“Follow me” series

Week 4: A Greater Purpose

November 22, 2026

Luke 5:4 When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” 5 Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Introduction

- If you grew up in church, you are familiar with Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus.
- After Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven, Peter became one of the leaders in the early church.
- It was Peter who preached in front of many a little over a month after Jesus had left leading to thousands becoming followers of Jesus.
- It was Peter who healed a lame man that caused such a stir that he got arrested by the same people who had arrested and killed Jesus.
- Later, after being released, he was arrested again and this time warned off and beaten before being released.
- Peter is used by God 4-5 years later when he is the instrument that God uses to bring salvation and the Holy Spirit to Gentiles. He is put in an awkward position to not only be with Gentiles, but then to defend what God was doing to other Jesus-followers who did not understand.
- It only got more difficult. Peter is arrested again several years later and sentenced to death by Herod Agrippa. It was only miraculous intervention by God through an angel that sets Peter free and he has to run for his life.
- It is 5-10 years later we see him back in Jerusalem for a council and in conflict with the apostle Paul where Peter had to admit that he was in the wrong.
- In the decade that followed, Peter had to leave Jerusalem again and traveled far from home telling people about Jesus. He ended up writing letters of which we have two, and we know he wrote them from a place far from home, probably Rome.
- Within 2-4 years of writing these letters, Peter was arrested by the emperor Nero. While confined, they led even more people to be followers of Jesus. Eventually they got so frustrated that they whipped him severely and crucified Peter, as his request, upside down, because he was not worthy to be crucified in the same way Jesus was.

- We are in a series called “Follow me.” We are examining the great invitation of Jesus to follow him. He never invited people to simply intellectually believe in him or to become religious people. He invites people to follow him. The last two weeks we examined the two pieces of how we do that.
- Jesus said to follow him is deny ourselves, to put God’s priorities first and to take up our cross, which is to leverage our very lives for the benefit of others.
- We understand what Jesus is asking.
- We realize that to truly follow him means letting go. It means surrendering. It means dying to myself.

Main Sermon Text

- And then we read about someone like Peter. A life of change he did not ask for. A life filled with both victories AND suffering. A life with miracles AND conflict. A life that included prison and a life that ended in a horrible and painful death!
- The question is simply, why? What made this worth doing? Why would Peter leave his business, his livelihood, devote 30 years to a life that most certainly affected his family, and involved dying like this?
- What makes following Jesus, denying ourselves and picking up our cross worth it?
- The last two weeks have been convicting. Heavy. Forced to confront, if we are willing, the parts of our lives that we have been holding onto and denying Jesus instead of denying ourselves.
- If you recall, we finished our teaching time last week with a quote:
- *"Your glory is too small a thing to live for."*
- What I want to unpack today, is that when we decide to follow Jesus, he gives us something that is worth living and dying for.

- Peter would have traced his entire life's journey to a specific event.
- Fishing was Peter's occupation and skillset. He and his brothers and business partners were cleaning up after a night's very unsuccessful fishing venture. Fisherman at that time fished at night because they used nets and the fish came into the shallows to chase after the minnows and such after dark. During the day, the fish went deep.
- The nets were fiber that had to be cared for or they would rot away. So after working all night, but before going home, they had to clean the nets.
- Jesus was teaching nearby and because of the crowds, he needed space and the ability to speak to all of them, so he asked to use the boat a little ways out from the beach to speak.
- Peter cleaned nets. Jesus taught.

4 When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

- You may have heard how ridiculous this advice is. Take the nets you just cleaned. Go out, tired as you are from a night of fishing when all you want to do is probably sleep, during the day, deep where the fish are so far below the reach of your nets that they will never come up, and begin fishing

5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

- It helps to realize that this was not Peter's first interaction with Jesus. He had seen him teach. The gospel timeline indicates that he had probably even seen first hand or heard directly about some of Jesus' early miracles. So even though this makes no sense, he obeys this rabbi.

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

- More fish than they could get. A bigger catch of fish than any he had ever received.
- Peter is overwhelmed, but his reaction may seem a bit odd.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

- Then he says, in one profound invitation, what changes the rest of Peter's life.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

- This whole scene is loaded with things that happened that apply to you and I, so let's pull it apart in two sections. What exactly did Jesus do? What is this invitation and its connection to me? Second, how did Peter respond and what is the connection to our response?

I. Jesus invites us to a new mission greater than ourselves.

10 Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

- From now on. . . there is a shift, a change.
- From this point forward, the whole orientation of your life is different.
- Even though you are not everything you want or need to be, I will work with you.
- I will take you as you are, but I am going to lead you into something new and better.
- Your purpose is no longer yourself. Up until now, you have fished, worked and simply tried to make your way in the world. You tried to be a good person, provide for your family, and be relatively comfortable.
- I am giving you something to live for that is so much larger.
- Peter, before, your purpose in life was you and your family. I am expanding this to be so much bigger.
- When Jesus invites you and I to follow him, he is inviting us into something so much bigger than us.
- It meant that the priority of Peter's life was seeing people know Jesus. It was to know Jesus better and help others find the same.
- Jesus is inviting you into something bigger and better than yourself. You see, if we accept his invitation to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow him, then our lives will have meaning.
- It brings value and meaning to life. When my life's meaning is wrapped up in accomplishing more at my job, making more money, enjoying my recreation, pouring into family, then while some of that is valuable, it is limited.
- Jesus said that when one person comes to know Jesus that did know him before, all of heaven rejoices.
- Jesus was filled with joy when the disciples exercised kingdom authority in teaching and praying over people, driving out demons and seeing people healed.
- Jesus said that those who love him act on the things he leads them to do.
- So let me ask you: "Has heaven rejoiced over your life in the past month?"
- The invitation is the same for us. When we deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow him, we are putting the kingdom of God at the center of all we say and do.
- This is not some invitation for everyone to follow him to become full time pastors or something like that.

A. Jesus began where Peter was at.

- It is easy to dismiss this but notice that Jesus started where Peter was at.
- He came where Peter was. He climbed into Peter's boat. He engaged and got his attention through Peter's occupation.
- Jesus invaded Peter's world.
- God's invitation for you to follow him always begins right where you are at. At your job. In your neighborhood. In your current activities and responsibilities.
- Jesus is not calling us to clean ourselves up before following him. He is not asking us to change careers before following him. He is not looking for us change before we follow.

- Wherever you are today, whatever your past, whatever your baggage. Whatever your accomplishments and talents are. Jesus' invitation to follow begins there. Of course, it doesn't end there.

B. Jesus dealt with Peter's guilt and shame

- After they had this huge catch of fish, Peter's first reaction is interesting. He doesn't jump and down and celebrate. He goes directly to Jesus and tells him to go away. Not "stay and do this again." Not "let's have a party to celebrate." But I am sinful. You need to leave.
- He was overwhelmed with the power and the holiness of Jesus. He saw his own unbelief. His own sin. He realized that Jesus was so much more than a rabbi.
- He was overwhelmed to the point where just being around Jesus highlighted the gap between his life and Jesus. In fact, he is fearful. He is terrified of Jesus or what Jesus might do.

10 Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid"

- Don't be afraid. It's OK. What you are feeling is fine, but you don't need to stay in that space. Trust me.
- It is easy to dismiss this invitation when we feel unworthy, or incapable of following him.
- That's the beauty of Jesus' invitation. He asks us to confess, repent and give up our guilt and shame to him. We don't need to live with that burden. When we accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, he takes that off of us.
- Our sins do not disqualify from serving. He forgives our sins and deals with our past. But he also changes our future.

C. Jesus gave Peter a new identity

- Jesus chose Simon Peter's boat. Have you ever considered that Jesus had waited from eternity for Simon to be born & grow up, and get to this day. Jesus had always known him, but the moment of when he would invite him had finally come.
- John records an interesting tidbit that Luke does not.

John 1:40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

- When Jesus called Peter, he gave him a new name. A name the defined the man he was going to become.
- The same is true of us. When we choose to follow Jesus, we are a new creation. Our old self is done away with. We are part of God's family. He considers us his children.
- Our identity is secure in Christ and the expectations and privileges are raised.

II. We must respond to the invitation.

- Peter was not passive in this whole situation. While Jesus was the initiator, Peter responded. It gives us a picture of what accepting Christ's invitation looks like.

A. Peter let Jesus into his space.

- He let Jesus use his boat.
- He listened to Jesus teach. He didn't have to do any of this.
- I wonder if we will let Jesus into our spaces? To our families, our jobs, our retirement?

B. Peter listened and trusted Jesus enough to submit.

- It began with the instruction to go catch fish.
- It was a command that was counter intuitive. It was foolish. It was a waste of time and effort. It would make their life more difficult.
- It is going to take hours to row back out in the heat of the day to do this.
- I am exhausted already. My arms and back are sore. My wife is waiting at home. I'm hungry and tired.
- I'm going to have to re-wash the nets. I'm the expert Jesus, you are not.
- Yet he trusted Jesus enough to do it. He didn't know there was going to be this amazing catch of fish. He had no clue about the results of his obedience.
- He took a faith filled risk.
- Denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus will always have times that feel risky. Where we are invited into what seems foolish. That goes against conventional wisdom. That feels inconvenient and takes time and energy.
- Don' kid yourself – if following Jesus never costs you anything, you are probably not following him. Peter listened and trusted Jesus enough to obey.
- He recognized something really important. Jesus has the right and the authority to ask us to follow him.
- When our politicians ask us to listen and do what they tell us to, when our teachers try to instruct us, when our bosses tell us what to do, we sometimes do it because we have to. Other times we make them earn it over time. Or we simply don't follow because we don't want to.
- Jesus, the Lord and creator of the universe, the king of all, the one who without you would cease to breathe, who died on your behalf, has the RIGHT and the AUTHORITY to ask you to follow. His position demands it and his actions prove it out.

C. Peter moved from knowing about Jesus to following Jesus.

- Jesus called Peter from what he knew into what he did not know (fishing to fishing for men)
- As we said earlier, Peter was already familiar with Jesus. He knew he was a rabbi. He had heard his teaching. He had witnessed or heard about some of Jesus' early miracles.
- He had some level of knowledge about Jesus.
- What changed was that he went from knowing about Jesus to following him.
- The invitation of Jesus is an invitation, not just to have knowledge about him, but to follow him. Many people sit in churches today, having heard about Jesus, listened to sermons about him and how to live, and done religious things, but have never moved from this to following him.
- Without Jesus, I would still be working for a company somewhere, making money and trying to find meaning through buying and doing stuff.
- Without Jesus, my marriage and family would not be what it is today.
- Without Jesus, I would be reaching this stage in my life and asking, "What's the point?"
- Without Jesus, when I die my life would be over, and worth nothing, forgotten forever in a couple of years.

Conclusion

- The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to the kingdom of God. We are going to explore this more in a few weeks, we adopt God's WHY and WHEN.
- He calls us to give him our lives and leverage them for others. To pursue God to know him and let others know. God's why is always wrapped up in people. Love God with all your heart, soul mind and strength. Love your neighbor the way you love yourself, making disciples.

- That's the why. The when is now! Not later. Not when your kids are grown. Not after this busy season at work. Not when you are out of school. Today. In all things.
- What changes day to day for us is the WHERE / WHAT / HOW / WHO. Your job, your talents, your skills, your experience, your location, your relationships, are all unique to you.
- When you choose to follow him, he will lead you into these things day by day.
- It will be an uneven journey – you will get it right and you will get it wrong. You will follow well and it will sometimes you will blow it. But that's ok. The invitation is to just keep following.
- Consider the ups and downs of Peter's journey.
- He followed Jesus from this point forward. He got to participate in some of the inner circle doings of Jesus. He was one of three who saw Jesus raise a little girl from the dead.
- He was sent out by Jesus and was able to cast our demons and heal the sick.
- He was one of three disciples who saw Jesus transfigured in all his glory.
- Peter got to walk on water.
- Peter was the one who first declared Jesus as king and Messiah.
- Peter was also the one who sank in the waves.
- He was the one that Jesus rebuked strongly.
- He was the disciple that completely failed Jesus and denied knowing him at the end of Jesus' life.
- Yet he never stopped following Jesus.
- It began with a miraculous catch of fish. It ended with a life that led to thousands of people coming into a relationship with Jesus, with Gentiles being exposed to the good news about Jesus, and experiencing the power of God in his life.
- Following Jesus gave his life meaning. It gave his actions value. It gave him direction. And his life had an eternal legacy.
- *"Your glory is too small a thing to live for."*
- But to live for the glory of God? That's amazing. It changes everything. When we follow Jesus, he gives us a greater purpose. His purpose. And it makes denying ourselves and picking up our cross totally worth it.
- The invitation is to follow Jesus. When we do, heaven celebrates.