

What It Means to Follow Jesus
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Wasilla Bible Church
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Let's hope that you will join me for just a moment here as I pray.

Lord God,

We come before you today and acknowledge the fact that truly we are sinners. We are people who are imperfect. We are people who consistently don't get it right and, God, consistently rebel against You. And Lord, we recognize that with that, You still love us; You still came for us. And God, I ask that You would help that truth be evident today, just what You desire of us, what You want in a relationship with us. God, give us eyes to see, minds to understand, and hearts to hold onto the truth that you have for us today.

In Your name we pray, amen.

As Larry said earlier today, this morning, we are a body of people who want to follow Jesus. And so, as a result, we've been going through the book of Mark. And the reason for that is because if we want to follow Jesus, if we want to be followers of Christ, we have to see Him, know Him, understand who He is, understand what He says, teaches, does—we have to know Him. Ok. It would be similar to if I said 'You know what? I want to go over to Pioneer Peak.' And I just walked out of here and I just started heading in whatever random direction I wanted to go. Probably I wouldn't get to Pioneer Peak. I might end up out in Big Lake or somethin' like that. But if I just walked out the door and started heading in whatever direction I wanted to go, whatever mood struck me, then I probably would not end up at Pioneer Peak. Instead, what I have to do is I have to walk out the doors of this church and I'd have to look around at all the different mountains, and I'd have to say, 'Hey, over there—that's Pioneer Peak. That's the way I need to go.' It's the same way with following Christ, ok? If we want to be a follower of Christ we first need to understand what it is, who it is, that we're wanting to follow. And that's why we're going through the book of Mark.

Mark, the thing...I hope that you hear me correctly in this, because if it's taken out of context this could sound really bad. So please pay attention these next few moments, ok? The past couple of sermons and what will be the next few sermons, in my mind are the highlight of what it means to follow Jesus. Everything else...I mean, if you had to get just a few sermons, a few passages from Mark to understand what it means to follow Jesus, this is it. From the tail end of Mark 8 through the end of chapter 10 or so...if...this is the heart of what it means to follow Jesus.

And so if you are here today and you've said, 'You know what, I want to be a follower of Jesus,' then guess what—you need to listen up, 'cause this is what it's all about. If you're here today and you say, 'You know what, I'm not a follower of Jesus yet. Somebody dragged me here; I did it as a favor to a friend, a family member, or whatever,' or maybe you're just curious. And you say, 'You know what, I'm not quite sure about this whole Jesus thing, but I wanna see kinda what it's all about, what is it.' Well guess what—this is a great time for you to be here. Because this is what it's all about.

What we're gonna be covering here today is part of this. It's Mark 9:30-50. And what's gonna happen is we'll just read through this. We'll read through a little bit, and then I'll stop and we'll explain, and we'll talk about it. And then we'll go on and we'll read a little more and explain some more. But it starts off in Mark 9:30. It says

Then they left that place...

'They' is the disciples and Jesus; then they, the disciples and Jesus left that place...

...and they made their way through Galilee. But He...

...Jesus...

...did not want anyone to know it. For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man..."

...Jesus...

“...is being betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him; and after He is killed, He will rise three days later.” But they did not understand this statement and they were afraid to ask Him.

Then they came to Capernaum. When He was in the house He asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, because on the way they had been arguing with one another about who was greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” Then He took a child, had him stand among them,

...the disciples...

...and taking him...

...the child...

...in His arms, He said to them, “Whoever welcomes one little child such as this in My name, welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me, but Him who sent Me.”

Picture this with me, if you will. The disciples and Jesus...they're walking along, and Jesus is trying up to this point...he's just recently, tail end of chapter 8, Jesus is finally started talking to His disciples where He's not using parables, little stories, picture stories, analogies. He's just telling them straight out, 'Look, this is what's gonna happen.' And here Jesus is. He's saying, 'Guess what—we're headed to Jerusalem. When we get there I'm gonna be killed; I'm gonna be betrayed, I'm gonna be killed, I'm going to be tortured to death, and be buried. And I'll be in the grave for three days; and then I will come back alive.' And the disciples say, 'What in the world is He talkin' about? It doesn't make sense!'

So instead, they decide to pursue a different topic of conversation. They decide, 'You know what? What should we talk about? Hmmm...ok. Let's have a debate on who is the greatest disciple. That's right—me. I am the greatest disciple. Who is it? It's me. Right here.' And so they're arguing about this. Jesus knows that they're arguing about it, ok? He's just...He's kinda like...well, let 'em talk.

They get to Capernaum. They set up shop for the night, and Jesus pulls 'em aside and He says, 'C'mere, guys.' He says, 'What were you guys talkin' about? What were you arguing about over there?' 'Course, you know they know, 'Oh man, what we were arguing about, that's the wrong answer.' So they don't say anything. And Jesus knows exactly what's goin' on. So he goes ahead and He says, 'Listen...you've missed the whole point.' And what we're gonna see is, this here—what Jesus says next—is the first of three truths. There's three of 'em in this passage we're gonna be talkin' about today. These truths are truths that you have to understand if you wanna follow Jesus.

And the first truth is pretty simple. Simply this—you need to be a servant to all. Everybody that you come in contact with, you need to be a servant to that person.

Sarah and I, my wife, we have two children—Liam and Charlotte. And whether or not...regardless of the fact, my two children...I love 'em very much, they're great kids and everything; but believe it or not, my wife and I do not have the perfect family. Yes, we do have sinful children, and yes, my wife and I do have disagreements, arguments, everything else. We have problems just like everybody. But here's the thing—something that has been fun with my kids. Charlotte is five, Liam is two. Liam is just now getting to the age and the size where he is able to kind of exert his will. Ok? In a big way. This most often comes out when he's interacting with Charlotte. Charlotte is a very strong-willed little girl, and so she always has a very precise idea of how things should be done. And Liam has gotten to the point where he's sayin' 'No! I don't think so.' And all of a sudden what'll end up happening is whatever toy there is, whatever movie they want to watch, whatever they want to pretend—all of a sudden arguments break out; and there's fighting and madness and mayhem. And so what ends up happening is the kids are sittin' here screaming 'Blah blah blah' back and forth. And we kinda have to pull 'em apart. And we sit 'em down and we say "Wait a second. What is more important? Charlotte, is your brother more important than the toy? Which is more important? Liam, which is more important—that you get to choose which movie, or your sister?"

Now, it hasn't quite caught on with my kids yet. I mean, Charlotte's response is usually, "*My brother!*" [in a frustrated tone] which tells me she probably doesn't quite understand the heart of it, ok? She knows the right answer, but it's not there. And Liam, his response is usually just "*NDDD!*" I mean, so we're workin' on it. We're still workin' on it. But the thing is, Sarah and I have been trying to teach our kids a very important thing—you need to treat other people more important than yourself. And the reason we're trying to teach Liam and Charlotte this is because if they don't understand *that*, then it's going to be very hard for them to follow Jesus some day when they get old enough to understand just exactly who He is and make that decision for themselves.

As I look...as I look around myself and life, I'm thinking I'm probably not the only one who's guilty of this. See, my kids, it makes me think that, you know, hey—it gives me a reflection on my own character; and in all honesty, I don't want to be the servant of anybody. I'm a very prideful person. I want to be self-reliant; I want to be self-dependent; I don't want to serve anybody. Why? Because I'm the most important. That's just the way that I...that I have a tendency to start looking at myself.

And something that I thought of, as Jesus was just sittin' here as I'm reading this, is He pulls this child in. And this child...He's using this child as an illustration. Because see, back in the day, children...it wasn't this romanticized, idyllic view of childhood. Children were to be silent. They weren't to be seen or heard or anything else. Until they became an adult, they weren't even really a fully functioning member of society, ok? They were kinda to stay in the background. Why? Because the really important things were the things that adults were concerned about. Children—when they became adults then they could become a part of things.

What Jesus says is He pulls this child aside and He says, 'You know what? You need to be willing to be a servant of this child right here—the person that you look at in society and you say 'You know, this person is not worth my time.'

I wonder...think of this for just a moment. Think of someone—maybe it's someone that you know; maybe it's somebody that you've just encountered at some point in the past, just in passing, maybe. But it's somebody that you can picture in your mind, you can think of...you can picture their face, what they're wearing, whatever; what they were doing, what you were doing. And think back...somebody who was just...they were the lowest of low in society. And ask yourself—would I be willing to be a servant to that person? Jesus says, 'You know what? If you wanna be My follower, that's what it's all about.'

It's like Mark 8:34. He ends up...that's really where this whole thing...'If you wanna be My follower?' This is what it's about. That's where He says, 'If you wanna be My follower...' This is the first time in Mark where He's saying, 'If you want to follow Me, this is what it means.' And He says, 'If you want to be My follower you need to deny yourself. You must. It's not a choice. You must deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow Me.' This is the heart of it. Basically, you need to be treating other people like they are more important than yourself. It's a hard lesson to learn.

But then there's another one, ok? Jesus goes on. In verse 38 Mark tells us that John, one of His disciples, said to Him, Jesus,

"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us."

"Don't stop Him," Jesus said, "because there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, who can soon afterwards speak evil of Me. For whoever is not against us is for us. And whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of My name, since you belong to the Messiah, I assure you, he will never lose his reward."

