

Following the Life Giver

by Peter Maiden

To follow the life giver is to listen, obey, die, and surrender to God, resulting in a life of fruitfulness and service to others.

Duration: 31:37

Scripture: Jonah 1:1-2, Matthew 4:19, John 4:39, John 6:38, John 7:38, John 10:27, Acts 2:41

Topics: "Following Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of following Jesus as the life giver. He begins by highlighting the individual responsibility we have to make the decision to follow Jesus. The speaker references John 10:27, where Jesus says that his sheep listen to his voice and follow him. He also mentions the story of Peter and John in John's Gospel, emphasizing that following Jesus is a personal commitment and should not be influenced by what others do. The speaker challenges the audience to prioritize listening to God and to be obedient to his commands, using the example of Jonah who initially ran away from God's call.

Transcript

Our subject tonight is following the life giver and I'd like to invite you to stand to your feet and we're going to pray together. Let's just stand and we'll pray. Father we thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ rose again to set men free, free to follow, free to love, free to obey and Lord we pray that in these final few moments of our day together you will teach us more of what it means to follow you in 1988.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen. Now I just have one verse as a text tonight and that is the 10th chapter of John's Gospel and verse 27 the words of the Lord Jesus my sheep listen to my voice and they follow me.

My sheep listen to my voice and they follow me. You know the world doesn't like this idea that through Jesus Christ we have found new life and new freedom. I don't know whether you've been following the very interesting articles in the Sunday Times in recent weeks triggered off by a lady called Ellen Pennington.

She wrote to the newspaper says the editor in bewildered despair about her son Mark and I quote from her letter he was brought up in easygoing tolerance by agnostic parents but he has rejected University and become a born-again Christian. He's attending a Bible college, he's believing literally in every word in the

Bible. Ellen Pennington went on to write to the editor if only he'd taken up drugs or glue sniffing or gambling or almost any sexual deviation I would have understood any of that anything but this piggish Bible bashing.

The commentator goes on to state born-again Christians are flourishing and she's being very very arrogant as she writes. She says they write a tireless length these born Christians their letters are filled with warm sympathy and constructive counseling and later on she mocks the certainty and the assurance of these born-again Christians. People don't like it the idea that we have found new life new freedom in Jesus Christ.

However the writer of that article had to go on later to state the following one mother of two sons who both got hooked she means converted after graduating cheerfully reported to me my sons are both married they're extremely happy they're actually working as evangelists and as for the money well God their mother added does seem somehow to provide. One previously skeptical father had ended joining the church himself and wrote to the editor of the Times before we had thought that the church was the refuge of the craven and the socially inept but now through the lives of our sons we've come to Christ ourselves. It's been a very interesting series of letters and as I've read these letters and noted the skepticism and the cynicism of so many against those who claim to have found life through the life giver.

I've realized again how my life how your life is so crucial in this skeptical sneering world in which we live. If we are to have any credibility in our witness as Christians it's got to be more than our words of testimony it's got to be our life of testimony. Coming to the life giver is something which can be done in a moment but following the life giver is the task of a lifetime and it's that I want us to consider just for 20 minutes or so this evening.

I want us to look at the characteristics of those who follow the life giver and I read to you from John 10 and verse 27 that's where we'll begin. My sheep said Jesus listen to my voice and they follow me. Two characteristics then of true Christians two characteristics of disciples of Jesus.

Number one they listen. Number two they follow. It's interesting isn't it? The first characteristic of the followers of Jesus is that they are listeners.

Not that they're witnesses not that they're dynamic activists for the kingdom of God but that they're willing to get down to that quiet activity often though not always carried on in private. That activity of listening. Do you remember what happened when the Lord appeared to that depressed prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19? He spent a night in a cave on Mount Horeb the mountain of God and the word of the Lord came to him.

This is 1 Kings 19 and verse 9. What are you doing here Elijah? And you'll remember Elijah's reply. I've been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty but the Israelites have rejected your covenant. They've broken down your altars.

They've put your prophets to death with the sword and I only I am left and now they're trying to kill me too. Elijah of course was desperately deceived and his deception could have had very serious consequences both in his own life and in the nation of Israel. Elijah needed to hear a word from God.

He needed a corrective word to get him back onto the right path of truly following God. So we read in verse 11. The Lord said to him go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord because the Lord is about to pass by.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart, shattered the rocks before the Lord and you can imagine Elijah this must be God. This must be his voice but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake but the Lord wasn't in that earthquake.

