

FOLLOW JESUS

1. INTRODUCTION

We just heard a series on Christ as King, Servant, Man, and God. Our response should be to follow Jesus, which is what I would like us to consider this morning.

What does it mean to follow someone? It means to do what they do, to imitate them, to “follow in their footsteps”, someone to “look up to”, to be like them.

The Apostle Paul said “imitate me for I imitate Christ”

To follow Jesus means to be like Him. To be like Christ means to be like the Father because Jesus said I do only what the Father tells me to do. “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”

This is a high and holy calling; one that each of us must take very seriously.

MAKE ME LIKE JOE!¹

Joe was a drunk who was miraculously converted at a Bowery mission. Prior to his conversion, he had gained the reputation of being a dirty wino for whom there was no hope, only a miserable existence in the ghetto. But following his conversion to a new life with God, everything changed. Joe became the most caring person that anyone associated with the mission had ever known. Joe spent his days and nights hanging out at the mission, doing whatever needed to be done. There was never anything that he was asked to do that he considered beneath him. Whether it was cleaning up the vomit left by some violently sick alcoholic or scrubbing toilets after careless men left the men's room filthy, Joe did what was asked with a smile on his face and a seeming gratitude for the chance to help. He could be counted on to feed feeble men who wandered off the street and into the mission, and to undress and tuck into bed men who were too out of it to take care of themselves. One evening, when the director of the mission was delivering his evening evangelistic message to the usual crowd of still and sullen men with drooped heads, there was one man who looked up, came down the aisle to the altar, and knelt to pray, crying out for God to help him to change. The repentant drunk kept shouting, "Oh God! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!" The director of the mission leaned over and said to the man, "Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like Jesus.' "

The man looked up at the director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, "Is he like Joe?"

¹ *More Stories for the Heart*, Alice Gray, Multnomah Publishers, Inc., Sisters, Oregon, 1997, p. 27.

2. THE BASIS

John 1:29-51 The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him, and *said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ 31 “And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” 32 And John bore witness saying, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 “And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ 34 “And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and *said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” 37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and *said to them, “*What do you seek?*” And they said to Him, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?” 39 He *said to them, “*Come, and you will see.*” They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41 He *found first his own brother Simon, and *said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, “*You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas*” (which is translated Peter).

43 The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He *found Philip. And Jesus *said to him, “*Follow Me.*” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip *found Nathanael and *said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” 46 And Nathanael *said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip *said to him, “Come and see.” 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and *said of him, “*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*” 48 Nathanael *said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*” 49 Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” 50 Jesus answered and said to him, “*Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.*” 51 And He *said to him, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*”²

Mark 1:19-20 And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. 20 And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.³

²The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

³The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

The reason these disciples followed Jesus was because who He **said** He **was** (the Christ), not because of anything He did! The miracles had not yet happened! There was no evidence to back up the claims of Jesus and John the Baptist.

3. THE PURPOSE

JOH 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.

*MAR 1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become **fishers of men.**"*

***Luke 5:27-32** And after that He went out, and noticed a tax-gatherer named Levi, sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "**Follow Me.**" 28 And he left everything behind, and rose and began to follow Him.*

*29 And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax-gatherers and other people who were reclining at the table with them. 30 And the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" 31 And Jesus answered and said to them, "**It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.** 32 "**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**"⁴*

*JOH 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your **fruit** should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.*

*COL 1:28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man **complete** in Christ.*

4. THE REQUIREMENTS

4.1. Faith

JOH 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

4.2. Commitment

***Luke 9:57** And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "**The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.**" 59 And He said to another, "**Follow Me.**" But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him,*

⁴The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

“Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” 61 And another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” 62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

10:1 Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. 2 And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”⁵

9:57-58. A man approached and wanted to **follow** where they were going. Jesus’ response was that a person desiring to follow Him must give up what others consider necessities. Jesus had no home of His own nor did His followers. They were on their way to Jerusalem where Jesus would be put to death.

9:59-60. Jesus called the next **man** with the same words with which He had called His disciples (5:27). The man’s reply that he **first** wanted to **go and bury his father** has been variously interpreted. Some maintain that the man’s father was dead already. It would seem strange if that was the case for he would certainly have been engaged in the burial procedure already. It is more likely that the man’s father was ready to die. His request was to let him wait just a little while before following Jesus. Perhaps the man also wanted to receive the inheritance from his father’s estate. Jesus’ response, **Let the dead bury their own dead**, implies that the spiritually dead can bury the physically dead. The point was that proclaiming **the kingdom of God** was so important that it could not wait. Of course if the man had left and followed Jesus, it would have caused a scandal in the community. But that was less important than proclaiming the kingdom and following the Messiah. A disciple must make a radical commitment.

9:61-62. The third man simply wanted to **go home and say good-bye to his family**. Elijah had allowed Elisha to do this very thing when Elisha was plowing (1 Kings 19:19-20). Jesus’ words underscore the fact that His message of the kingdom of God was more important than anything else—even family members. The message and the Messiah cannot wait. Jesus’ message was more important than Elijah’s message and demanded total allegiance. Jesus’ servants should not have divided interests, like a farmer who begins plowing **and looks back**. Since Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, the man had to make up his mind right then as to what he was going to do. Interestingly Luke did not record the outcome of any of Jesus’ conversations with the three men.⁶

4.3. Listen

JOH 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

⁵*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.
⁶Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

An Indian was in downtown New York, walking along with his friend, who lived in New York City. Suddenly he said, "I hear a cricket."

"Oh, you're crazy," his friend replied.

"No, I hear a cricket. I do! I'm sure of it."

"It's the noon hour. You know there are people bustling around, cars honking, taxis squealing, noises from the city. I'm sure you can't hear it."

"I'm sure I do." He listened attentively and then walked to the corner, across the street, and looked all around. Finally on the other corner he found a shrub in a large cement planter. He dug beneath the leaf and found a cricket.

His friend was duly astounded. But the Indian said, "No, my ears are no different from yours. It simply depends on what you are listening to. Here, let me show you."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change—a few quarters, some dimes, nickels, and pennies. And he dropped it on the concrete

Every head within a block turned.

"You see what I mean?" the Indian said as he began picking up his coins. "It all depends on what you are listening for."⁷

4.4. Focus

John 21:15-22 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter, "*Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?*" He *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He *said to him, "*Tend My lambs.*" 16 He *said to him again a second time, "*Simon, son of John, do you love Me?*" He *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He *said to him, "*Shepherd My sheep.*" 17 He *said to him the third time, "*Simon, son of John, do you love Me?*" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "*Do you love Me?*" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus *said to him, "*Tend My sheep.*" 18 "*Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.*" 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, "*Follow Me!*" 20 Peter, turning around, *saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21 Peter therefore seeing him *said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" 22 Jesus *said to him, "*If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!*"⁸

4.5. Sacrifice

Mark 8:34-35 And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*"

⁷ *More Stories for the Heart*, Alice Gray, Multnomah Publishers, Inc., Sisters, Oregon, 1997, p. 97.

⁸ *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

35 *“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it. 9*

4.6. Obedience

HEB 5:8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

ACT 26:19 "Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

BROTHER DUAN'S CHRISTMAS MIRACLE¹⁰

It was the greatest miracle that ever happened to Brother Duan, and he would not have experienced it had his bus not broken down.

En route from a northern to a southern province of China in December, he happened to be passing through Henan province when the engine of the bus expired in its futile battle with the cold.

On a whim, Duan trudged off through the fields, leaving the other passengers huddled inside the bus. He was a house church leader in northern China. Now 77 years of age, he still had no home to call his own.

Truth is, he was deeply depressed. He was on his way to mediate a dispute among some leaders and was weary of the infighting that seemed to be harming the house churches. And he was lonely.

As he crossed the frozen field, Duan thought longingly of his beloved wife, who died long ago. He wished she were alive to listen to him and give her sweet counsel. And then the thought came into his tired mind of his little son, and an even darker cloud settled over his heart.

He found a village and knocked on a door. A little cross was notched on the doorpost.

"Is there anyone here who loves the Lord?" he asked. "I would love some fellowship tonight."

The door was opened by a man in his fifties, and Duan was warmly welcomed. His feet were washed in a basin - the custom of welcoming a stranger among the house church movement - and was fed hot congee and steaming vegetables.

He noticed that the people were all excited. It turned out that they would be traveling to a neighboring town to hear a dynamic Bible teacher from one of the bigger cities.

