

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-14-15 PM NOTES
"THE DESIRE TO FOLLOW CHRIST"
MARK 8:34
#1 in Series, "Following Jesus"

Matthew 4:18-20 (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."

Matthew 9:9 (NKJV) "As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed Him."

I. Following Jesus: An Overview

A. We Must Desire to Come After Jesus (v. 34a)

B. We Must Deny Self (v. 34b)

The Gospel that Jesus gave is not a "self-esteem" gospel; it is a self-denial Gospel.

Philippians 2:3 (NKJV) "Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

"A crucified Savior will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded people" —J. C. Ryle

Colossians 1:18 (NKJV) "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

C. We Must Take Up Our Cross (v. 34c)

Romans 6:11 (NKJV) "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

D. We Must Follow Jesus (v. 34c)

Luke 19:10 (NKJV) "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Philippians 3:10a (NKJV) "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..."

John 17:4 (NKJV) "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."

II. Following Jesus Begins with Desire (v. 34a)

A. The Creation of this Desire

John 6:44a (NKJV) “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”

B. The Cultivation of This Desire

John 3:16 (NKJV) “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

“O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, so that I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, ‘Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.’ Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.”
—A. W. Tozer

C. The Culmination of This Desire

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We live in a culture where the word “Christian” has been so watered down that it is virtually meaningless. “Christian” has become the default box that you check when you are not atheist, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim. A “cool” term that is being used today instead of “Christian” to designate that a person believes and has been changed by the Gospel is “Christ Follower” or “Follower of Christ”. I’m usually not into “cool” and I could be the poster child for “un-cool”, but I like that description, that designation of a true disciple of Christ. I am a Christ Follower! The key ingredient of being Jesus’ disciple is following Him. When Jesus called His disciples, what did He say? **Matthew 4:18-20 (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.” **Matthew 9:9 (NKJV)** “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘**Follow Me.**’ So he arose and **followed** Him.” Those who are called by Jesus are called to follow Him!

If “following Jesus” is the ultimate description of a disciple and we are commanded in the great commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), then it is imperative that we know what it means to be a disciple – a follower of Jesus. Here is our approach in this series. We are going to use Mark 8:34 as the foundation on which we build this series. Today we are going to see an overview of this verse and then look deeper at what it means to “desire” to come after Jesus. Over the next several weeks we will look at each step leading up to following Jesus.

I. Following Jesus: An Overview

It is impossible to follow Jesus until you desire to come after Him, deny self, and take up your cross. You can't “pick and choose” which of these demands of discipleship that you will accept and which ones you will reject. The reason so many people profess Christ, are baptized, and then after a while fall away is not that they were Jesus' disciple and then fell away. The reason that they are no longer following Him is that they came to Him on a whim and for all the wrong reasons; they refused to deny themselves and they looked at the cross from afar, but never took up Christ's Cross. I have just described what is likely over 50% of those who profess Christ in The United States. If a person is not following Jesus as a pattern of life, they are lost and headed for an eternity of separation from God. Let's get an overview of these demands of discipleship.

A. We Must Desire to Come after Jesus (V34a)

Have you ever noticed that we tend to do what we really desire to do? If a person has little or no desire to come after Jesus, they won't come after Jesus. It is just that simple. Let's look at a word study of this word translated “desires”. The grammar of the word tells us that this is a continuing, life pattern desire that doesn't ever go completely away though there are some things that cause that desire to wane (we will look at some of those things later in this message). The Greek word itself is rather intense. It is not speaking of just being willing; it means to desire strongly. It is a desire so strong that it presses us to action. This word pictures someone who is intensely hungry for the “Living Bread” (John 6:51) and deeply thirsting for the “Living Water” (John 4:14) that only Jesus can give. We will go deeper in this desire later in the message.

B. We Must Deny Self (V34b)

The Gospel that Jesus gave is not a “self-esteem” gospel; it is a self denial Gospel. Far from pamper self, raise our esteem of self, enhance self's image, or promote self, we are to deny self. Let's look at the word “deny”. To “deny self” means to completely disown, to utterly separate from. It means to put away, to refuse, to give up oneself. It is an intensive form that means “to deny utterly”. The self that Jesus is referring to is neither one's personality nor basic human needs. It is the flesh, the programming of the old man in Adam who was crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20). It is the self-centered, self-seeking life. The opposite of this self life is **Philippians 2:3 (NKJV)** “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*”

The word translated “deny” is in a tense that designates something that happens at a point in time. In other words it is not “slowly wean yourself”, or “over a period of time reach a state of having denied yourself”. Daily we are to deny ourselves. This denial means that we vacate the throne of our lives; we say “no” to self-centeredness; we set aside our own will, our own dreams, and our own ambitions. Dr. J. C. Ryle said, “A crucified Savior will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded people” [J. C. Ryle, “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Volume 2”, page 310]. We are to deny our self-effort, our rebel wills, our carnal longings, our Christless ambitions, our self-generated plans, our obsession with controlling our own life, and our lust for comfort and ease. This is not flippant or without counting the cost. This denial of self is not partial, since partial self-denial is not self-denial at all. There is a radical, extreme denial of all the competition – all the self life. There is to be no reservation, nothing held back, no hesitation, and no exceptions. You must deny self.

