

“WILL WE FOLLOW HIS CALL?”
Imagine Meeting Christ Series #11
Jonah 1:1-3, 2 Timothy 2:1-7, Luke 9:57-62
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“Is lordship optional for a Christian? The question only arises for those who live in a time and place where Christianity is culturally acceptable, where they have enough resources and support to simulate true Christianity **without having to cling** every day to Jesus for emotional, spiritual, and even physical survival.”¹

I ask this question today for us to seriously consider, because most of us have become anemic Christians, willing to claim the name of Jesus for us, but not very willing to do something about it, or even follow His commands given to us. It is easy for us to sing songs from our hymnal like “Christ for the World We Sing” and “Go, Make of All Disciples,” but there is no intention for us to really make either of it happen. Do we really mean “...the world to Christ we bring...?” Do we really seek “the faint and overborne, sin-sick and sorrow worn, whom Christ doth heal?” Are we really striving “in fervent prayer; the wayward and the lost, by restless passions tossed, redeemed and countless cost, from dark despair?” Or are they just words on the page that we have put music to in order to fill up our hour of worship?

How many of us are really crying out for the world in which we live in? And what about “...with us the work to share, with us reproach to dare, with us the cross to bear, for Christ our Lord?” Do we really invest ourselves into the lives of anyone else to help them to grow closer in their relationship with Jesus Christ? Are we guilty of living such a bold life for Jesus Christ as to bring **reproach to us**? Sadly, most of us just hang out at home, taking care of our own business without making the effort to lead another person out of sin and darkness into the light of Christ. We’ve become more like arm-chair followers, nodding our heads at the messages we hear here in worship, but not letting any of those words pierce our rubbery hearts so that they might make a difference within us, or to the lives of anyone else around us.

¹ (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sister’s, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998], pg. 134)

Many in our world today would agree that “the problem with the New Testament is that its writings fail to recognize the **optional nature of Christ’s lordship**. This can be traced back to the fact that Jesus was similarly misinformed.

“Would that the New Testament writers could have understood what many generations of believers have since discovered; that it is quite possible, even popular, to receive the comfort of having a Savior **without going through** the cumbersome process of living according to His commands. Many of us have become quiet proficient at living this way. We debate the issue, wondering why the New Testament doesn’t seem to agree with itself, wishing its writers had cleared up this dilemma.”²

I hope you caught the sarcasm within those words. But that’s exactly what people think Christianity is all about these days. We have become lazy, powerless, useless people who claim to have Jesus with us, but have no real understanding what that really means or what it actually involves! We let attendance in church once a week be the full expression of our faith. We get so caught up with our own stuff that we forget Jesus’ call for all of us to “*make disciples of all the nations*” (Matthew 28:19), beginning with those close to us and then extending to the furthest regions of the world. We’re weak in prayer, sloppy in our daily living, absent from the feet of Jesus, and we even cultivate more contention in the lives of others rather than planting the nature of God within their hearts.

Yet, “from Jesus’ perspective, trusting Him as Savior **automatically demands a commitment to Him as Lord**. New Testament believers knew this instinctively. Society in New Testament times was not friendly to the Christian faith. Jerusalem, Ephesus, Athens – they and many others rose up to snarl at members of The Way.

“Some believers in subsequent centuries couldn’t afford to consider **Christ as anything but Lord**. The cities that sought to snuff them out had names like Moscow and Beijing. Those brothers and sisters in Christ clearly understood the meaning of the Gospel the way the New Testament saints did, because to align themselves with Christ exacted a toll. To willingly endure such persecution, they had

² (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, pg. 133)

to know Jesus is Lord over all.”³

Unfortunately, there’s **far too few of us** who are even able to give our own testimony as to how Jesus changed our lives when we made a commitment to Him as our Savior. We’ve got all we need, plus much, much more, so we have no need to rely upon the Lord Jesus for our daily bread; much less for our daily life. When everything goes well for us, when the income is up and the troubles are down, there’s not much need for us to rely fully upon God.

And **if we were to hear the call** of God in our life, we would probably be more like the prophet Jonah, deciding that God really didn’t intend for us to go to the enemy to preach the Good News of Salvation to them. Many would also go in the exact opposite direction just to avoid the ones God has called us to minister to. Some would decline the invitation and argue like Moses, that they couldn’t dare to speak to others about God’s Salvation because they don’t know the right words.

When God called Jonah to go to preach to the wicked people in Nineveh, Jonah deliberately decided to try to get away from the Lord. Instead of going east to the metropolis of Nineveh, Jonah set out for Spain. God said, “Go this way,” and Jonah said, “No, I’m going that way.” He was upset about God calling him to go to the enemies of Israel to preach for their salvation, so he split in the opposite direction.