After the earthquake there was a fire but the Lord wasn't in the fire and after the fire there came a gentle whisper and it was then that Elijah heard his corrective word. Go back Elijah to the way from which you have come. I wonder tonight have you learned in your life to recognize that still small voice of God because listening, listening is the primary qualification of the man or the woman who would be a follower of the life giver.

A disciple is a follower. A Christian disciple is a follower of Jesus but how can we follow him? That was one of the questions of the disciples. Jesus said to them where I am going you cannot follow and they were confused by that but although we can't follow Jesus to heaven yet Jesus is speaking to us.

He is instructing us. He is commanding us. Sometimes he is correcting us but are we listening to Jesus? My sheep hear my voice.

Now to be a good listener requires at least two things. It requires time and it requires concentration. You ever had the experience of talking to someone you knew was in a desperate hurry? You have the impression he just couldn't wait to get rid of you.

He couldn't wait just to get on with the really important business. Have you ever had the experience of talking to a person who I call a butterfly character? As you share your need or your blessing or your problem with him his eyes are everywhere. It's obvious his concentration is flitting around from one thing to the next.

If you're anything like me when you find yourself talking to someone like that you don't have either the confidence or the desire to share very deeply with such people. You know if you really want to be a disciple of Jesus the first qualification I stress again is to listen to him and the first qualification if you're going to be a listener is quality time. Time which you can put aside to concentrate on listening to the voice of your shepherd.

You know after all the conferences and sermons and exhortations and books written on the quiet time most Christians still fail at this basic point of their walk with God and according to Alan Redpath even those who manage a regular quiet time often fail. This is what he writes, I sometimes wonder if our quiet times are not huge barriers that impede and hinder our spiritual growth. Why you may ask? Because says Redpath too often it's my thoughts, it's my words, it's my problems that dominate the tone of my prayers.

True prayer is first of all taking time to listen to God to be conscious of his presence and of his spirit in our lives. My sheep listen to my voice. But what's the point of listening if we don't follow? Hearing the command but not obeying.

Being hearers of the word but not doers. My sheep hear my voice and they follow. I wonder how many Jonah's we have in our audience tonight.

Do you remember Jonah 1 verses 1 and 2 the word of the Lord came to Jonah go to the great city of Nineveh and Jonah heard the voice of God he was listening but Jonah ran away from the Lord. Are you doing that tonight? You've heard his word you know his will yet you're refusing to obey or you rationalize of course how can you really be sure it's his will but deep down you know. What is it? What is it that you're

refusing to obey on? Is it a relationship? Is it some aspect of service in your church you're just not willing to get involved in? Some course of study you're not willing to commence or you're not willing to continue with? Some way in which the Lord wants you to use your money possibly? Your life giver is your Lord.

To accept his life is to accept his will for your life. My sheep not only listen to my voice says Jesus they follow. So here's our foundation.

Listening and following, hearing and obeying is the very basis of Christian discipleship. Now let's look at what this following will mean more specifically. If we're listening and if we're ready to obey what's it going to mean in our daily lives? Well secondly to follow the life giver is to choose the way of the cross.

To follow the life giver if you're listening to him your response will be to choose the way of the cross. In Luke 14 it's recorded that Jesus said to large crowds who were following him anyone who doesn't carry his cross and follow me can't be my disciple. You can imagine the image which came into the minds of the hearers as Jesus used that illustration.

It wasn't unusual really in this part of the world at that time in history for a man to be seen struggling through the streets of the major cities with a heavy wooden cross on his back. And the whole city would pause. There'd be a deathly hush.

Everyone would look towards the man with the cross on his back. They knew where he was going. He had a one-way ticket.

There was no return. The man was as good as dead. And Jesus says if you're going to follow me if you're going to listen and if you're going to obey you've got to take up that cross that symbol of death.

You know I believe it's hard for us to appreciate in the 20th century the kind of revolution that Jesus was calling for in that illustration. Many of our modern expressions for coming to Christ and for discipleship fall short utterly of expressing the revolution that Jesus was calling for. We talk about coming to Christ as if it's something you can take or leave.

We talk about making a commitment to Christ. I don't think phrases like that are really faithful to Scripture. We need something much more radical.

That's what Jesus is calling for through that illustration. And one way you can see how radical the commitment is that Jesus is calling for there is to look at the verse which precedes it in Luke 14. You'll know the verse well.

Jesus said if any of you from this big crowd that's following you come to me and you don't hate your father, your mother, your wife, your children, your brothers, your sisters, even your own life. You can't be my disciple. You know you and I cannot truly receive the life of the life giver unless death takes place.