Second truth that we see here is this...well, I'm sorry...Mark 8:34...second truth we see is this—don't be an obstacle to others. *Don't be an obstacle to others.* We're gonna elaborate on this a little bit. What does this mean? Ok, well here it is. See, Jesus...ok. John is telling Jesus, hey, kind of almost like to try and get the spotlight off 'em and say, you know, 'oh yeah, we were doin' ok.' John, he ends up sounding like a Pharisee. Basically what he says is, 'Jesus, there was this guy. We're walking along and we see this guy, and he's talking, and he's casting out demons and doing all this stuff. But he isn't a part of our group. He isn't one of us. He isn't quite one of our followers. He isn't part of "us". And so we told him to stop.'

And Jesus says, 'No! Don't stop him! He's so close.'

I mean, that sounds so like a Pharisee. The Pharisees got upset because Jesus wasn't playin' the rules right. He wasn't part of their group; He wasn't part of their religious organization; He didn't look at things the way they looked at 'em. And John says, 'You know what? This guy—he doesn't quite have it right. And he's not part of our group. So we're gonna stop him. Why? Because we have a corner on the market.'

And what ends up happening is Jesus says, 'No. Look—he's so close. He's so close to me. Why? Why, why would you rebuke him? Why would you turn him away when he's so close? He's right there. He understands who I am. He may not be a part of our group yet, but God is doing amazing things through him because of what this guy understands so far. And it won't be long before he understands fully, and he is one of us.'

And Jesus gives us a couple good reasons to keep this in mind. First of all, in verse 41 He says, 'I can assure you I'll remember it. I'll remember what this guy does, positive, for people who are my followers.' 'Course, the reverse side of that is this...He's also going to remember if we stand in that guy's way. If He's gonna remember when this guy would give you a cool glass of water, He's also going to remember if you turn this guy away because he doesn't quite have it right just yet. And so you start givin' him the smack-down because he doesn't have it quite just yet, although he's followin' after Jesus and he's right there.

But then there's a second part here. It's this...gotta cut off the sin. In verse 42

"But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones..."

...one of these people who are right there, they're a young believer or maybe they're right at the edge... 'Whoever causes one of these little ones to fall, who believe in Me...'

"...it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes your downfall, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and go to hell, the unquenchable fire, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. And if your foot causes your downfall, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and be thrown into hell, the unquenchable fire, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out. It's better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

What Jesus says is this: 'If there is anything in your life that is causing other people to stumble, you better cut it off! And here's why—because I take that very seriously.' That's what Jesus is sayin'. 'I take it so seriously that you would be better off tying a huge, heavy stone around your neck and jumpin' off a boat into the ocean. Because that's gonna be better than what I have planned for you.' That's how seriously Jesus takes it. And so He says, 'You know what? If there is anything in your life that causes you to sin, cut it off.' We know that our hands, our feet, our eyes don't actually cause us to sin. What causes us to sin, what we see in Mark 7, is that it's our heart. All of the evil stuff comes out of our hearts. But what Jesus says is, 'You know what? If there is any part of your life...cut it out of your life if that's going to cause somebody else to stumble, if it's gonna cause you to sin and be in the way of somebody else, to be an obstacle.'

I don't know what it is in your life. In my life, honestly, it's pride. Things that feed my pride can be oh, so bad for me, because all of a sudden I start gettin' really puffed up and everything else. And God has a really good habit of...anytime I start gettin' too full of myself, He takes a big ol' 2' x 4' and just 'SMACK!' and all of a sudden I'm just layin' on the ground, and I'm like, 'Ok. That's right. I need to humble myself.' And I have to be very conscientious of anything that feeds my pride, and I have to cut it off and say, 'No. I'm not goin' there.'

I don't know what it is in your life. Maybe it is pride; maybe it's something else. Maybe there's a relationship that you say, 'You know what? This matters more to me than followin' Jesus.' I don't know. Maybe...maybe it's your job. Maybe you are a parent who, you know what? You may say that your family is more important, but you end up spending more time and energy and effort and thought focused on work than you do your own family. And what Jesus is sayin' is, 'You know what? You better cut it off.' Maybe you have to get rid of your job...I don't know. Maybe you have to change somethin' in your job. Maybe you have to change somethin' in your life. Why? Because if you don't, you're gonna cause other people to stumble. You're gonna cause your children, your family, your friends, people who see you—they're gonna look at that and say, 'If that's what it means to follow Jesus, then you know what? I don't want any part of it. I just want my dad. I don't want my dad to be so arrogant.'

It's a heavy thing, but Jesus says, 'That's what it takes to follow Me. If there's anything in your life, cut it off. You have to be willing to get rid of it. There's nothing else that can come before Me.'

