

What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus? Matthew 4:18-22

Good morning! We're starting a new series I'm calling "Legit: Becoming a Real Christ-Follower". It'll be a 6-part series which will take us right into just before the start of the holy week.

Legit. You've heard of the term, right? It is, of course, short for legitimate. It means authentic, without pretense, real. So, in this series we're going to look at what it means to be a real Christian and a fake Christian. Just like there is real news and fake news. Real is real, it's what really happened. Fake news is fake, it didn't happen. It just seemed like it happened. Or people pass it around like it happened.

A real Christian is otherwise known as a Christ-Follower. He is someone who follows Christ. He is a true disciple. He walks on the same path that Jesus walked on. He goes on the same journey with Jesus. He walks very closely, following Jesus as his rabbi. You see, during the time of Jesus, that's what exactly the disciples of rabbis did. They watch every move and behavior of their rabbi and try to emulate him until they become like him.

A disciple like that is a follower, not a fan. A fan is someone who admires someone from afar. And many, many so-called Christians today are just fans of Jesus, not followers of Jesus.

So, throughout this series we're going to look at what it means to be a legit Christian. What it takes to be a legit Christian. What are the characteristics of a real Christ-Follower?

Has anyone heard of a man by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer? Bonhoeffer was born into a large family in Breslau, Poland in 1906. He became a German pastor, theologian, spy, anti-Nazi dissident, and key founding member of the Confessing Church,

which was one of few Christian churches in Germany that openly opposed the Nazi regime. Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in 1943 for refusing to join the military and talking against Hitler's persecution of the Jews. After the failed bomb plot of 20th July, 1944, in which many of Bonhoeffer's friends and allies were convicted of attempting to assassinate Adolph Hitler, the Nazis decided that Bonhoeffer was too dangerous and Hitler ordered his execution. The Nazis hanged Bonhoeffer in the notorious Flossenburg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, just two weeks before the end of WWII.

This great Christian martyr and theologian wrote several books, the most famous, *The Cost of Discipleship*. In this book, he coined the term "cheap grace" and called it, "The mortal enemy of our church" (Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 43). Bonhoeffer writes, "Cheap grace is grace without a price, without costs. Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship." (Bonhoeffer, p. 29-30)

Bonhoeffer goes on and contrasts cheap grace, this "grace without discipleship" with "costly grace." Costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field, for the sake of which, people go and sell all they have. Costly grace is the pearl, for whose value is so great, that the merchant sells all that he has. It is Christ's sovereignty, for that sake of which you tear out an eye or cut off a hand if it causes you to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ, which causes a disciple to leave his nets and follow him. (Bonhoeffer, p. 30-31)

Please turn in your Bible to Matthew 4:18-22. Then, please turn also to Matthew 9:9.

Our focus this afternoon is Matthew 4:19, when Jesus says, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

Jesus called the first disciples near the beginning of His ministry in a region called Galilee.

Galilee is where Jesus began preaching repentance and the good news. The majority of the first three gospels happened in Galilee. There were about 204 cities and villages in Galilee, with an estimated population of between 2 million & 3 million. Galilee is a place of great natural fertility. The soil in the region rejects no plant and the air suits nearly every variety. The fruits grown there are remarkable. The Galilean commerce was heavily dependent on both agriculture and fishing industries.

Jesus calls disciples from all lifestyles and occupations. Regardless of where you grew up, how you live your life, how much money you have, or what terrible sins you committed, Jesus calls you to become one of his disciples. It doesn't matter if you have slept with hundreds of people, lived a homosexual life, taken drugs, or even killed someone...Jesus calls you to become one of his disciples.

No matter what our past, Jesus calls us to leave our old life, follow him as our Lord, become transformed to be like him, and go make more disciples.

How does God make disciples?

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

In this one command, Jesus gives us the **four main characteristics of a follower of Christ.**

I. A Follower leaves the past behind.

The last part of verse 21 says, "Jesus called them..." These fishermen didn't go looking for Jesus. Jesus came to them. He came to where they lived and called them to be his disciples.

What did these fishermen do? The scripture says in verse 20, Peter and Andrew, "At once...left their nets..." It says in verse 21, James and John, "Immediately...left the boat and their father..." It says Matthew 9:9 that Matthew "Got up and followed him."

What did the disciples give up?

Simon Peter and his brother Andrew dropped their fishing nets to follow Jesus.

James son of Zebedee and his brother John left their boat and father to follow Jesus. Bartholomew's, likely a farmer, left his family farming business to follow Jesus.

