

“COME, FOLLOW ME!”
Psalm 27:1, 4-9, I Corinthians 1:10-18, Matthew 4:12-23
January 25 & 26, 2020

Pastor Tony Evans tells this wonderful story about the **POWER** of intimacy. He says, “One time a dog was chasing my oldest granddaughter. She was only about four or five years old. She was just terrified. Now, I don’t think that dog was going to do anything to her, but she didn’t know that. She was crying and screaming as she made her way to me as fast as her little legs would carry her. She was yelling my name, ‘Poppy! Poppy! Poppy!’ That little girl was in a complete state of terror. I ran to meet her and gathered her up in my arms. She was huffing, heaving, and puffing, totally out of breath.

“The dog ran up to me, stopped just short, and started barking away. The advance had ended. My granddaughter looked up at me and noticed that the dog was no longer a threat. She looked down at the dog, and then she looked up at me. She looked back down at the dog, and then with a new verve and vigor, she said, ‘Na-na-nana-na!’

“Intimacy breeds confidence. When you are close to someone whom you love who has a lot more power than you do, you can piggyback” on that power and change the world.¹ And we hear that very thing in our Old Testament lesson of Psalm 27. God invites us to be **CLOSE** to Him so that we have a new courage and a new strength given to us so that we can face the stuff of this world.

King David starts right out, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation; I will fear no one. The Lord protects me from all danger; I will never be afraid*” (v. 1). When we come to understand that God has ALL authority and ALL power, the closer we come to Him, the more protection we have from Him, and the less we have to fear from the world, no matter what is thrown at us. When the Lord is our Light and our Salvation, we need fear no one! Who is greater than the Lord our God? ANYONE? That’s right, no one is greater than the Lord God. Therefore, when we cozy up to Him and lean upon Him and allow Him to catch us up and hold us close, there is no way anyone is going to be able to touch us.

But to get the Lord’s protection, it demands that we seek Him and do our best to grow close to

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 166, #499)

Him. Why would the Lord defend anyone who is against Him? Why would the Lord assist anyone who is adamantly defying all of His commands? The Lord protects and watches out for those of His family, so the only way we can find the Lord's help is by growing close to Him. So Finding the Lord's protection demands a close **RELATIONSHIP** with Him. We seek Him out; we get to know Him; we follow His will and His ways; and we desire to be with Him. Then, when trials come to us, when we are put to the test by the stuff of the world, God is willing to step up to help us, protect us and provide for us. He does this so that we glorify Him as we come to know His great authority and power.

But seeking the Lord demands **ACTION** on our part. We can't just sit around and call out to God and expect Him to do everything for us. If we can't do anything, then God delivers us from our trials without any of our effort. But if we can do something about the difficulties that confront us, then He expects us to do our part and that demands action from us. So when the Lord says, "*Come worship Me,*" our response needs to be "*I will come, Lord*" (v. 8), and that followed by our immediate action and movement to be with Him. If we don't move when God calls us to move, we may miss the chance to see Him at work for us and He might just let us struggle a bit more until we are ready to give our whole hearts to Him and let Him be our Lord and God.

But not only does closeness to God bring protection and assurance and new confidence, Closeness to God brings **ONENESS** with each other. And we see that in the New Testament lesson of I Corinthians 1:10-18. The Apostle Paul told the people of Corinth "*The message about Christ has become so firmly established in you that you have not failed to receive a single blessing, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed*" (1:6-7). They diligently sought out the Lord, grew closer to Him, desperately desired to know Him in all His ways, and so they learned all about what His commands were. They studied the Scriptures, they sought truth through prayer, and they put the things they were learning into practice so that God was delighted to bless them in every way.

And this is the only way that we can become one with Christ Jesus. **UNITY** (with Christ Jesus) comes as we have "*only one thought and only one purpose*" (v. 10), and that is the thought and purpose

of Jesus. If we try to obtain unity within the church with divergent thought or alternate purpose, there is no chance that unity will be obtained. We in the church must seek to have Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Authority in our life, so that we might together, follow all His teachings and commands. Once we begin to think that some of Jesus' teachings or commands are either wrong or don't pertain to us any more, we are outside of His teachings and commands, and we will find ourselves outside of the protection and blessing of the Lord our God. Since Jesus is the Son of God, since He is the Messiah, the Savior, the One who has come to lead us back into the presence of the Lord God, He, and He alone, is the One we are to follow in ALL of our ways so that we will find our place right there at the feet of God. If we vary our path and not follow the path that Jesus laid out for us, we will find ourselves nowhere near the Lord God, but out in the middle of the world, stranded to our own will and our own ways, limited by our own strength and our own wisdom. Unless we lean on God's authority, we have no power whatsoever to face the hounds that pursue us, and the canines nipping at our heels seeking to devour us.

