

“Come Follow Me”

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said. These words shot like an arrow to its mark. They were spoken to Simon and Andrew, Two Galilean fishermen. We find this same word on almost every page of the gospels (like the watermark on certain types of paper). To Matthew the tax collector, to the young man who had great possessions, Jesus spoke the same word: “Follow me”; and that is the word Jesus is speaking to women and men today. The word may come to different people in different ways, but when it comes it always creates a problem—how can we follow Jesus today?

The early disciples had no such problem. They were called to a literal following. They went with Jesus wherever he went. Today that is not possible, because Jesus is no longer with us in the flesh. The visible Christ has become invisible. Today we follow Jesus not with our feet, but with our heart.

To follow Jesus is to turn our life in his direction, as the needle of the compass turns toward the magnetic north. It is to love him and trust him, to accept his truth and obey his commandments.

Let’s come to closer grips with our text. There are three questions I want to ask and try to answer. First, why should we follow Jesus? Second, how can we follow Jesus? Third, where will he lead us if we follow him?

To follow Jesus means three things—deliverance, decision, and discovery. Let’s look at the text from this three-fold point of view.

First, we should follow Jesus because he is the Savior. He is more than a great example. Examples do not save us. They may show us the heights and inspire us to start climbing. That’s why it’s valuable to read biographies. When I read a biography I am always interested in the difficulties the person has had to face and how they have to overcome them. Sometimes we see the hero or heroine, born in poverty, climbing upward, until they make a name of themselves and is a blessing to all who know them. Or perhaps the person is born to great wealth and power like Winston Churchill and yet must still face criticism and defeat before he wins final victory. As we read the story we are encouraged to take our difficulties in stride and press on. Examples may show us the heights, and inspire us to climb the heights, but when we have seen the heights,

we need a power other than our own to help us to reach them, and when we fall we need someone to come to our rescue. That is what Jesus can do. He is the Savior.

This is what attracts people to Jesus. They turn to him because they cannot stay away from him. Here is one who says: "I turned to him because for years I was seeking the truth of life and Jesus is the Truth and the Life." Another one says, "I turned to Jesus because I was so lonely and life was without meaning. I found in Jesus the Way to a new purpose and friend who is always near." Still another says, "I could not forgive myself for what I had done. I turned to Jesus and because he forgives me I am finding it easier to begin to forgive myself." All sorts of people have discovered that Jesus is the Savior; they have been conscious of his redeeming power in their lives. So when the call comes, if we want to make the most of life and get the best out of life, we must dare to obey.

This brings me to my second question, how can we follow Jesus? My answer is by an act of person decision. All of us are constantly living in a state of deciding. Young people have to make decisions about their career and their marriage. Older people have to make decisions about their home and their business. Elderly people have to decide whether they are going to continue to maintain their home or go to an apartment or retirement home. The President has to make far-reaching decisions that will affect the welfare of all of us. But as important as all of those decisions are there is another decision that rises above them all and overshadows them all. It is the decision whether our life will be lived for Christ or against Christ.

There are two great cities in this world of ours: the City of God and the City of Destruction. There are two great processions in this world, winding their way through history: those who are following Jesus, and those who are not. There is no third city. There is no third procession. When we decide to be a citizen of the City of God and when we decide to join that procession that is following Jesus, that may mean for one person a new way of speaking: when a girl decided to join the procession that is following Jesus, this may mean for her a new way of dressing or a new ideal for a husband. The businessman who decides to follow Jesus may find that he must find a new place to invest his money and a new way to treat his employees. When the natural religious person finds themselves following Jesus it may mean that they discover that they must start working for peace and justice between people and nations. When the natural political activist decides to follow Jesus he begins to sense the penultimate nature of all political

involvement in the light of the kingdom of God. And for everyone there comes a new desire to get others to join us in the procession.

People may be astonished at the differences they see in our lives even if we were church members before. Some may even envy us. These outward changes are symptoms of a deep inner change, however. When we set out to follow Jesus we are allowing God to enter more fully into our lives and by his redeeming power to change and transform our lives, giving them a new depth and a different outlook.

This brings me to my third question, where will he take us if we follow him? He may send us to the very people we hate, like Jonah, in order to warn them of God's judgment and enable them to experience salvation. If we follow Jesus it may mean that, like David Livingstone, we will be separated from wife and family for long periods of time. We really can't say for Jesus just where Jesus will lead us if we begin to follow him. When we decide to follow Jesus we are embarking on a great adventure, the end of which neither "eye hath seen nor ear hath heard." Jesus is the great traveler. He takes us over the sea and away to new lands. He can also lead us to stay right where we are. You might want him to lead you to be a missionary and he may lead you to enter into the exciting life of a housewife here in Kenmore. Where will he take us if we follow him? Nobody knows. Jesus is a great traveler. He is the real wandering Jew of the ages, and if we are following him we must be traveling too. There is no standing still in the Christian life. We must be continually going on, making new discoveries, getting new insights.

Where will he take us if we follow him? Maybe that's not the question we should be asking. Maybe the question should be, what will we miss if we do not go? There are two great cities in the world: the City of God and the City of Destruction. There is not a third place. There are two great processions making their way through the world today—those who are following Jesus and those who are not. There is no third procession.

Let us pray: Almighty God: your Son our Lord called men and women to serve him as disciples. May we who have heard his call rise up to follow where he leads, obedient to your perfect will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.