

Russell Kelfer

Follow Me!

973-B

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Follow Me!

Father this morning we praise You,

We love You and we thank You for all You are doing for us. We praise You and thank You for all you are doing in us. We pray that this hour Jesus might be exalted and no one else.

Amen

THE NEXT STEP

The stage is set for the next great event in the life of God on earth. Our Lord has emerged triumphantly from His encounter with the enemy in the wilderness and is now prepared for His ministry on earth. He has been baptized by John the Baptist, whose eyes have been opened to see that this man, Jesus, was indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. So in awe is this man, John, of who Jesus is, that each time the Master passes by, the Baptist announces again with unparalleled excitement, "Behold the Lamb!" The stage has thus been set. The props are in place. The curtain goes up on the drama of the ages, and God, clothed in the body of our humanity, prepares to demonstrate once again how God behaves on planet earth.

The task that faced Him would seem to the human mind insurmountable. The carpenter's son, this one so seemingly untrained in the skills of management and organization and so unaccepted by the electorate at large, has three brief years to put together a team of men whose ministry it would be to change the world. They must have unparalleled commitment. They must have unwavering loyalty. They must have an undying vision of what He was trying to do. Or must they? What must they have to qualify for this, the spiritual Olympics of all eternity? What is God looking for in a man or woman that sets them apart as the ones He can use? It is that question, among others, that we explore in this study as we envision now the next step in Jesus' pilgrimage on planet earth.

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We take up reading where we left off in our last lesson as John the Baptist seeing Jesus once again, proclaims once again who He is. And two of John's faithful followers turn at once and leave the "way-maker" to follow the "Way" instead. Our Scripture, then, takes up in John 1:35,

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;
And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the
Lamb of God!

And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed
Jesus.

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith
unto them, What seek ye? [What are you looking for?] They
said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted,
Master,) where dwellest thou? [Where do you live?]

He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw
where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was
about the tenth hour.

One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him,
was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him,
We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the
Christ.

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him,
he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be
called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and
findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have
found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets,
did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. [He's the
one!]

And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing
come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him,
Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?
[How'd you know me?] Jesus answered and said unto him,
Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig
tree, I saw thee.

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Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

(John 1:35-51)

This is hardly what you would call a professional talent search. You and I would have rented an office in downtown Jerusalem, run ads in the "Hebrew Herald" and interviewed every prospect in the country before we settled on a team. We would have wanted a resume, a look at their religious training and, in all likelihood, would have come out with twelve losers. We would have employed the world's psychology and used the world's methodology and would have missed the entire point of it all.

God wasn't looking for talent. IBM wouldn't have given these guys a second interview. He wasn't looking for intellect. These men were, at best, possessors of average I.Q.'s. He wasn't looking for religious training. These weren't the theological heavy hitters of their day. He certainly wasn't looking to put together a team of already established, politically visible men. To the religious elite of their day, these were nobodies. It almost looks as if God went out of His way to choose a team that could not be noted for its expertise. Well, not almost. He did. His heart was set on choosing a cross-section of mankind that *apart from a miracle*, possessed absolutely no potential to change the world. Otherwise, He would have been noted for His abilities as a talent scout, not for His supernatural grace to change the lives of men. You say why? Glad you asked! Turn to I Corinthians 1,

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

And base things of the world, and things which are despised,

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hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

That no flesh should glory in his presence.

(1 Corinthians 1:25-29)

God was and is looking for men and women who do not in and of themselves qualify for greatness. He wants to implant in their spirits through His Holy Spirit, the ingredients for greatness and so design those ingredients that they, when brought to fruition, can only bring glory to God. So the next step in God's ministry on earth was to call out a team with which to reach the world. God, as always, was marching to the beat of a different drummer. His ways are higher than ours.

WHAT SEEK YE?

The story begins the very next day after John answered the inquiring Jews' question about who he was. As it turned out, he was standing with two of his disciples, one of whom was a man named Andrew. This man Andrew was destined for greatness. His name would be emblazoned forever on the pages of history, not for the size of the crowds he preached to, but because the very minute he met Jesus, he ran and got his brother. And he brought his brother to Jesus. What a beautiful phrase. That brother turned out to be one of the most influential men of God in history, the apostle Peter.