"What's his name?" asked Duan.

"Brother Wang."

As they made their way to the meeting, they told him some of the stories about this mysterious Brother Wang. It was clear they loved him dearly, and one of the men explained why.

"We were once holding a training seminar here and heard the police were coming. Brother Wang got everyone out, except our main pastor. When the police arrived, Wang dared to bargain with them. He would go to jail if our pastor whose wife was eight months pregnant - could go free. The policeman accepted his terms, and Brother Wang spent three years in prison."

⁹*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

¹⁰ *Open Doors Newsletter*, December, 1998.

"How old is Brother Wang?" Duan asked. When told he was in his early 40s, Duan's face showed great pain.

"What's the matter?" he was asked. "Are you ill from the cart trip?"

"No, I'm not ill," he replied, "just very sad. I once had a son, whom I knew for just two months. He's dead now, but if alive he would have been 42 today.

"My wife called him the 'Christmas Child,' since he was born at Christmas time. I called him 'Isaac,' because we had despaired for so long of having a child."

There was silence as they rode in the open cart under the stars. Brother Duan told the incredible story of how he and his wife had been evangelists in the 1950s. They refused to join the Three Self church, and Wu, an old school bully, kept accusing them of political and criminal offenses. It was only a matter of time before they were jailed or killed, but what would happen to their boy?

One night, Duan's wife heard a strong voice in a vision, saying, "Give your son to your enemy." Knowing nothing about this, Duan read Genesis 22:2 the following morning: "Go get Isaac, your only son, the one you dearly love ... and sacrifice him to me."

Sharing their impressions, the couple decided on a course of action that caused Duan to wince in pain every day since. They gave their boy to Wu and his wife - who were childless - even as Wu arranged for the couple's arrest.

It wasn't until 1978, when Duan was released from jail, that he learned what happened to his wife and son. She had died in the terrible famine of 1958, and his son had disappeared along with the Wu family under the rubble of a devastating earthquake in 1975. Said Duan sadly as the cart approached the meeting place, "God judged me for being so irresponsible with my little son."

As they arrived where the evangelist was to speak, a crowd of 200 people was already packed into the house. Like many others, Duan had to sit in the courtyard and listen to the teacher through the open window.

When Brother Wang began preaching, Duan felt a terrible shock. It was like hearing himself. He began to tremble with fear. Was he dying? Even the phrases the teacher used sounded familiar.

Confused, he staggered up to the window to see the preacher, causing a commotion as he fell over people. The preacher stopped and there was a moment of shocked silence as the men looked at each other. The crowd was hushed as they realized the amazing physical likeness. "I'm sorry for interrupting your excellent message," Duan began. "You see, I had a son who would be your age right now. If he had lived, he would have looked and sounded just like you."

Brother Wang began to tremble violently. Suddenly, his legs buckled under him and he had to be caught before he fell. Clutching his pounding chest, he sobbed, "Are you Daddy Duan?" Everyone wept as father and son were reunited. The preacher told how he had indeed been brought up by Wu, who was so impressed by Duan's act of giving that he had become a strong Christian.

"I'm not your real father," Wu used to say to him. "He's a great man of God, full of grace and love. He gave you to me, and I give you all my love and the encouragement to put God first, just like your real father."

Wang's adopted parents had moved away from the earthquake zone before the tragedy, but both died of cancer in their 60s. Wang became an evangelist and tried to find his real father, but Duan had changed his name so many times to avoid arrest that he had proved untraceable.

As father and son continued to hug and weep, the elder of the church stood up and declared, "It's December. We have seen our sermon tonight: Christ came into the world to save sinners that is Christmas. Just as Duan handed his only son to the care of his enemy, so God handed over His own Son to us sinners. Let us rejoice in their reconciliation and ours too."

Are there any broken down busses in your life this morning? Jesus is in control!

5. THE REWARDS

Mark 10:17-31 And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21 And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.

23 And Jesus, looking around, *said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus *answered again and *said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And they were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Looking upon them, Jesus *said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." 28 Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30 but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 "But many who are first, will be last; and the last, first." 11

JOH 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

6. CONCLUSION

Let us make it a priority to follow Jesus!

11 *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.