What Jesus said of himself is true of each one of us. Unless a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it will remain alone. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit.

You know sometimes that means physical death. On Thursday night I came back from India. On Wednesday night I sat for three hours in Delhi with the widow of a 27 year old American who last September went out with Operation Mobilization to the great city of Delhi to reach Afghan people.

Refugees there with the gospel of Christ. Just married 18 months. Ten days ago he went to the doctor with a cold.

He's now with the Lord Jesus. Died of encephalitis and viral meningitis. At the memorial service on Wednesday 90 Afghan and Iranian people came and listened to the gospel of Christ.

Kim said to that crowd of people, Kim is the widow, you know if Ray and I were asked by God to come again to you with the message of Christ and we knew the consequences, she said I believe we'd come again. A corn of wheat has gone into the ground in Delhi and died. Look out for the church amongst the Afghan people there.

Because when a corn of wheat goes into the ground and dies, it will bear much fruit. You ready for the death sentence on your life? The death sentence on your plans, your goals, your needs, your desires. The death sentence on all of that so that the life of the life giver can flow through you and from you to those around you.

Listen to Paul, think of the fruitfulness of that one seed. He writes in 2nd Corinthians 4, we always carry in our bodies the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus sake so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

To follow the life giver is to learn to listen to him. It's to learn to obey him. It's to learn to die, to choose the way of the cross, to all of my petty ambitions and desires so that his life can be seen in me.

But then thirdly, and I'm using the words of the Lord Jesus throughout this message, thirdly, to follow the life giver is to leave your nets. To leave your nets. In Matthew 4, 19 and 20, the Lord is calling Simon Peter and his brother Andrew and we're told this, at once they left their nets and followed him.

That just takes my previous point a stage further. It's one particular aspect of our dying. These men left their livelihood.

They left their source of income. No doubt to some degree they left their status behind them to follow Christ. And that's the last thing we want to do, isn't it? Especially in our kind of society, we cherish our independence.

The security of knowing that we are fully able to provide for ourselves and our loved ones. No doubt these disciples felt much the same and then the chilling challenge came to them. Leave your nets.

In other words, place your future and your security entirely in my hands. Hand over the reins of your life, the reins of your independence to me. Have you heard that call? That call to total abandonment.

You heard it? Not a call to total irresponsibility. We are not called all to immediately leave our jobs. But to every disciple there comes that call to total abandonment.

That call which can only receive the response, yes Lord, anywhere, anytime, anyhow, whatever you say, I'm abandoned to your will. Until you've made that response, you've never really accepted the Lordship of Christ. And I wonder how much you know of the life of the life giver.

To follow the life giver is to listen, it's to obey, it's to die, it's to hand over your independence, it's to hand over the future entirely into his hands. Fourthly, to follow the life giver is to become a fisher of men. We

remember our Lord's words to Peter and Andrew, Mark 1 17, come follow me, Jesus said, I'll make you fishers of men.

It's obvious, isn't it? When we receive new life from the life giver, it would be a strange thing indeed if we just sat quietly back and kept it all to ourselves. In fact, I don't think we would be wrong to argue that if that were the case, we just sit back and quietly enjoy this great life from the life giver. If that was the case, I think we could easily argue that it's proof positive you know nothing, nothing of the reality of his life.

Listen to John 1 43 and 45, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, follow me. Philip found Nathanael, told him, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote.

Do you recall the response of the Samaritan woman in John 4? Her immediate response after meeting with Jesus was to go back to her town and declare to the town people, come, see a man who told me everything I did, couldn't this be the Christ? And later we read, many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. In John chapter 6 and verse 38, Jesus made this wonderful promise. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture says, listen, streams of living water will flow from within him.

And John explains, by this Jesus meant the spirit of God, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. And what happened when that promised spirit came? Remember Jesus said, when the spirit comes, streams of living water will flow from within you. What happened when that spirit came? Well, the attention of the people was arrested, Peter preached a great sermon and about 3,000 people immediately became Christians.

You know, they had no exhortation to evangelize the early church. They had no seminars on evangelism. They had no alive 34 weekends or 88 weekends.

Streams of living water began to flow from within them. They had received life from the life giver and they could not possibly keep that to themselves. Leave your nets, said Jesus, I will make you fishers of men.

Finally, to follow the life giver is an individual decision and we are held individually responsible. Do you remember that interesting incident in the last chapter of John's gospel? Jesus had been explaining to Peter how he would die and he was encouraging Peter to follow him. And then we read in verse 20, Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them.

When Peter saw him, he asked, Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what's that to you? You must follow me. Campbell Morgan says this, Jesus is really saying, Peter, mind your own business. Don't spoil your own soul's condition by fussing about someone else.

We're so good at that, aren't we? I am. Diverting the challenge from myself by focusing on someone else. Comparing ourselves with others.

Jesus doesn't say, follow me if your friend does. He doesn't say, follow me if your wife or your husband does. He doesn't say, follow me to the degree that your friend does.

He's just been explaining to Peter that commitment for him would ultimately mean crucifixion. And his challenge is this, Peter, travel all the way with me. You're going to die, Peter.

You're going to be crucified and if tradition has it, he was upside down just outside Rome. You're going to die, Peter, but travel with me all the way. That's what it's going to mean for you.

Peter looks around and he says, well, Jesus, it's going to mean the cross for me, it's going to mean crucifixion. Well, what about John? What about him? Is he going to have to die? Jesus says, mind your own business, Peter. If I allow him to live until I return, what's that to you? You must follow.

You've been personally called and you're personally responsible before God for your own spiritual commitment. You've often sung, haven't you, though none go with me, I still will follow. Will you? Will I? It's one thing to be committed at a conference like this, isn't it? But there's an atmosphere of commitment on occasions like this.

Think of Peter himself. There he is gathered around the last supper table with the Lord there and all the other disciples and Jesus is predicting his death and the denials of the disciples he's predicting as well. Now in that atmosphere, Peter is very confident.

Even if all fall away, I won't fall, says Peter. But he's a very different man in the courtyard of the high priest. He's on his own now.

The Lord is apparently in a very vulnerable position and three times Peter denies him. One moment in the crowd when everything's looking good, he's so confident, so filled with faith. But the next moment when things aren't so good, what's happened? Where's his faith gone? Can I ask you at the close of this day, how real is your faith? How real is mine? Are we really committed to him? To the risen Lord himself? Or are we committed to the church? To a group of people? To a certain kind of lifestyle? And if those things were taken away, what would be left? Jesus says to Peter, put everything and everyone out of your mind for a moment.

Forget about John. Are you ready to travel with me? Even if it means crucifixion. The call of the life giver is to you and it's to me personally.

Jesus is saying, Peter Maiden, follow me. No matter, no mind what everyone else does, Peter Maiden, follow me. And that's the challenge of this weekend.

You can come to the life giver in a moment. But following the life giver is the business of a lifetime. How are you doing? How are you doing? Are you listening? How much time are you giving to listen to God? Do you give an hour a day to listen to him? Not to gibber away in his presence, but to listen to him.

You know, if you give one hour a day, you'll probably give about 4% of your life. Is that too much to give? To listen to God? My sheep, my people, listen to me. You make a fresh commitment to listen to your Lord as you move away from this civic center.

On hearing his voice, will you follow? Have you accepted your death sentence, brother, sister? Have you accepted your death sentence? Have you taken up that cross, a condition of following him? You made that decision to leave your nets, to put your life and your future and your independence in his hands. Are you willing to share that life with others? That's what it means to follow the life giver. And it's an individual decision.

Only you can make it for yourself. Only I can make it for myself. Let's bow before him for a moment.

Quietly spend time listening in his presence. Maybe the life giver is going to give a corrective word. Maybe he's going to give an encouraging, motivating word to you.

My sheep, listen to my voice. And they follow. Oh Lord, we need to hear from you.

We don't know the way. We need to hear from you many times every day. We pray, oh God, that you'll grant us the discipline in our lives and the desire in our lives.

Put that time aside to listen to you, our shepherd. Not to go rushing, racing through life, doing the things that we feel need to be done, the way that we feel we should do them. But Lord, give us that discipline to listen to you and to do your will.

Lord, you've called us to death so that life can flow through us. We don't want to run away from that cross, Lord. We want to embrace it.

We want to go the way of the cross. We want to put our own plans and our own ideas and our own ambitions to death. We want to abandon ourselves to your will and to your purpose.

Lord, grant us that desire and that ability to share that life with others. May that spirit flow from deep within us so that many will be touched. Lord, help us to look at our own lives and not to be constantly worried, thinking, critical about others.

But Lord, to follow you, never mind what anyone else is doing. Thank you for your life, our loving Lord, given for us. Thank you for your life within us.

Help us to accept your Lordship, that your life might flow through us. In your name we pray. Amen.

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