Jude and his younger brother, James, pushed aside their intense and violent nationalist views to follow Jesus.

Matthew left his life as a tax collector to follow Jesus.

Philip, likely another fisherman, dropped his nets and left his fishing boat to follow Jesus.

Simon the Zealot, left his Zealot views and hatred for everything Roman to follow Jesus. Thomas had to give over his pessimistic views to follow Jesus.

We do not know much about Matthias, other than he was already a follower when he was chosen so had to give up his comfortable life to replace Judas and follow Jesus.

The most notorious of the apostles, Paul, gave up his prestigious life as a Pharisee to follow Christ.

This rag-tag group 5 fishermen, one farmer, one tax collector, two Nationalists, one Zealot, one pessimist, one late-comer, and one Pharisee made up the group of men Jesus called to be disciples.

Jesus called these early disciples to leave their past life and follow him, transforming these men into disciple makers themselves.

I remember when God first called me to be a disciple. As many of you know, I was a former member of a pseudo-Christian cult and I was deeply involved with that cult. Every Sunday, I would go house-to-house with someone and try to convince people that we have the truth. Until one time I got hold of a book written by a Christian author who disputed the teachings of the cult I was in.

To make a long story short, at the end of the book, I realized who Jesus really was and he was calling me to follow him and give up my religion. It was a struggle at first, but Jesus even allowed me to have faith in him and I decided to follow him during the summer of 1980. That was the time I started my journey as his disciple. In following him, I gave up my former life in that I dropped all my ambitions to become a missionary in that cult. It meant giving up also all the books and materials I have accumulated as a member of the cult. And I never regretted my decision to follow Christ even if it meant giving up my most cherished ambitions and possessions.

I'm sure many of you here had to give up at least one thing when you decided to become a follower of Christ. You must have given up gambling, swearing, partying, cheating, and other things that are sinful. So, following Jesus means making an about-face. It is about leaving things that are precious to you when those things interfere with your walk with Jesus.

How do you know you are called to be a disciple? Each one of us is called to be a disciple when we hear the gospel message and the Holy Spirit draws us. If the Holy Spirit has drawn you by the gospel message, you confessed and repented of your sins, and made Jesus your Lord, then you were called to be a disciple.

If you've not yet accepted Jesus as Lord and Lord, you can do that today.

We've determined that all disciples are first called and take the first step by leaving their past lives behind. And then,

II. A Follower follows Jesus.

Well, that's obvious and it's redundant. But let me belabor the point. First, that is exactly what Jesus requires of his disciples. Vs. 19 says, "Follow me..."

I have a passion for football. I am a huge New York Giants fan. When they're playing, I make it a point to watch them on TV or record their games.

I keep playing their old big games on youtube especially those two Super Bowl championship games against the Patriots. I have the ESPN app on my phone so that I can keep track of what's happening with the team. Even my wallet says, "NY Giants". This was actually a gift from my wife. I am a huge NY Giants football fan.

However, I don't have any sort of relationship with the players or the coaches. I lived in New York, but I never played football on the team. I don't work out in their gym, train on their field, or study their playbook. I don't live with the team, eat with the team, or practice with the team. I don't even have any relatives or close friends that are on the team. Eli Manning, the quarterback, doesn't even know my name. I'm not on the team and never will be on the team because I am "just a fan."

In contrast, the true "followers" of the Giants are on the team. They were selected by the recruiters and coaches to be on that team. They put on the pads and strap on the helmet. They learn the Giants way by starting off on the practice squad. They work side-by-side with the starters. They train hard in the off-season, learn the playbook, and are ready to step in if a starter goes down. As they mature as a player, they may even become a starter. Regardless, they have a specific position and role on the team. They can be called a NY Giants player. They are the true followers of the Giants.

Do you have a personal relationship or just know about Jesus? Do you talk to Him daily or admire Him on Sunday? Are you part of His body or do you just attend church? Do you put on the full armor of God or just wear the T-shirt? Are you learning God's playbook, the Bible, or do you just analyze the plays and stats of other Christ followers?

How a person answers the follower vs. fan question is how I define a disciple of Jesus Christ. Which are you?

We've established that Christ-Followers leave their past behind and follow Jesus, let's move on to the third point.

III. A Follower becomes like Jesus.

Vs. 19 says, "...and I will make you..."

Jesus' goal is to transform us into the likeness of Him. He is in the business of making you into someone he wants you to be.