But Jesus doesn't just stop there. In...He picks up, and this is where I take a lot of encouragement. These couple verses that are coming up...they're ones that, in all honesty, I've spent a lot of time on, questioning, mulling around. In many ways I feel like I'm still getting a handle on it. Believe it or not, guys who get up here and speak don't always have all the answers. That's right—we still are very confused about things a lot of times. But this is something that I've been mulling over, and mulling over, and mulling over. And this is the point to where I've come. In verse 49 it says

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt should lose its flavor, how can you make it salty? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

There's another truth here, and it comes at the tail end of the verse, of verse 50. But it's basically this: you need to be gracious to one another. *You need to be gracious to one another.* See, what Jesus is sayin' in verse 49...He's sayin', 'Guess what? Everybody is going to go through periods of trial and suffering, and everything else in life. There's going to be fire that refines you. And what will end up happening is you will become more purified; you will be preserved. You will become more and more salty through the trials of life that I take you through, and that's a good thing.' He says, 'Don't lose that; don't lose sight of it. All this other stuff that we've said before? Make sure you follow it. Why? Because you don't want to lose what God has poured into you—the grace that God has poured into you...you just don't want to lose it. You don't want to waste it. Don't let it go.'

And so He says, 'Preserve the peace. Be salty. Have salt among yourselves; have preservative among yourselves. Keep the peace. Be gracious to one another. Extend God's grace to one another.'

I like the way Eugene Peterson...he summarized these couple of verses. He paraphrased it. Basically everyone's going to go through a refining fire. It's gonna happen sooner or later. But you'll be well preserved. You'll be well salted. You'll be protected from the eternal fires, the fires of hell, through that preservation process. And so he says...yourselves, you should be preservatives; preserve the peace.

Another verse that comes to mind is Colossians 4:6, where basically we're exhorted to season our speech with salt, to extend grace to one another. And this is why this is encouraging to me, because there is a recognition that you know what? This is a process. If you're lookin' around, and maybe you're in here and you say, 'You know what? I'm not a follower of Jesus. And all the stuff that you said doesn't quite make sense to me just yet.' That's ok, 'cause it's a process. Keep...keep seekin'.

But you look around and you say, 'Ok, I don't understand all of this Jesus stuff, but what I do understand is I look around and I see that person over there, that person over there, that person over there, whatever, and I know how they talk. I know what they do. I've seen them, and oh man, they're hypocrites.' Well guess what? So are you. So am I. It's just the truth, ok? This is a room full of hypocrites. We are a room full of people who screw up. We're sinners. That is one of the primary truths...that is *the foundation* that we believe. And we aren't perfect; and we acknowledge it. That's the foundation for even following Jesus, is you have to come to a point where you say, 'You know what? I'm a screw-up. I sin; I mess up; and I can't do it on my own. I *need* Jesus to forgive me. I *need* Him to work in my life. I need Him to purify me and preserve me, 'cause I can't do it alone.'

And so the thing that I would say if you're someone who has not yet decided to follow Jesus, and you're sittin' here and you're lookin' around, I'd say, "Yeah. But hopefully, if you look at this person, what you can say is, 'You know, they aren't perfect yet, but guess what? I can see where God is makin'...they don't talk quite the same way that they used to talk to people or about people. They don't do quite the same things that they used to do. I can see where God is changing their lives.'"

If you're someone in here who has decided to follow Jesus, here's a very encouraging thing. Guess what? You don't have to be perfect. That's right. We've talked about it before. The number one qualification, the *only* qualification that you have to have to be a follower of Jesus is the fact that you are willing to say, "That's right. I'm a sinner, and I need help." All you have to bring to the table is your sin. That's it. That is the number one job qualification for being a follower of Jesus—you have to be a sinner. That's it. Jesus didn't come to save the church people. He didn't come to save the righteous, the people who don't need help. He didn't come to save the proud. He came to save those who are willing to say, "I need help." And so we don't have to be perfect. Why? Because Jesus is going to be purifying us through His Spirit.

And so He says, 'Guess what? You need to be gracious to one another. Be patient with one another. Realize that 'you know what? This other person is more important than me. I'm not gonna be an obstacle to them. And guess what? They're gonna mess up, yeah. But I'm gonna be at peace with 'em, and be patient. Why? Because I'm a sinner too.'

That's the attitude we should have here in the church with one another. We should extend grace to one another. We should extend grace to our community. That's what Jesus calls us to.

In just a moment I'm gonna pray. Before I do, I just wanna let you know...after you are dismissed there will be...I'll be down here, and there'll be one or two other pastors, elders, that sort of thing. If you wanna pray, if you wanna talk, please feel free to come up here into our little prayer zone area, ok? And we'd love to talk with ya and pray with ya.

Let's pray.

Lord God,

Thank You so very much that You did come; You did come for us, people who are sinners. And though we aren't perfect, You do promise that if we follow You, if we seek Your forgiveness, if we accept Your gift, You're willing to work in our lives and make us who You want us to be, and allow us to experience life with You. And God, I thank You for that. I thank You for that grace.

Help us to extend grace to one another as we go out this week.

We pray this in Your name, amen.