However God had other plans for Jonah. After causing a storm that threatened to sink the ship he was on, Jonah convinced the sailors to throw him overboard so that they could be saved. Sounds like a pretty selfless act on Jonah’s part, but he decided he would rather die than to participate in God’s outreach to the enemy. But God scooped him up, took him on the first air conditioned submarine ride back to the western shores of the Mediterranean Sea and plopped him up on shore once more with the command, “*Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to the people the message I have given you*” (Jonah 3:1).

Now, imagine being from Nineveh, seeing this man coming into the city with clothes that are

³ (Ibid., pg. 133-134)

half digested, with a piece of seaweed stuck right here, and he's telling everyone to repent! I don't know about you but I'd repent!

Many of us likewise go to great extremes to NOT do as God desires us too. Either we don't trust God to protect us and use us in a mighty way, or we just blatantly don't want to do it. So God uses a variety of ways to convince us to work for Him, and even then we make more excuses why that's not such a good idea.

So God has given us the words of 2 Timothy 2:1-2 to consider. Paul writes to his son in the Lord, "*As for you, my son, be strong through the grace that is ours in union with Christ Jesus. Take the teachings that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others.*" This is known as the 2:2:2 principle. Once we become strong in our faith in the Lord, we're not to just sit back and watch from the sidelines of what God is doing. Paul instructed Timothy to take what he had learned, and teach it to reliable folks who would then take it and teach others about it. Paul taught Timothy, who was to teach trusted people, and then they would teach others so that the cycle would multiply exponentially, affecting a whole city within a short time. Timothy didn't sit on the lessons of Paul, but used it to spread the Gospel in the places where he was working.

Yet how often do we go to some Christian seminar or conference, enjoy the teachings very well, learn great things, but when we get home, we fail to share those teachings with anyone else. The training stopped with us. Unless we take the lessons about God's great work of Salvation through Jesus Christ to those around us, why do we even call ourselves followers of Jesus? Are we really following Jesus if we don't let others know about it? We're not to be "undercover Christians." We're not to be covert operatives for Jesus in this dark and sinful world. We are to live in such ways that people look at us and know that we're **ONE OF THOSE**, followers of Jesus.

We are to be so guilty of living for Jesus that when the time comes for arrests to be made to round up all the Christians, there's no question that we're guilty of living for Jesus. The times we are

living in are so ripe for harvest in the fields, and people are literally dying to hear some good news for their life. We need to be telling **EVERYONE** about the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Around the world people are finding hope and new life in Jesus as the followers of Jesus are telling them about Him. People are struggling so much that they desperately want to find hope, and receive assurance for new life. But how are they going to hear about it if we don't tell them about it? How will the world hear about Christ if we don't tell them?

The second part of the lesson from 2 Timothy 2 invites us to “*Take your part in suffering, as a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus*” (vs. 3). Soldiers don't often just sit around, comfortable with their surroundings. They most often find themselves in enemy territory having to keep watch in order to be ready for any sudden attack, always planning how they will fulfill their mission. Likewise, we are to be constantly ready to go to the enemy and share with them the great news of what Jesus has already done for us. We're to keep our eyes open for the opportunity to battle with spiritual forces of evil in order to bring the light of Jesus Christ into those dark, sinful places. That's the job of the soldier, to be prepared at all times to move out and fight to find conquest over the enemy. Christians are to do that with great love to win the enemy to Jesus using every resource they have to find victory.

Likewise, athletes don't join a sport to sit on the bench. They practice hard regularly, staying in shape to be able to compete at their sport and to win the battle over the other team or opponents. The athlete follows the rules of that sport and strives hard to be the very best. The word “strive” means to give it all you've got to the point of leaning forward to inch out the other competitors in order to win. Think of it as a runner coming up to the finish line, pushing hard, wanting to win by giving it all he or she has, and then throwing back their arms and pushing out their chest to cross the line first. Striving!

The other example Paul uses are farmers who diligently prepare the land for the seed, planting as much as possible in the space they have in order to achieve the greatest harvest. If they only plant a few seeds, they only get a small harvest. If they plant lots of seeds in lots of places, then they can be assured of a great harvest. The work has to be done before a harvest can be brought in, however.

So it is with us as followers of Jesus. If we want more members here in this church, we have to do the planting of the seeds of Jesus Christ in the lives of people so that they get excited about being here. If we don't talk to anyone about Jesus, if we don't invite others to join us here in church, then we'll never have more than our regular membership attending. But if we diligently canvass the community, develop relationship with those around us, teach them about the love of God for them, and invite them to join us here, you will see people gathering in throngs. But there will be no harvest, no growth in membership, unless we **all do the work together** for Christ in this world.

Ministry is hard if only one person is expected to make it all happen. But if we are all involved in doing the same work of growing the faith of folks around us, that workload becomes much easier for all of us. The proverb goes like this, "Many hands makes for light work, but few hands exhausts the workers."

And that's what we hear from the Gospel lesson today of Luke 9:57-62. This is the account of "Would-be Followers of Jesus." Listen to it carefully please. (READ Luke 9:57-62)

Three people come to Jesus and want to follow Him, but they want to follow in their own time and under their own conditions. The first man tells Jesus, "*I will follow you wherever you go*" (9:57). That seems to be a very admirable statement, until Jesus responds to him, "*...the Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest*" (9:58). You see, some of us, like this man, make the claim to want to go after Jesus and follow His call, but we want all the luxuries of life. We want the reliable transportation, the cushy hours, the same bed every night, in the same house, where it's safe, comfortable, warm and dry. But if Jesus calls us to anything less than that, we begin to hold up our hands and say, "Wait a minute, Jesus. That's not what I was called to!" But how many people that need to hear about the Good News of Jesus Christ live in neighborhoods that are safe, comfortable, warm and dry?

The greatest number of people in the world today that need to hear about Jesus live in the 10/40 window, between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude. The greatest populations of the earth live near the equator, where it's warm. But there are so few workers desiring to go to those areas

because they're dangerous places. The governments of the people living there are opposed to any influence of the Christian faith. The other religions (Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist) are offended and become hostile toward those who would bring the light of Jesus into the darkness of that world. Though the people are poor and desperately need the hope of Salvation through Jesus, there are far too few folks who risk going into the rough areas to establish churches or schools to teach the people to take Jesus to the others. If we don't teach others about Jesus, they can't take Jesus to the rest of their country. But we're too comfortable to leave our safety and security.

Well, the second man got called by Jesus, "*Follow Me!*" (Luke 9:59) Yet this person felt like they needed to tie up all of the loose ends of their lives before going out to follow Jesus. The parents had to be cared for. They may not even have been dead, yet this one asks Jesus for permission to take care of the aging parents first. Once they're no longer alive, THEN he might be open to follow Jesus beyond his home community. "*Let me first go back and bury my father*" is merely an excuse, demonstrating that his faith in Jesus was not really genuine.

So Jesus' response addresses the issue, "*Let the dead bury their own dead. You go and proclaim the Kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:60). At first sight this looks to be an absolutely ridiculous response, but Jesus is calling the man to "*Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...*" (Matthew 6:33).

It reminds me of John Bunyan's book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian sought to follow the Lord's call to reach the Celestial City, but those in his own community thought he was nuts. In fact they did everything they could to keep Christian from leaving the City of Destruction. His family called out to him, the people of the city ran after him, and several, especially the man called Obstinate, tried desperately to talk him out of leaving. But Christian was determined to follow.

The people of the City of Destruction were dead in their sins, having nothing to do with finding Salvation in Jesus. Had Christian returned to the city where his family was, he would surely have never left, therefore never journeying to the City of God. The "*dead burying their own dead*" are those who have no desire to follow Jesus and find themselves dead in their sins, having never sought out Jesus.

Jesus desires that we desperately seek His will and His way, following His call to us to “Follow Me” so that we might gain eternal life in Him. Even at the expense of our own family!

The third man in our Gospel lesson of Luke 9 stated that he wanted to follow Jesus, but he first wanted to “*go and say good-bye to my family*” (Luke 9:61). This person decided that he needed the permission of his family and friends first, before venturing out for Jesus. He wanted to take care of business and get everyone’s blessing before starting out.

However, when we express the call of God that we have received to those around us, letting them know what God has invited us to do, they quite often ridicule us, or make fun of the idea, or do whatever it takes to talk us out of such a hair-brained idea. They don’t get why God should call us out of our comfort and ease to go to the places where it is dangerous to live, and even more dangerous to talk about Jesus.

The faith of the family and friends is solely based upon religious church attendance, so when one of the family responds to the call of God in their life, they just don’t understand. So they often attempt, and many times succeed, in altering the course of the called ones to direct them away from God’s call for their lives. “It’s too crazy! Surely God wouldn’t be asking you to do THAT!” So the person becomes torn – to follow their family’s advice, or to boldly follow the Lord.

Jesus tells us that the only way that we can follow Him is to make Him Lord of our life, to let Him have the #1 spot in our hearts and minds so that we only follow Him and do what He commands. Though the world would turn against us, we are to remain straight after Jesus. If we listen to the world, we find ourselves going this way and that way, never completing any mission for the Lord. We end up like the man at the plow who looks back and ends up going all over the place, making a mess of things.

So will we follow Jesus’ call, “Follow Me?” Or will we take our eyes off of Him and listen to everyone else? Will we let Jesus be the Lord of our life? Or will we abandon Jesus and become pleased with the delights and desires of the world around us? Jesus says, “Follow Me and you will find eternal life. But it’s only by Me that you will obtain it.” No other way will lead us to God’s life for us.

Let's pray: Father, You have called each one of us to follow Your direction. You have told us to let Jesus be Lord of our life, listening to Him only. But Your still small voice is so hard to hear amongst the rabble and cacophony noise of the world. Give us ears to hear Your call, and the courage to follow You, no matter what. Help us to seek only Your will and Your way for our life so that we might be living witnesses for Jesus. This we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen!