

## **“More than a Believer” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 3 – June 26, 2022**

- I. **Luke 9:59 - Jesus said, “Follow Me.”.**
- II. **The Northwest District Convention was held two weeks ago.**
  - a. We spent three days going over a number of business items, including the many activities going on in our District of Alaska, Washington, Idaho, and Oregon.
    - i. One of the keynote speakers was David Kinnaman, who is the CEO of the Barna Group – which does a lot of research and surveys to see how Christianity is going in our country and world.
    - ii. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock recently wrote a book that was discussed over many hours at the convention called, “Faith for Exiles”.
      1. The authors looked at what separates young people who grew up in church and remain actively engaged in their faith... and those who are no longer committed to core Christian beliefs and behaviors.
  - b. As I watched all the graphs, something really grabbed me about kids who grew up as Christians who are now aged 18-29:
    - i. One group was called “habitual churchgoers” (38%)
    - ii. The other group were called “resilient disciples” (10%)
  - c. Habitual Churchgoers were somewhat connected to church... going on average once per month (I guess that’s habitual by today’s standards!)
    - i. They did not really care too much about... or stick with... the basic principles of the faith (like reading the Bible, sharing Jesus, or even believing the Bible is inerrant and inspired.)
    - ii. These young people were about half as likely to have a joyful relationship with Jesus, a solid prayer life, and say that God impacts the way they live their daily life.
  - d. Resilient Disciples were a lot like the Habitual Churchgoers... except they stayed committed to core principles of the faith, experience far greater joy and intimacy with Jesus.
    - i. Here’s the main differences though –
      1. Resilient Disciples attend church AND engage with their church outside of worship
      2. They trust firmly in the authority of the Bible
      3. They are committed to Jesus personally and affirm that He died and rose again to conquer sin and death.
      4. Finally, they want their faith to make a difference in the world.
  - e. Compared to those that simply attend church, “resilient disciples” are far more likely to say that God works throughout all their lives, and they want others to receive that blessing too. <sup>1</sup>

- f. There is much more I can say about this book, but it made me wonder how many of us older adults are in the category of “Resilient Disciples”...

III. **Jesus is on a mission in our Gospel reading today.**

- a. He has revealed to His disciples that He is the Messiah, and they have seen with their own eyes the many miracles and healings.
- b. However, time is growing short for Jesus to stay with them in person.
  - i. He keeps telling them that He will be betrayed and to be prepared for bad things to come... but they don't quite understand fully.
  - ii. Yet, Jesus knows the time is short, so He even reaches into the Samaritan villages – or the people who Jews despised.
    1. What was the response from these Samaritans? They rejected the message of salvation.
    2. The disciples were indignant... how in the world could they be so bold to reject Jesus when He is doing them a big favor by just getting near them!
    3. But rather than destroying them, Jesus moves on...
- c. A random person says they will follow Him wherever He goes... and Jesus responds with a warning – “you want to follow Me and I don't even have a place to stay... you should count the cost before you are so bold.”
- d. The second two people are chosen by Jesus – “Follow Me,” He says...
- e. Then comes the word... the exception... the “hold on a minute”... the “okay, BUT.”
  - i. But, I'm almost done with...
  - ii. But, I don't know if...
  - iii. But, I just have to...
  - iv. But.
- f. An important point to what Jesus is calling people to do is a radical giving up of things that might get in the way of following Him.
  - i. The cost is high – maybe we don't have a place to sleep... maybe we cannot bury our loved one... maybe we don't get a chance to have a proper goodbye.
  - ii. We are called to look ahead at what Jesus puts before us... not behind, or put a “but” in the process.
- g. In chapter 8, as Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower, He says that some seeds of faith fall among weeds that grow up and choke it out...
  - i. The worries and cares of this world will often cause us to say, “Yes Lord, but...”

IV. **You see, believing in Christ is also “doing”**

- a. It concerns me greatly when people say they are a Christian (which the very name means, “follower of Christ”) and they don't know the Bible, attend church, or live out their faith in any outward way.

- b. But it also concerns me greatly when people come to church (Habitual Churchgoers) all the time, but don't know the Bible or live out their faith in any outward way.
  - c. C.S. Lewis writes in Mere Christianity, "if what you call your 'faith' in Christ does not involve taking the slightest notice of what He says, then it is not Faith at all—not faith or trust in Him..."<sup>2</sup>
- V. **The remedy to the "buts"** and lack of following Jesus is found in the Word.
- a. I know, I know, you hear it all the time – but the Word of God is the living and active way that God reveals Himself to us and opens our hearts to follow Him wherever He leads!
  - b. The Word is the promises, the truth, and the place where the Holy Spirit is actively in our hearts.
    - i. The Word shapes us and opens our minds to our true calling – disciples – followers of Christ.
  - c. Jesus is the very one who went first so that we could follow.
    - i. Jesus leads us through the valley of the shadow of death... He guides us by being the first to go through it and win!
    - ii. He would never ask us to bear a cross or experience things that were not part of His own trials or human experience – which is why He became human.
    - iii. Without Him leading the way to the cross, giving His life to free us from our sin and brokenness – we would forever be wandering in darkness.
    - iv. Without Him leading the way to the grave and the empty tomb, we would have no hope to follow Him anywhere.
    - v. Our Jesus is worthy to follow because He gave everything up for us – including His own life.
  - d. I will gladly follow a leader who would never ask me to do anything He didn't already do... or was willing to do himself.... And Jesus is that Leader.
- VI. **I invite you to take a journey through the Word of God this summer**...
- a. Begin by reading in the Gospel of Luke and if you get through that, start in on Acts.
  - b. As you read the Word, pay special attention to the places Jesus calls on us to listen, obey, or follow...
  - c. Open your own heart to the ways that God has called you to follow Jesus in your vocation...
    - i. You are a son/daughter, husband/wife, father/ mother grandfather/grandmother, retired, employed, widow/widower... all vocations to follow Christ and proclaim Him to others.
  - d. We each have a chance to proclaim the kingdom of God by our work in the world – and that work is multiplied greatly as we join together as the Church.

e. We are saved by grace through faith, and our gift of salvation makes us more than believers, but also hearers and doers of the Word. Amen

<sup>1</sup> David Kinnaman & Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Baker Books, 2019), pp. 42-44

<sup>2</sup> "Mere Christianity", copyright © 1952, C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. Copyright renewed © 1980, C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd.