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Jesus on The Call to Follow Him

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TEXT: Matthew 4:18-20 (NIV)

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

What a great God we serve, who still sits enthroned in Heaven; and all authority and power and Heaven on Earth is his. And it's just an honor to be able to look into his word with you today and look at what he said to us when he was among us here in the flesh in the form of Christ, and he called people to follow him. You know, Jesus said, "Follow me," or "Come to me," and it's recorded for us at least 19 times in the Gospels. But the Gospel of John tells us that there are many other things Jesus did that are not recorded for us here. So, he may have said it many other times, maybe even hundreds of times, when he was with us. He might have just been talking to people and said, "Hey, why don't you follow me, follow my teaching, follow my ways." As we said earlier, the great C.S. Lewis said, "At its simplest, Christ's call was 'Follow me.'" He asked men and women for their personal allegiance. He invited them to learn from him, to obey his words, and to identify themselves with his cause.

In Matthew 4, we read this first calling of the disciples verses 18-20. [See above.] Now, this may seem like a surprise, but when a rabbi in that day (and Jesus appeared and became a rabbi, a Jewish religious teacher, and he knew the scriptures), and when someone like that called you to follow them, it was a great honor and a great privilege. And so these young men left their professions and took up this new profession of

learning from the rabbi, being disciples and followers of Christ. Now we learn right away here in Jesus called to follow him, there is a purpose. There's a purpose in it. "Follow me," he said, "and I will make you fishers of men." It was C.S. Lewis who said, "God is calling us to identify ourselves with his cause."

What is the cause of God in the world? None other than the cause of redemption. God is calling us to himself to be a part of his work in the world, where he is working to restore all things to himself. He did not come into the world in the form of Christ to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. And he is inviting us to join in this work of salvation by being laborers in the kingdom, by being seed-planters of the truth of the good news of Christ, by being those who water one another and nourish each other in the faith, and cast seed out into the world to help advance the Kingdom of God. Because just a little spark of the word in a person's heart can bring them to life in Christ and change their eternal destiny. And God is inviting you and I to be a part of this purpose in the world.

Human beings are longing for purpose and meaning, but there's no greater purpose going on around us than the purpose, the work, the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul said it this way: "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us." That appeal is that people would be reconciled to God. And friends, we need that more than ever today in the in the call to follow Jesus. There's a purpose, but there's more than that. There's also a unique supernatural peace. You know, Jesus said in Matthew 11, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest, take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I'm gentle and humble of heart and you'll find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light." You know, when we are rightly living out our call before God, following Jesus with our whole heart, the promise of internal peace and rest is given to us. You know, this is something that the world can't offer us. There's all kinds of tension and disagreement and division and anger and anxiety and worry and even scoffing and sitting in the seat of the scornful in our world today. And it's hard to grasp a true peace. And Jesus said this: "My peace I leave with you, my peace, I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." The closer we follow Jesus, the more the fruit of the spirit of peace can be a part of our lives. There's a purpose in following Jesus. There's a peace in following Jesus.

And there's also, Jesus said, a price. In Luke, 14, we read this: "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them, he said, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'" Jesus wasn't saying here literally to hate our family members. What he was doing was emphasizing the call to allegiance to him above everything else. And when we say yes to something, we're always saying no to something else. And Jesus is saying,

If you're going to say a full yes to me, if you're going to follow me with all your heart, you're going to have to say no to a number of things. You're going to have to say no to the lusts of your flesh. You're going to have to die to yourself. You're going to have to say no to the lust of the eyes and all the love of the world and all the different things that can woo us away from God.

These false idols that are always presented to us. There's a cost in saying no to a lot of things to say yes to the call to follow Christ. There's a purpose in it. There's a peace in it, but there's a price in it. And Jesus said, "You have to take up your cross, die to yourself to follow me." And he told us to count the cost. He said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay a foundation and are not able to finish it? Everyone who sees it will ridicule you saying this person began to build but wasn't able to finish." And so Jesus said, "When you think about following me and what it means to truly follow me, I want your full allegiance."

Consider the cost now. It's very unique to each of us what the cost might be. No one knows what the cost to following Christ will mean for them in their lives. Even the early disciples didn't know. As a matter of fact, the Gospel of John tells us about Peter. When Peter was talking with Jesus near the end of Jesus' time here, he was talking with Peter, and he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me." The following of Christ would cost Peter his life in a way he didn't want to go, and Jesus was telling them that, warning them of that, but saying he was worth it. "I'm worth all you have, Peter." But Peter didn't know how to respond. The scripture tells us Peter turn and saw that disciple whom Jesus loved, who's John, and when Peter saw him, he asked the Lord, "What about him?" Jesus answered him,

“If I want him to remain alive until I return. What is that to you? You must follow me whatever the cost.”

You know, I had a friend of mine who talked to me a few years back about the lordship of Christ, and he said there's four words that describe making Jesus first in your life, and those four words are anytime, anywhere, anything, at any cost, I will follow Christ. I don't know if you've been called to sacrifice for the Lord in your life, but maybe you're struggling today with your allegiance to him giving him your whole heart. And maybe you sense his spirit reaching out to you, saying to you again, “I know, I know, it's hard, but follow me. Come to me.” Find purpose in your life, find peace in your life, count the cost, but then be willing to pay it because Christ is worth it. The spirit might be telling you today he's worth any sacrifice that needs to be made.

