ**. This is the first, the primary, call of Christ. **'Follow Me!'** If we look at the beginning of the Gospels, we find this answer in each of the synoptic accounts – Matthew, Mark and Luke, and we find it also in John but a little less directly. I will come back to John later on. This is the primary skill, the fundamental action of the Christian. If we boil it all down, we come back to this time and again. We are, above all else, **followers of Christ**. Nothing more but also, nothing less. But what does this mean?

Perhaps the first thing to be mindful of is that following Jesus has a goal. This is not some power trip God is on. We are not followers of Jesus because God needs to feel important. God has a reason He wants us to follow Jesus. Jesus says, "Follow me **and... I will make you...**" Make you... God wants to turn us into something, to teach us a skill, to make us useful in His Kingdom. There is a goal. He wants to make us... **fishers of people...** or as the older versions say, **fishers of men**. Now I know this may sound horrific to some of you but please remember this – Jesus almost certainly didn't have in mind people on soap boxes preaching to a crowd something they didn't really want to hear. Jesus caught people in all sorts of ways and He is still in this business. The last thing you may want to do or be capable of doing is preaching to a hostile audience or even to a friendly one, but you can still fish for people.

But is this the central reason for following Jesus. Are we followers simply to attract other followers or is there some deeper logic to God's call to be followers. I want to suggest to you today that there is a deeper logic and that the evangelical theme in Christ's call is not God's 'end game.' You see in other places Jesus suggests that God could raise up followers, children of God, all by Himself. In Matthew 3 John the Baptist lays bare the false logic of the Pharisees who considered their salvation to be secure because of their Jewish bloodline. In attacking this logic John says this. ⁹**Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. (Matt 3)** Now if God is able to raise up Children of Abraham from stones I would presume that He can do the same for His own children. And Jesus Himself says that it is the action of God who draws people to Himself and is does not depend on our work. ⁴⁴**No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. (John 6)** So if fishing for people is not God's end game what is?

The answer goes to the core of our salvation. Sin led us essentially **out of relationship with God**. **Following Jesus is our way back into that relationship**. And, of course, the doorway into that life of 'followership' is to believe in and accept Jesus as the One who must be followed. But lets always remember – this is the doorway, this is the beginning of the journey. We must then continue the pathway entered upon. Why then 'fishing for people?' Can't we just follow Jesus and leave others to their own devices?

No! If God's heart is for humankind then naturally, if we are to enter into relationship with God, His heart must become our heart. Care for others and concern for their eternal destiny must be at the core of what we believe and what we are about. So this life of following is directed towards the skill of catching others but takes as its central theme relationship with God. As we learn to catch others so we will need to grow closer to God for from this will our true love for others and our true concern for

people arise. So why follow Jesus? What's in it for us? Why become a follower today? Why remain a follower after today? Let me give you three very simple but profound reasons.

1. We follow usually because we do not know the way ourselves. We follow Jesus for the same reason. We follow Jesus because He leads us to the God who wants us to have and to live an abundant life; to the God who loves us unconditionally and to the God who holds out to each of us a life that is and will be **eternal**.

But we follow Him because we also do not know the way to live here and now. Many people are prepared to follow Jesus so long as He doesn't interfere in their lives; so long as He doesn't muck up the well prepared, carefully planned life which they've worked very hard to build. Others are prepared to admit their lives are a mess and so they come to Jesus and follow Him for some time until, they reason, their lives are how they like them, and they 'take over' again. Still others, live largely the life of the follower but at regular intervals take over for a time and make a mess and give the steering wheel back to Jesus.

The fact of the matter is, we won't follow Jesus until we're convinced He can do a better job. While we still live confident of our own ability to lead ourselves, Jesus will always be second.

2. We follow Jesus because we do not know how to achieve what God wants. Religions around the world have a suspicion of what it means to be good, to be loving, to be generous, to be righteous. But the achievement of these things is beyond us.

Jesus leads us to live in a manner that achieves what God wants not only in our lives but in the lives of others around us. Relationships matter to Jesus. This isn't essentially a solitary life. It a life meant to be lived in community and that will always raise tensions and conflict. Living in community is not easy because most people in **are wrong!** (Well at least they're wrong at some point!) How we live with others is a key indicator of whether we're following Jesus because those who do discover new resources of love, compassion and interest in and towards others. And as we follow we learn to love and as we learn to love we catch people into the kingdom of God.

3. We follow because we do not know what love is.

The great majority of songs celebrate in some measure the feelings and events around men and women falling in or out of love. Some of them reflect some expertise in this field the others, simple ignorance and poor judgement. What is clear is that this small part of the great vista of love has come to take enormous significance – so much so that it now stands as perhaps the only experience of love many want or understand. What one understands as one grows older is that the horizons of love are much much bigger than this. That, for example, simple friendship can prove a much more love filled relationship than romantic love. That love can be expressed far more profoundly in a relationship where there appears to be little mutuality than in some where both partners are committed to the relationship. Take for example the profound love shown to his captors by Nelson Mandela or the amazing love Jesus showed towards the people who killed Him or the love extended to countless thousands by Mother Theresa.

We are not great lovers and yet love is the key to future survival. We follow Jesus to become great lovers – to really learn how to love.

Do you want to learn how to love? Do you want to achieve what God wants in your life and with your life? Do you want to find a pathway to the abundant life God has for you? Then ask Jesus to lead you today. Ask Him to be Lord of yours life. Say to God, “I want to be your follower. Help me to do that God!”

Let’s pray together and if you want to agree with me just say yes silently to this prayer.