Remember that the commands in verse 34 are sequential. You cannot follow Jesus until you have taken up your cross and you can't take up your cross until you have denied yourself. Let me give you some portraits of people who have not denied themselves. People who have not denied themselves will give

some money to God's work, but they won't consider giving in a way that necessitates changing their lifestyle. People who have not denied themselves focus way more on being saved from the penalty of their sins than being saved from sin and its dominion over them. People who have not denied themselves are quick to say that Jesus has a place in their lives – even a prominent place. Jesus doesn't want a place or even a prominent place; He demands preeminence! **Colossians 1:18 (NKJV)** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the **preeminence.**" People who have not denied themselves think much more about life on earth than they think about eternity in Heaven. They are so consumed with life here, they seldom if ever think about and meditate upon what is waiting on us there. People who have not denied themselves are concerned with playing it safe when it comes to following Christ. They want to be in control of their lives and they are not comfortable when they are not in control and have to trust God alone. I think you get the idea! To be His disciple, you must deny yourself.

C. We Must Take up Our Cross (V34c)

On this side of the cross, to take up your cross has two emphases. First, it means that we reckon (count by faith as true) ourselves to dead to sin because the old us in Adam that sin held in slavery has been nailed to the cross with Jesus. **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** "Likewise you also, reckon [count it true by faith because God says it is true] yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." When I take up my cross, I am by faith counting as true what God says about me that sin is not my master and I am therefore no longer a slave to sin because that old me that was the slave was crucified on the cross with Jesus. That is why a Christian is never a victim of sin. We may choose to sin, but are never under compulsion to sin. We can never say "I couldn't help it". Second, there is a more general meaning to taking up our cross that would have also applied to Jesus' disciples on that side of the cross. It simply means that we are willing to pay any price for the sake of following Christ. We are willing to endure shame, rejection, suffering, and even death to be obedient to him. The cross was an instrument of death and to take up our cross is death to anything that stands between me and obedience to Christ. Contrast what Jesus says here with the bumper stickers that used to be popular that said, "Try Jesus". The Bible says, desire to come after Him, deny self, and take up the cross, the instrument of death.

I think that my second favorite missionary (next to Hudson Taylor) is John Patton. He lived from 1824-1907. He served 10 years as a Pastor of a growing church in Scotland and God began to burden his heart for the South Pacific New Hebrides Islands that were populated by cannibals. When the ship Captain dropped off John Patton and his young family on the islands, he did not want to leave them and warned him, "You will die". Patton's answer was simple: "We have already died". What did he mean? Patton and his wife had taken up their cross. The issue was settled. Even though Patton suffered beyond our comprehension, his work was very fruitful as some of the islands came almost completely to Christ. If you would be Christ's disciple, you must deny yourself and take up your cross.

D. We Must Follow Jesus (V34c)

The call to follow Jesus is a call to surrender moment by moment to his Lordship. The tense is to keep following Him – every day, 365 days a year, every year of your life. True discipleship is not a door to be entered; it is a path to be followed. Let me bring it down to the realm of the practical. Following Jesus means joining Him in what He was sent to do. When we see Jesus saying, "This is why I am here", then we are here for that same reason if we are following him. Let me give you some examples. First, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That truth is given many times in many different words, but the clearest is in **Luke 19:10 (NKJV)**, "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Whether it is through the platform of your vocation, on short-term missions, in your neighborhood, revitalizing a church, or as a vocational minister or missionary, we are to see our primary task as seeking to save the lost by introducing them to the one who can save and then to disciple them to follow Him fully. That passion ought to be reflected in our prayer, our use of our time and our use of the money that He has made us managers of. Second, Jesus came to suffer. We certainly can't follow Him in suffering what He suffered on the cross as a substitute for the sins of man, but a part of following Him is a willingness to suffer that He might be magnified. **Philippians 3:10a (NKJV)** "that I may know Him and the power of

His resurrection, and **the fellowship of His sufferings...**” Third, following Him means that in all we do our motive is to glorify the father. Jesus said in **John 17:4 (NKJV)** “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” Success is finishing the work He has given us to do.

