

NCMI EQUIP South Africa 2013

Session 5b



Following Jesus

by Jack Tsoai

Henri Nouwen once wrote: “What binds us together in our diversity is our spiritual struggle to say 'yes' to Jesus' invitation to "come and follow me". It is a screaming and kicking 'yes' that says 'I want to follow him.'”

Mother Theresa of Calcutta also once said: "To be holy doesn't mean to do extraordinary things, to understand big things, but it is a simple acceptance, because I have given myself to God, because I belong to Him - my total surrender. He could put me here. He could put me there. He can use me. He can not use me. It doesn't matter because I belong so totally to Him that He can do just what He wants to do with me.”

And the Greek philosopher Aristotle once said: “Belief in itself remains completely unchangeable in every way. It's only when the actual *fact* of belief changes that the contrary becomes the truth.”

That's why we keep on saying, as Tyrone has*, that if your sins are forgiven, don't look back like a man on parole. We keep on saying these things to remind ourselves. I want to look at this thing of following Jesus wholeheartedly by looking at four of Jesus' disciples from the book of Matthew.

Matthew 4: 18-22 (NKJV)

18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

* Also see <http://ncmigauteng.co.za/a-fresh-commissioning/>

Let's start with James and John who I want to affectionately call the “cheese boys” or the “larney boys.” I'll qualify that. In **Matthew 20:20 – 22** we read:

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons [who are James and John] came to Him [Jesus] with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.

21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?”

She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.”

22 But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask...”

Even their mother knows that her sons don't deserve the lower places in society, so she goes to Jesus to tell him that they're cheese boys. How many mothers don't ask for favours for their kids? None. See, this woman was not in the wrong. All moms will ask for favours for their sons! But Jesus says she doesn't know what she's asking and later on you realise that this John is the same one who wrote the fourth gospel, 1 – 3 John and Revelation. And in John 13: 23 he says of himself, “Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.” John himself knows that he is loved in some unique way to the exception of the other eleven, including his brother James!

Now let's look at the other two, Peter and Andrew, which I'll call the “PDI's” – meaning, “Previously Disadvantaged Individuals.” Peter was very impulsive. In Matthew 16 we see Jesus asking his disciples that famous question, “Who do you say I am?” and Peter raises his hand amongst all the disciples – I can almost imagine the others cringing – and says he knows the answer. Perhaps to the others' disappointment he gets the answer right, saying that Jesus is the “Son of the Living God.” I can imagine Peter saying to the guys, “I told you!” and Jesus having to sort this thing out straight away by saying, “My Father in heaven has revealed this to you.” In other words, “This thing doesn't come from you, but from my Father in heaven who revealed it to you!”

In the very next chapter, Matthew 17, we see Jesus transfigured on the mountain and impulsively Peter offers to set up a tent for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. On their way down, Jesus, knowing Peter's impulsiveness, charges the three disciples not to tell anyone about what they saw because it's not yet time. This probably included not telling the other nine.

Remember this guy would also cut ears off! See the larney boys won't do that, they're well groomed. But this guy... not this guy. Even when Jesus tells his disciples about how he must suffer in Jerusalem, Peter impulsively says, “I'll never be like these other guys! I'll be there until the end!” And Jesus looks at him. And then he says, “Peter, this very night, you'll deny me three times!” (Matthew 26.) And he

was right – Peter denies him three times to three different people.

We're equal before him

These are the kinds of people I'm introducing you to. The reason I've chosen the passage from Matthew rather than the other gospel accounts is because I want to speak into this context. Matthew's Gospel is the most Jewish one of them all as he introduces Jesus to the Jewish people and helps them understand things in their context.

See, when God calls these larney boys and PDI's he doesn't say, "I don't think you've got it in your blood because you're a PDI." No, he says, "Follow me." He doesn't go to businessmen and say, "I see you've got money. I see you're good with business. Come, follow me, I want to get something out of you." No, we're all equal before him and we can *all* scream and say, "Yes! I want to come!" Because God is not a respecter of persons!

This is the context in which Matthew writes, showing that God calls all. He introduces a Jesus who teaches the law afresh, right in the beginning (Matthew 4 – 7.) Out of all the Gospel accounts, his is the only one that quotes Jesus saying, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."