I cannot imagine how those two disciples must have felt when John the Baptist first acknowledged who Jesus was. I do not believe they turned and left John with ungrateful hearts. I do not believe it was as though they had found something better and abandoned John. No, I believe that John had done his job so well that the only thing that would satisfy John's heart was for those he gave his life to, to meet Jesus at last. I think he had programmed them to look for and follow the Messiah once He came.

The interesting thing was that all they did was hear The Truth. That was enough. As John spoke, they knew that there resided within Jesus' spirit, something more than the heart of a great man. There stood before them The Lamb of God. The Coming One had come! It reads:

And the two disciples heard him (John) speak, and they followed Jesus.

(John 1:37)

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Do you see the value of the Word of God? When men hear who He is, they follow Jesus.

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? [What are you after? What are you looking for?]
(John 1:38a)

Jesus was and is forever asking that question. He wants to know why men follow Him. If they are looking for miracles to satisfy their lust for excitement, He wants to know. If they are looking for a way out of their problems, He wants to know. If they are looking for a way to get spiritual security without giving up anything to get it, He wants to know. Mainly, if they are looking for a Savior, He wants to know.

The disciples answered: "Rabbi (or Master), where do You live?" In other words, they were saying, "We want to spend time in Your presence until we know who You are. How can we do that?" Jesus answered, "Come and see." They spent time with Jesus and came away so excited that the first thing Andrew did was run and tell his brother, Simon. The Scripture says, Jesus beheld Simon. He took a good look, a deep look. The Master saw something when He looked into the eyes of that rugged fisherman that you and I would never have seen. He saw a rock. He saw a glint of what an impulsive loud-mouth could become when bathed in the Spirit of God. He saw a *potential for greatness*.

He did not judge the man by his credentials; he had none. He did not reject the man for his shortcomings, though he had many. He looked into the heart of the man who would one day curse and deny he even knew Jesus, and He saw a rock, a foundation stone. He saw a potentially immovable spirit that would stand against the enemy and bear the brunt of Satan's onslaughts with victory. He looked beyond the self-willed fool who would shout, "Lord, these other guys might let You down, but not me," and saw the heart of one who would one day pen the words,

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake:
(I Peter 2:13a)

Jesus looked beyond the petty arguments of one who would seemingly always want his way to the lips of one who would one day cry out,

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.
(I Peter 2:20)

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Patiently? This man hardly knew the meaning of the word. But, even on first contact, the Master saw a man who would one day come to pen,

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (1 Peter 1:6,7)

God looked at Simon Peter and saw the same thing He sees when He looks at you and me. He saw a rough-cut miracle in the making. He said,

Thou art Simon, son of Jona, thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a stone. (John 1:42c)

The very next day, Jesus is walking in Galilee. He comes across a man named Philip. He looks at Philip, turns around, begins to walk away and quietly says to this total stranger, "Follow Me." Philip not only follows Jesus, but also runs and gets Nathaniel and says, "We found Him! We found Him! The Messiah has come."

(John 1:43-45 author's paraphrase)

One thing ought to stand out already in this discipleship selection process that was going on in John 1. Jesus' method of calling each of these men was different. Two of them initiated the conversation. One of them was simply approached by Jesus. Two of them were approached by their peers *on behalf of Jesus*. His methods of calling men are as different as the men He calls. To try to clone either the men or their methods is to do our creative God a great injustice. God calls us each in a manner so unique that no one can patent the system and call it "God's Discipleship Method."

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No matter how He calls us, however, He is after the same thing. And in closing, it is that issue that must be addressed. What was this One they claimed to be the Chosen One asking them to do? That is the secret of the Christian faith. In essence, when all of our doctrinal differences have been added together and divided by God, they will be of inconsequential value. But what Jesus was asking these men to do was, in essence, everything.

When they asked if they could investigate just whether or not

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He was who He said He was, He lovingly invited them to “come and see.” This was to be no mystical club of spiritual secrets. This was to be the Kingdom of God and “whosoever will” was welcome. If you, even today, are wondering if indeed this man Jesus is the Messiah, He quietly invites you to come to Him and see for yourself.

But if the issue was to be discipleship, in two simple words Jesus wrapped up the entire subject in a cross-shaped box, tied a ribbon of grace around it and said, “Here is what I’m asking you to do. I am asking you to do only one thing, Follow Me.”