My wife and I are reading a devotional each morning about individuals who followed Christ and paid a price and their following of Christ. One is about Pastor Li De Xian. Just as Pastor Li De Xian began his sermon, the doors of the house church burst open. Armed officers of the Chinese Public Security Bureau poured into the room, threatening everyone present and grabbing Li to arrest him. “Wait, please allow me to grab my bag.” As always, the pastor's tone with the officers was polite yet firm. The officers were surprised at the request. “What's in there?” they demanded, grabbing the black zippered bag. Held ripping it open, the bag contained a blanket and a spare change of clothes. Li told them because he had been expecting to be arrested that day, he packed this bag. Pastor Li had been arrested many times. Twice police had beaten him to the point where he vomited blood and one time Li's face was beaten with his own Bible. Lee was warned that police were watching the village where he held his Tuesday meetings. He knew if he showed up to preach, he would be in prison. Today, Chinese citizens can be sent to labor camps for up to three years without a formal trial. The risks were great, but Li's bag was packed. More than having a bag packed, though, he had his mind and heart prepared. He was willing to pay any cost to preach the gospel, to be a part of the purpose, to be in the mission with God. He was convinced God would care for him, even in prison.

Maybe you've heard also of Rachel Scott. Rachel Scott lost all her friends at school; when she began to walk the talk of her Christian faith, they began to make fun of her. Rachel's journal entries showed her disappointment that the very people to whom she wanted to show Christ's love turned away from her, but she wouldn't give in.

"I'm not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus," she said. "I will take it. If my friends have to become my enemies for me to be with my best friend, Jesus, then that's fine with me. I always knew being a Christian means having enemies, but I never thought that my friends were going to be those enemies." Rachel was a student at Columbine High School on the day two students opened fire in the school. One gunman asked her if she still believed in God. She looked at him in the eye and said she still believed. He asked her why, but he didn't let her answer before killing her. Rachel Scott passed her test, and because she did, her light, reached beyond her school to around the world. Long before the test came, Rachel expressed her willingness to give her all for Christ. The words from her journal written exactly one year before her death, tell about her commitment. "I am not going to hide the light that God has put into me. If I have to sacrifice everything I will." God is calling us to be among the faithful in following him.

[Song *Faithful Men* plays.]

In the call to follow Christ, there's a purpose. God has deep meaning for us. He wants us to be involved in his work here on the Earth. We're literally the living body of Christ, and we hold in ourselves the message of life. We hold out the word of life to those around us. We've been given the Ministry of Reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. There's a purpose in it. There's a peace in it, friends. There's a supernatural peace available only to the people of God. A friend of mine says it's a precious experience a Christian enjoys – the peace that passes all understanding. There's a purpose, there's a peace, and there's a price for everyone who follows Christ. Jesus guarantees it. There will be some sort of sacrifices. There will be prices that have to be paid along the way. But he assures us that he is worthy and that it's worth it. And he assures us at the end there will be a prize for those that are faithful. There will be a prize for those that are faithful. The Apostle Paul said, "Now is in store for me, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day." Jesus said in Matthew 19:28-29,

Truly, I tell you at the renewal of all things when the son of man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on the twelve thrones judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel and everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

And then, he said, "Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first." God is the ultimate judge of all things, and in the end he will dole out the rewards and the prizes to those deserving, and he will also judge the world and judge individuals and cast some away from his presence into eternal condemnation. He did not come into the world to condemn the world. The Bible says it all stands condemned already. He came to save the world. Salvation is found and no one else. There's no other name under Heaven given among men by which we can or must be saved. Jesus Christ is the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through him. All of creation is pointing towards him. He's the alpha, the omega, the beginning, the end, the firstborn over all creation. All things were created by him and for him, and his message still goes out to anyone who will listen today. "Follow me. Come to me. I'll give you purpose. I'll give you peace. There will be a price to pay. You'll have to sacrifice. I bid you to come and die to yourself. Be crucified with me so that you might live with me forever."

Do you sense the spirit of God calling you today to follow him more closely, to walk more closely with him? I sure hope you do, friends. We need more and more people who will take up their cross and follow him. The call to follow Christ is still going out loud and clear today. Sometimes it's a gentle and quiet voice. At other times we hear it deep, calling within our spirit. I hope you'll respond to his call today. Join him in his purpose. Grow in his peace. Pay the price that's asked so you yourself can receive the prize that's awaiting you. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this chance to look into your word and encourage each other as we listen to your teaching to us, your call to us. Help us have ears to hear. Help us have a willing heart to want to respond to follow you. Thank you for teaching us. Thank you for instructing us. Thank you for giving us your word and your holy spirit from which we can learn and listen to. Continue to minister to us as we now sit before you, listening and worshiping you in our hearts. Help us follow you wholeheartedly. Seal our hearts to you. Bind our wandering hearts to you. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.