

All Church Outdoor Service "Follow Jesus...with Passion"

Matthew 16:24-26

Mark Vroegop

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? (Matt 16:24-26)

One Sunday, One Service, One Church. That is our theme for this special celebration of God's goodness to College Park Church. And God has been very good to us, hasn't He? Today's worship service is designed to show you the depth and breadth of what is included under the umbrella of the church that God has given us.

For the last four months, I have often found myself shaking my head in joyful disbelief at the unique and powerful ministry that happens here. I mean it is really beyond belief, and I couldn't be more excited about what God is doing at College Park. Further, I'm here to tell you that God does amazing things through the amazing people who I get to work with every day. I trust that you know that we have a marvelous group of people who make ministry happen every day of the week. They know what a privilege it is to serve at College Park, and I think you know how grateful we are to God for every one of them.

These last four months have been like a honeymoon for me and my family. You have responded so graciously to us in making our transition as smooth as possible. But even more, you have responded with a joyful hunger for the Word of God that just thrills my heart. College Park, we love you and we believe that God has some great things in store for the future of this wonderful ministry.

Now the reason that we have this service is to see and savor the entire body of Christ at College Park and to center us on our common mission. You see there is a blood-earnest reason why we do all this, and it is because we want to be passionate followers of Jesus. The main campus, the Arabic Church, the Spanish Church, the Columbus satellite campus, Next Generational ministries, Flock Groups, ABF's, Youth Ministry, Counseling ministry, Verse by Verse Radio, Compassion Ministries, AWANA, Worship Arts, Global Outreach and Local Outreach all exist for one purpose. We are one Church with one mission – to ignite a passion to follow Jesus.

To follow Jesus with passion is the heart of discipleship, and Jesus himself said this in Matthew 16:24-26. This text is so important because it captures the heart of what Jesus has called us to do.

Today I'd like to call all of us at College Park to follow Jesus in fresh and new ways. I'd like to call you to be what a friend of mine calls spiritual pyromaniacs – those who would ignite a passion others to follow Jesus. So what does following Jesus look like?

A Renouncing (v 24)

The first step in following Jesus is a right understanding of what we must turn from or renounce. In other words, following Jesus is an all-encompassing calling and passion. Jesus calls people to an exclusive relationship with himself. So there is no room for statement like I follow Jesus and.... There is no Jesus and... It is Jesus all or Jesus none.

Of multiple spiritual paths

In verse 24 Jesus is having a conversation with the twelve disciples and a larger crowd (see Mark 8:31) about the plan and purpose of God for his life. Each of the disciples had been personally called by Jesus to follow him. There was Matthew at the tax collector's table (Matt 9:9). There was Peter, Andrew, James, and John who Jesus called them to be fishers of men (Matt 4:18-22). Jesus is using this moment to identify a fundamental characteristic of his disciples: believing exclusively in Jesus.

Followers of Jesus believe in him knowing that he has the words of life. One time Jesus said some things that caused some fringe people to decide that they were no longer going to follow him and Jesus said to the remaining disciples, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:67-69).

That is the nature of being a disciple of Jesus; you renounce all other paths. This begins when you understand that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father but through him (John 14:6). Being a disciple of Jesus begins when you agree with the Bible that there are not many ways to God – there is only one. Following Jesus means renouncing all other paths and persons for the solution to your sin. Jesus says, "Follow **me!**"

Of a distinction between believers and followers

It also means that you understand that believing in Jesus cannot be separated from following Him. That is why he says "If anyone would come after me." Jesus' offer to come after him means a belief that leads to following. The reason that belief and following are linked is because of the substance of who Jesus is. If one believes that Jesus is the son of God, the Lord

of the universe, and the atonement for sin, then following him will naturally follow. Faith is how one receives Christ, but following him flows out of genuine faith. Now I am not talking about perfection, no one is capable of that, but I am saying that following Jesus is the natural result of believing in Jesus. Jesus calls people to come and follow him.

Of yourself

Jesus calls people to renounce themselves. He says “let a man deny himself” which means to completely disown or to utterly separate oneself from¹. It means to give up all reliance on whatever he is by nature and to depend for salvation on God alone. He no longer seeks to promote his own predominately selfish interests but has become wrapped up in the cause of promoting the glory of God.²

The tense of words indicate that this is a decisive and deliberate act. Coming to Jesus means that I renounce myself. In what ways does this happen?

- I renounce my belief that I’m not that bad or not as bad as others
- I renounce the my natural bent to worship myself
- I renounce my attempts to please God by my works
- I renounce my desire to run my own life
- I renounce my tendency to only think of myself
- I renounce anything and everything that doesn’t please Christ

In the midst of all that our wonderful church does, the common denominator is that we are a group of people who have renounced ourselves. Whether we speak English, Spanish, Arabic, or Azeri the confession is the still the same. Our confession very simply stated is, “I’m the problem! Jesus is the solution.”