Matthew is talking within the context of people who know the law. The Pharisees at the time were the custodians of the law. They saw themselves as the only capable people who were able to interpret it. But when Jesus comes into the picture, they had a problem with him, and of course you just need to read Matthew 23 and see how this played out. Jesus calls them so many things like snakes and vipers! Because he knew he was upsetting their system on multiple levels while not abolishing the law. And when it's fulfilled there are certain things we no longer do because the final sacrifice of Jesus has come and everything is done. That's how Matthew introduces Jesus to us in this text.

Follow at once

Jesus says, "Come and follow me" to these four guys and they do so immediately – they drop their nets, they leave their parents. Jesus is calling them to leave their business, family, their security and follow him.

If it was me, I'd ask some questions around what positions he is promising I could fulfil. The larney boys might be interested in being the CEO and COO. And the PDI's will scramble around seeing what they can get. But see, with no exception, all of them immediately follow him. Promptly; instantly; at once they acted.

God doesn't tell us everything

Interestingly enough, Jesus doesn't give them much detail about their new job descriptions. I love that. Because that's how God works when we follow him wholeheartedly. Ps 119: 105 says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” It's a lamp, not a spotlight! That speaks to me about having faith to trust God one step at a time. God doesn't reveal the whole of everything to you, otherwise he would cease to be God. So when he says, "I want you to follow me," we do so, by faith, every step of the way.

Moses is an example. God tells Moses how he has seen the suffering of his people, how he had heard it, and how concerned he is and that he wants to rescue them. Then he says to Moses that he wants to send him there. Moses says, "Who am I Lord?" and God doesn't say, “You're Moses!” He doesn't come up with qualifications and say, “Well, the first 40 years you learned things in Egypt and you'll be intelligent according to their standards. And the second 40 years you've spent in the wilderness taking care of your father's sheep. And the last 40 years you're going to be with the hot-headed Israelites and you may not even see Canaan.”

Imagine if God said that? Moses would have said, “No, forget it! I'm not doing that!” God doesn't do that. Not a chance. Every step of the way he wants you to follow him and have faith in him.

Sometimes we want to kiss God's hand simply because we've got dreams. I've seen people who Christianise their dreams and ideals and present them to God and say, “Bless my thing.” He'll never do that. He will always disappoint you if that's how you go about it because the minute God fits into 'your thing' he ceases to be God. He calls us to 'his thing', what he's doing.

My testimony

This is not only academic but it's for our own lives. Let me illustrate by sharing a bit of my testimony.

I was a teacher of history for eight years at a High School and at one time – for four and a half years – I also had the opportunity to be on TV with a ministry I was involved with. At one stage they wanted me to come and lecture at their college because of my teaching background, so things were going well for my wife and I. At the same time we had a squatter camp group going as well (we were on eldership with Manny Perreira from Ebenezer at the time.)

But God spoke to me directly with the words, “Squatter camp” and I felt we had to leave all those things. At that time I didn't understand – did we really have to leave all these good things for a squatter camp? Now I realise, years later, that God was more interested in me than the squatter camp. There were things he needed to deal with in me. We spent some time in the squatter camp and we saw

some crazy things there. I had someone die in my car; we had a youth leader killed for a cellphone. But God was doing more in my life than what was going on there.

Soon Cosmo City was going to be developed and God said to me, “Jack, now that you trust me and follow me, I want to put you to the test.” We were staying in Randpark Ridge at the time and God challenged us to sell our property and put that money into a building account for our church in Cosmo City.

Guess what? I had to go to my wife and tell her the news. TV gone! Teaching gone! Squatter camp! And now you even want my house, Lord! But that's what we call following Jesus and I needed to hear that and I needed to be sure that it was God speaking. It wasn't easy on my wife and I and we had to pray about things and do it together. I can't do it alone. I needed her on my side.

We later bought the land for the church and together with that and with what many guys gave, we finished the first phase of the building and we didn't owe the bank or anyone anything. In my context, when you have that kind of thing, you become the king. Those from my PDI context will know what I mean. And then God said to us it was time to hand over and many of my friends couldn't understand that – I had phone calls from friends asking me, “Jack, what are you doing? This is the time for you to chillax bru! And have everything come to you now. You're the king!”

We had to hand it over and where to next? Wherever God is leading us. That's what I call following Jesus without question; without looking back and knowing he is the provider of our future.

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