The **BODY** of Christ is one with Him, and only when we are united with Him do we find His strength living in us. It is only when we follow Jesus Christ that we find unity. If we begin to claim to be followers of Martin Luther, or John Wesley, or John Calvin, or Roger Williams, or even of Billy Graham or any other evangelist or pastor, we miss the path that leads to life. Life is found ONLY in Jesus Christ folks! Please don't be attracted to Warren Waddell as your savior! I, as Paul states clearly, have not died on the cross to save you (v. 13). Neither did any of the other Christian leaders of history! Only Jesus Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins, and so it is only His teachings and His commands that we are to follow. The Bible Is Our Book, and as Christians, The Bible is to be our guide to find fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. There is no other way! Once we diverge from the Scriptures, we separate the body of Christ into lesser groups and make Jesus less relevant for our world today. Is it any wonder that people are confused about Christianity when so many denominations claim to be "the way and the truth?" And the only way we can become the church we used to be, is to give up our petty differences, devote ourselves to the truth of the Bible, and together strive to reach the world as a united

body that follows Jesus Christ.

You see, We are all CALLED to “*tell the Good News*” (v. 17). Each of us is to seek Jesus and learn more about Him and grow in our faith in Him so that our lives reflect the truth of God’s Word. We are all called to be ambassadors for Christ Jesus, telling those around us about the Salvation found only in Jesus.

I love the new contemporary song by Casting Crowns *Nobody But Jesus* that says, “*I’m just a nobody, trying to tell everybody, all about the Somebody who saved my soul. Ever since You rescued me, You gave my heart a Song to sing, I’m living for the world to see nobody but Jesus.*” We’re not to make it all about us, but make our life to be a witness to all that Jesus did for us to bring us new life through His death and resurrection. Not “using the language of human wisdom” (v. 17). Our wisdom gets the message of God’s great love all messed up and twisted around so it becomes about us. The Good News of Jesus can only be given to the world by using the wisdom of God through His Word that tells about HIS sacrifice and HIS resurrection, and only as we submit to that sacrifice and that resurrection can we find life again. We have to tell the truth, keeping the power of Christ’s death on the cross as the ONLY way for us to find the Lord God.

The message of Christ’s death has great power for the believer who receives Jesus as Lord and Savior. But to those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways and rely upon their own strength and wisdom, it is foolish to even consider thinking that one Man’s death on a wooden cross can do anything to save anyone. But when we live among them as witnesses of what Christ Jesus has done in our own lives and demonstrate the power of Christ that transformed our lives, they begin to see that there is something strange about us and they begin to see that there is more power in the name of Jesus than they might have first considered. Each of us need to live boldly in our faith so that those around us might see the great love that Jesus has for all of us and the changes that only He can make in us as we turn to Him for protection and courage.

So it is The Call of Jesus Christ that is of most importance to our lives. Jesus desires that each

one of us submit to His authority and power so that we might come close to Him and feel His embrace and find comfort away from the fear of the things in this world. Jesus sends out His invitation to every one of the people in the world so that all may run to Him and find rest, and peace, and hope, and love (Matthew 11:28). But it is the choice of each individual person. Jesus doesn't force anyone to Him.

And we see that in our Gospel lesson today of Matthew 4:12-23. Listen to the start of Jesus' ministry and what He does to the folks around Him. (READ Matthew 4:12-23)

Having been baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus has spent some time in the wilderness being tempted by Satan in all things human. When he returns from the wilderness, Jesus learns that John has been imprisoned for condemning Herod's actions of taking his brother's wife as his own wife (Mark 6:17-29). "*Jesus then began to preach His message: 'Turn away from your sins, because the Kingdom of heaven is near!'*" (Matthew 4:17). Jesus started with the people of Capernaum, inviting them to come to Him as the Savior. Capernaum is on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, and as He spends time teaching the people and calling them to Him, many begin to follow Him. These were His people and Jesus reached out to those who were right around Him with the news of how to find new life.

And then one day Jesus walked along the shoreline and found some fishermen and called to them and invited them to follow Him. Just common ordinary men working at their business catching fish. He calls out to Simon and Andrew and invites them to follow Him. So they pull in their nets, bring the boat up onto shore and turn it over and effectively close the S & A Fishing Company and change their livelihood from catching fish to catching people. The same is true with James and John, leaving their father's business of Zebedee & Sons Fish Market, to start this new career of seeking out the souls of people. They drop everything to follow Jesus.

Now, we could ask, "Why these four fishermen and not any others?" Well, Jesus FOCUSED on a 'few good men' and called them out of their everyday lives to make Him first. Jesus recognized in these men the tenacity to do hard work with the intent to not only serve their families, but also those around them. I imagine that most of those in Capernaum knew these guys because that's where they

went to get their fish from. Not everyone fished, so if the family wanted fish tacos or fish chowder or fish sandwiches, they needed to go to the fish markets to get the fish.

These men had all the skills they needed to reach out to people and supply them with the necessities of life – fish. Now Jesus is calling them to a much higher purpose, to meet the spiritual needs of every person in Capernaum. Yes, they were meeting the physical needs of the people by supplying food for them, but now they would be feeding their very souls from the abundance of the Son of God. And these men knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and they accepted Jesus' invitation without argument or a second thought.

And we're told that "Jesus went all over Galilee" (v. 23) teaching and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God, transforming the lives of many as He healed them and delivered them from all their struggles. They ran into Jesus' arms, and He picked them up and brought them new life, new courage and new hope so that they could live without fear or worry or anxiety. The call of Jesus in the lives of these people invited them to put their faith in one that was greater than they were, One who had more power than they did, so that by crawling up into His arms, they could find the protection they needed from the wolves and hounds of their day. Jesus' call gave them the courage they needed to face their attackers and thumb their noses to the threat they posed.

But it wasn't just back then in Jesus' day when He walked the earth that He makes His call to people. JESUS CALLS US in the same way that He did those people so long ago. He reaches out to us with the words, "Come, Follow Me!" to each one of us, and He gives us the opportunity to learn about Him, and trust in Him and to place our lives in His hands.

You see, Jesus calls to us, right where we ARE. It doesn't matter who we are, what position we have or what situation we find ourselves in. Jesus calls to all of us, "*Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Where else will we find power like the power of Jesus? Where else can we find the wisdom like the wisdom of Jesus? Where else can we find hope like the hope of Jesus? No matter what is facing you today, listen to Jesus' call, "Come, follow Me" and

you will find confidence, you will find peace, you will find hope and you will find love like you have never found in any other person here on the earth.

But you might say, “But I’m a nobody. I’m not important. Why would Jesus call out to me to follow Him?” The disciples of Jesus were what many would say were nobodies. They had no positions of power, no authority, no great influence. Yet when they heard Jesus’ call, they simply followed Him AND THEN they gained power, authority and influence to tell the Good News to the people. Jesus is the One who gave them the strength, the courage, and the tenacity to live for Him.

So it doesn’t matter what kind of job you might have, or position you might hold. Jesus calls us to use our own **SKILLS** and specialities for the purpose of living for Him. These disciples were fishermen, skilled at catching fish, but Jesus used even those skills to help them reach out to those around them. Today Jesus needs bankers, iron workers, administrative assistants, company owners, tailors, movie producers, athletes, singers, maintenance workers, construction workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, domestic engineers, even retired folks – you name the occupation and Jesus needs you to use those basic skills to do the work of the Lord in our world today. Whatever you do, Jesus calls you, “Come, follow Me!”

We are called to make Jesus **FIRST** in our life so that no matter what we do, we do it all for His glory for the benefit of the Body of Christ. But Jesus wants you to let HIM be first in you, and then everyone else second, or third or whatever. If we do not make Jesus first in our life, if we begin to put someone or something else in that first place of our hearts and lives, then we will begin to wander away from Jesus and we will find ourselves once more surrounded by the hounds of the earth away from His protection and help and encouragement and hope. Jesus has to be first in our lives so that we might live for Him. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

“A guy was watching football on a Saturday afternoon. He had the remote in his hand when the phone rang. He walked over to the phone with the remote still in his hand. Even while on the phone, he was interested in keeping up with the game so as not to miss any big plays. He couldn’t see the TV but

he figured that at least he could listen in. He pointed the remote in the direction of the TV and attempted to turn up the volume. Nothing happened because he was too far. It's not that the remote didn't work, and it's not that the TV didn't work. He was just too far (away for the remote to have any impact in turning up the volume).

“Sometimes Christians will say that God doesn't work when in reality the problem is that *they* are simply too far away. It's not that Jesus doesn't work, it's not that the Bible doesn't work, and it's not that the Holy Spirit doesn't work. If a person is not in the vicinity of God, then it will certainly seem that nothing works. Closeness and intimacy with God is what provides the full experience of walking with Him.”²

So if you find yourself being afraid, or worried, or threatened, or weak, or harried, or out of control, don't blame God and tell Him it's His fault. When you find yourself at a distance from God, it wasn't God who moved. What we need to do when everything seems to be falling apart in our life is to first seek the presence of the Lord. Grow close to Him, snuggle up to Him, find His strength and power surrounding you, and trust in Him to be with you to protect you and keep you.

Remember, Jesus calls us to Come, FOLLOW Me! Not the pastor of your church – there's no telling where they might lead you. Not the mayor of your city – who knows what they might try to impose on you. Not the people on TV – who knows what they might try to convince you to believe. Not the owner of the company you work at – who knows what they might want you to do. Now, if a police officer tells you to follow them, it's a good idea to do what they say, but do not follow that person as an individual – they're just like you, in need of God's guidance.

The only one we are invited to follow with our whole life is Jesus. Following Him will never lead you astray and never bring you to destruction, but rather to eternal life. Jesus says, Come, follow Me and I will teach you to reach out and find people, for the glory of God. Let's pray. Father give us the courage to follow Jesus with our whole life so that we might do your work, In Jesus' Name. Amen.

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, pg. 168, #504)