In fact, Jesus gave this instruction immediately after one of Peter’s worst moments – a moment when he was not renouncing himself. In Matt 16:21 we find that Jesus is explaining all the things that are going to happen to him—how he will suffer, die, and be raised. Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him. Jesus’ response is stunning. “Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” This is not a good day for Peter. To follow Jesus means that we renounce ourselves.

An Embracing (v 24)

Turning from yourself is the first part of being a follower of Jesus. This begins when you turn from your sins and put your faith in Christ. After receiving Jesus it means that you embrace a

¹ John MacArthur. Matthew 16-23. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1988. p. 47

² William Hendrickson. Matthew. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973. p.656

new calling for your life. Having decided to trust in Jesus you now embrace what it means to be a disciple; you take up your cross.

The phrase was a radical call to a death march. In the New Testament times, criminals would be forced to carry the cross beam of the cross. The very act of carrying one's cross meant that they were on a final walk with a certain destiny: death.

This metaphor must have been stunning to the disciples because at this point they did not fully understand the nature of Christ's death or the symbol of the cross. God's call for all of Jesus' disciples is to live out the example of Jesus. Every individual and every area of ministry is called to join Jesus in his death march.

You can imagine how powerful these words were to the disciples when they thought back on the suffering of Jesus as he walked to the cross. To follow Jesus means that his disciples pick up their own cross and join him in his divinely ordained death. It is a powerful image of Jesus leading a painful parade of people all of whom are carrying their own death sentence. You see what Jesus is showing them here is that a follower of Jesus is called to embrace a radically different life.

Followers of Jesus choose a path of radical selflessness and Christ-centeredness in every area of life. Disciples are called to embrace the calling that God gives them. Hardship, suffering, difficulty, and trials are all a part of the call of God to follow Jesus. Therefore, we ought not be surprised when hardships come.

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

It is important for us to realize that to side with Jesus means engaging in a real battle. Each of our battles may be different, but it is a battle nonetheless. Taking up one's cross means that you pay whatever price God's calls you to pay for Christ's sake. But there are many people who view the church like a cruise ship rather than a battle ship.

Following Jesus could involve persecution, rejection, shame or reproach. But I also think that it involves the consistent and unwavering commitment to do what honors Jesus in every arena of life. It is a life that reflects the dying-to-self flavor in everything.

In other words we are all called to follow Jesus, and we need to embrace the specific way in which God chooses to apply that in our lives.

We don't get to choose the path or the race. But we are called to do the same thing – deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

A Treasuring (v 25-26)

Finally, there is an explanation as to why we should live this way. The Bible frequently calls us to live our lives by a value set that doesn't make sense to a watching world, but makes perfect sense if you know Jesus.

Following Jesus with passion is simply treasuring what is really important. It is living in a radical self-less way because you know that doing so is a very wise and right choice. Following Jesus makes perfect, passionate sense when you consider the following:

- You save your life by losing it
- There is nothing more important than the soul

First, Jesus says that there is a spiritual paradox here. The way up is down; you receive by giving; you live by dying; you find life by losing it; you save your life by losing it. Following Jesus means you live by a value set that seems completely opposite to those who don't know Him. And that is the power of being a disciple: you treasure a selfless approach to life. Your passion is that life is not about you. That commitment began when you received Christ, and it extends into every arena. Your life is marked by a treasuring of radical selflessness.

Secondly, disciples of Christ treasure living with eternity in view. Jesus show us this in two ways. Verse 26 says that it is possible for someone to gain everything in life – to have it all – but actually have nothing. Jesus sets up a tragic hyperbole. Imagine a man who literally gains everything in this world; he owns every piece of property, every vehicle, every industry, every home, and every piece of technology but he dies and realizes he has nothing! He looks like he has everything but the reality is that he has nothing. He is damned!

The other statement is equally as powerful: what will a person give in exchange for his life? In other words, there is nothing more important here than this. Our calling in life is to constantly remind people that there are soul issues on the line. Our mission is eternally important. Sure, it requires sacrifice, commitment, suffering, and a deep resolve. But it is worth it.

Following Jesus involves a renouncing of self, an embracing of God's calling, and a treasuring of eternal values. We have one mission – igniting a passion to follow Jesus – but we accomplish that mission in thousands of ways.

Therefore, I'd like to call you work out the meaning of follow Jesus in your life:

- Turn from yourself and receive Christ as your Savior today

- Destroy the notion that you can believe in Jesus but not follow Him
- Submit to God's plan for your life – embrace it with joy!
- Stop being an outside observer of College Park; make this place your base camp for Christ-exalting, self-renouncing ministry
- Grow deep in your affections for Jesus
- Ignite a passion to follow Jesus in every arena of your life

There is nothing better than following Christ. God has shown that to me over and over. Through hard times and good times, one thing always remains true: following Jesus is worth it.

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