Romans 8:29 says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son"

1 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things pass away; behold, new things have come."

Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Jesus transforms our minds and hearts so that we can see the lost through his eyes. He transforms us so that we can become his hands and feet to this lost world. He transforms and trains us to tell our story and ultimately his story.

Have you heard of Joni Eariksen-Tada? She is a modern-day Christian hero because of what she became for Christ. You'll see in the trailer of the movie about her life how her circumstances and deep depression brought her closer to Jesus and in turn Jesus transformed her to a person that has inspired millions of people and drew people to Jesus.

VIDEO – Joni Trailer

God wants to transform your life to be like Jesus. Many times, God allows you to go through difficult circumstances to mold you and change your behavior to be Christ like.

How many of you are in a difficult circumstance right now? Jesus knows what you are going through and will “Never leave you or forsake you.”

When the apostle Paul was in chains (Philippians 1:12-14), he said, “What has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.” He goes on to say that, because of his imprisonment, it has built the confidence of “brothers and sisters” to advance the Gospel.

So, followers of Jesus becomes like Jesus. And finally,

IV. A Follower goes and makes other followers.

Vs. 19 says, “...fishers of men.”

In Chapter 28, Versus 19, Matthew pens the Jesus’ last words before he left this earth. Jesus said, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.”

When we leave someone, we want our last words to count. We want our last words to be important and make a lasting impression on the person in which we are speaking.

George Harrison’s (Beatles) last words to his family were, “Love one another.”

Jack Daniel’s last words were, “One last drink, please”

Steve Irwin’s last words were, “Don’t worry, stingrays don’t usually swim backwards”

After the priest told Charlie Chapman, “May the Lord have mercy on your soul,” his last words were, “Why not, after all, it belongs to him,”

Harriet Tubman’s last words were, “Swing low, sweet chariot.”

Murderer James W. Rodgers, as he was put in front of a firing squad in Utah asked if he had a last request. He replied, “Bring me a bullet-proof vest.”

Not all these famous people made their last words count. Some did and some didn’t.

Jesus made his last words count when he said, “Go and make disciples!”

Folks, Jesus has commissioned his followers to make other followers. He wants us to share with others what we have experienced and experiencing through him. He wants us to be his channels of grace to other people. A lot of people are lost and dead in their sins. They have no hope. We, as his followers, are called by Jesus to share this hope with them. As the Bible says, we are ambassadors for Christ. We are his representatives in this lost and dying world.

In closing, folks, like these first disciples, we follow Jesus so He can transform us into His image. And then we allow Him to work through us to impact others. I hope that's your desire, because that's my desire for you. The world is full of people who call themselves Christians but who don't really follow Christ.

Jesus said, "Follow Me – stick with Me, learn from Me. And let Me transform you into someone who reflects Me and My priorities the priorities of My kingdom. Let me make you fishers of men."

Well in light of all this, let me offer you...

Two Invitations:

1. Move from just being a believer to being a disciple.

Move from being someone who just has his "fire insurance" to being someone whose life is transformed by Jesus into someone who reflects Christlikeness and kingdom priorities.

This doesn't happen automatically. You need to be decisive in inviting Christ to have you. Recognize His authority to claim your life.

The Bible says that He deserves all of us anyway, so why not let Him have it all? I can guarantee you that it's worth it.

You want security? Live as a disciple of Christ, allowing Him to constantly remind you of His presence and care.

You want significance? Allowing Christ to have the control allows you to be used by God in significant ways.

And what's more important – significance in gaining possessions or significance in making a difference for the kingdom of God?

The second invitation is much more basic and is for those who have never placed their faith in Jesus.

2. Take the first step of faith in Jesus.

Being a disciple of Jesus starts with establishing a relationship with Him.

What does it mean to have a relationship with Him?

It basically means that you acknowledge Him as your Savior, putting your trust in what He did in Calvary for your sins.

You see, the Bible says that without Christ you face an eternity in hell, paying for your sins.

But Jesus said, “You know what? How about instead of you dying for your sins, how about Me dying for your sins?”

And that's what He did. What you need to do is just accept His gift of eternal life that He bought with His own blood.

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. All you need to do is just accept the gift. If someone gives you a birthday gift or a Christmas gift or whatever, the gift does not become yours until you take it for your own.

So do that today if you never have before, okay? I'm going to give you that opportunity in just a moment.

I love the fact that Jesus is not done transforming me to be more like Him, to know Him better and to love Him more. He's not done with you, either. But you need to get close to Him for it to happen.