He looked at Philip, and without so much as an introduction, the eyes of God met Philip’s, and the lips of God gently uttered two words, “Follow Me.” No explanations. No promises. No limitations. No questions. This total stranger just heard Jesus speak, and it reads, “he followed Jesus.” Immediately, he turned his back on everything that had gone before and knowing nothing of what awaited him, except that the One who stood before him was God, he followed Him.

In Matthew chapter 9 a similar encounter clamors for our attention. It reads simply,

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.

(Matthew 9:9)

Matthew’s own testimony is startlingly simple. He was at his post, doing what he always did, performing a task quite lucrative, financially, but devastating morally, and Jesus happened to walk by. No questions were asked. No doctrinal statements were passed out. No sermons preached. No credentials discussed. Jesus simply looked into the eyes of the man who, in his own society, was known to be an extortioner, and said, “Follow Me.”

No clearer statement could be made anywhere of what it is God is asking man to do in order to become a disciple. There is, I believe, simply by doing a brief study of that one phrase, enough insight into the purpose of God for each of us to adequately assess our willingness to do what God is calling us to do.

First of all, He is asking us to be willing to start life over. He is not interviewing us with an eye to using our experiences and credentials as a base for our discipleship. He is rather, looking for a vessel that He can empty and fill with Himself. In Luke 9:57-62,

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we have God's explanation of that principle.

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath no where to lay his head.

And He said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

(Luke 9:57-62)

“Lord, I will follow Thee,” they all exclaimed, “*as soon as I tend to some unfinished business.*” Jesus knew better than that. He knew man better than that. If they were ever going to follow Him, they would follow Him now...when they were face-to-face with who He was. If, like the first man, they were just curious over how He lived His life, they would never make it as a disciple. If they were willing to follow Him, but only after finishing the things this world thought were essential, they would procrastinate beyond hope. If they were willing to follow Him, but not until they had said their good-byes to the world, they would never follow Him, because the world is like flypaper when you try to tell it good-bye. “No,” Jesus was saying, “I am calling you to start a whole new life, not a new chapter in your old one. Bury the past, forget your good-byes, just follow Me.”

And He asks you to come with no preconceived plans as to how it will all turn out. In John 21. we read of Jesus, in His final hours with His disciples, making this statement,

This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow Me.

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

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Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. (John 21:19-22)

Jesus said, “Simon, don’t start worrying about the discipleship equal rights amendment. I will do what I please with you, and I will do what I please with John. Just follow Me.”

To follow Jesus, then, is to simply place your feet in His feet and let Him walk where He wants to walk. To follow Jesus, then, is to place your hands in His hands and let Him lead you where He wants you to go. To follow Jesus, then, is to let the dead bury their dead and let the living follow their pursuits as they choose, but as for you and your house, you only have one goal left in life and that is to follow Him.

Following means total abandonment of what you intended to become, total abandonment of what you intended to own, total abandonment of what you intended to accomplish. It means death. It means, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross every day and follow Me.

Even this moment, Jesus is passing by. He is not looking for men and women of great stature, nor is He looking for men and women who have already established their claim to success, though He will not pass you by should that be true. He is simply looking for men and women who, willing to forsake all that they have, will, like Philip, quietly turn, just upon hearing His gentle voice and simply...follow Him.

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Quietly the Master calls;
He says, “Today’s the day.
I know it won’t be easy;
But there is no other way.

“If truly, My disciple
Is what you want to be,
Right now, Beloved, turn around,
And simply follow Me.

“You know not where we’re going,
Nor what’s in store for you.
You know not but a Cross awaits,
Before your journey’s through.

Follow Me!

“There could be pain and suffering;
Though now you cannot see.
There will, however, be a crown,
If you’ll just follow Me.

“I care not for credentials,”
The Master’s heard to cry,
“I only ask that those who come,
Come willing but to die.

“To die to self, and all self holds,
And let Me set them free,
For all I ask of any man
Is that he...follow Me.”

Our Father,

The sheer simplicity of it so often stumbles us. You really are not asking us to come with great plans or great talent or great abilities. You haven’t called us because of our greatness; You’ve called us because of Yours. What You ask us to do is just to quietly stop what we are doing, stand up, turn around and follow You. Some of us here today, Father, have forgotten where we are going. We started to follow You and then we began charting our own course, making our own way, and we think we are disciples. This morning may we stop and kneel once again at the feet of our Master, and, once again, quietly hear the one commandment He gives to each of us, “Just follow Me,” and may we rise and do just that.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.

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