That is an overview of this process of following Jesus. Let’s begin a more in depth look. Today we will focus in on what it means to desire to come after Jesus.

II. Following Jesus Begins with Desire (V34a)

A disciple who is motivated only by duty and dread of punishment to be a disciple of Jesus will falter, fade, and be miserable. The primary motive is a deep abiding love for Him who is altogether lovely and an insatiable desire to follow Him. Discipleship starts with a desire to come after Jesus. The HCSB says, “If anyone wants to come with Me”. Let me ask you a very personal question. Do you desire, want, long to be a true disciple of Jesus and thus walk with Him and learn from Him and be conformed to His likeness? Be honest. Are you content to have Him as your eternal “fire insurance”, but you really don’t want Him messing with your life?

A. The Creation of This Desire

The desire to follow Jesus is not natural to fallen man. Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us that unregenerate, unsaved mankind is spiritually dead, walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, conducts themselves in the lusts of their flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and are by nature children of wrath. The last thing a spiritually dead person is concerned about is following Jesus. If you have no desire, no longing to be His disciple and to be taught by Him and conformed to His likeness, then it is very likely that you are still spiritually dead in your trespasses and sins.

Who must take the initiative for a spiritually dead sinner to become a new person who desires to follow Jesus? It is God! A dead person can’t take the initiative to do anything. Here is what happens. God, the Holy Spirit begins convicting the spiritually dead person of sin. Their spiritual eyes are opened and they see their sin, their lack of a right standing with God, and the judgment they are facing (John 16:8-11). At this point God begins to draw them to Jesus. **John 6:44a (NKJV)** “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”. Look what God has done: He opens the sinner’s spiritual mind that was darkened; He convicts of sin; He draws the spiritually dead person to Jesus. Now there is the ability to hear the Gospel and God grants the ability to repent so that the sinner repents of sin and then believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved. When a person is truly saved, they have been made a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). There may be fear and even some dread, but this new creation in Christ will desire to come after Jesus. We can’t get puffed up about our desire to follow Jesus because unless God had convicted us, drawn us, given us the ability to repent and savingly believe on Jesus, we would still be spiritually dead and have no desire to come after Him. If you are following Jesus and have a desire to follow Him more closely and completely you need to give glory to God because apart from His regenerating work none of this would have happened.

B. The Cultivation of This Desire

When we start buying in to the world’s values, believing the world’s propaganda, start having a lust for stuff and begin to become less faithful with spiritual disciplines (Bible reading, prayer, church attendance and involvement), and just get so busy that we have little time for the things of God, our appetite for the world begins to increase and our appetite for following Jesus begins to wane – to fade away. So we begin to find ourselves being lukewarm in our walk with Jesus. If that is where you find yourself, it is time to start clearing away by repentance those things that have stolen our desire for Him. When you begin to see Him as the treasure that is worth selling everything you have to obtain, when you see Him as the Rose of Sharon, the Lilly of the Valley, the One who is faithful and true, the one who is the fullness of God in a body, then you will desire to come after Him. When people supremely love Jesus all they need is to be told what to do. When people don’t love Him and desire Him, no amount of manipulation, guilt tripping, or pleading will bring them to the place of denying self, taking up their cross and following Him. This

desire is a work of God in you and if you don't have it, cry out to the only one who can grant it to you. I would suggest you consider borrowing from this prayer by A. W. Tozer that has blessed my heart and expresses the desire of my heart. "O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, so that I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, 'Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.' Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long" [A. W. Tozer, "The Pursuit of God"].

C. The Culmination of This Desire

Here is what will happen when the desire to follow Him becomes compelling, when it drives us. We will begin with new fervor to deny self, take up our cross and follow Christ Jesus wherever He chooses to lead us.

CONCLUSION

In John MacArthur's book, *Follow Me*, he tells the story of a great violinist who announced that he would give a concert using an unusually expensive violin. When the advertised time came the hall was packed to hear this man play the expensive instrument. After an amazing performance, there was thunderous applause from the appreciative attendees, but then something happened that shocked everyone. He threw that instrument on the floor and stomped it to pieces and then walked off the stage. Needless to say, the audience was horrified. A few moments later, the stage manager came out and said to the stunned audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, the violin that was just destroyed was only a \$20 violin. The maestro will now return to play on the advertised instrument". He did so, but only the most trained ears could tell the difference. Most of us are \$20 violins, but when there is deep abiding desire to come after Jesus, deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus, the Lord, the maestro if you will, will accomplish great kingdom things through us.