

Are You Following Jesus or Admiring Him?

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following Jesus, balancing worship and obedience, and living a life of forgiveness and faith.

Duration: 49:35

Scripture: Mark 7:6, John 6:53, John 14:6, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Timothy 3:12, Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 6:20, James 2:5

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of not just admiring Jesus, but also following Him. It discusses the need for balance in our Christian life, transitioning from admiration and praise to actively walking in His footsteps. The sermon highlights the challenges of following Jesus, including persecution, standing against unrighteousness, and choosing the narrow path of the cross. It encourages believers to live a life of gratitude, service, and godliness, even if it leads to being unpopular or facing opposition.

Transcript

Dear brothers and sisters, it's always a joy to share God's Word with you. And this morning I want to speak on the subject, are you following Jesus or just admiring Him? The great need in our Christian life is for balance. God has made our human body in such a perfect way, there's a balance on the left and the right.

And in our Christian life we need to worship, admire, appreciate and praise the Lord. There's no end to that, we're going to do it all eternity in heaven. But that must lead on to following Him.

It's much easier to express our appreciation on Sunday morning when we come together in praise and to say there's no one else like you Lord. We admire you, appreciate you, it's so necessary. I think it's good for us.

Out of ten lepers who were cleansed, only one came back to thank and appreciate the Lord. That's a very good quality. But it shouldn't stop there, because Jesus, the word he used most frequently when he spoke to people inviting them was, follow me, follow me, follow me.

That means we are to literally walk in his footsteps. One of the complaints that God had against the Israelites in the Old Testament and which Jesus repeated and quoted was this in Mark chapter 7 and verse 6. In Mark chapter 7 and verse 6, Jesus said to them, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites. This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me.

And there it says, their heart went off to their covetousness and the things that they wanted, but they would come into God's presence and honor him with their lips and say wonderful things to him. We had to be careful that we are not guilty of that. That when we express our appreciation and love for the Lord and gratitude for all that he did for us, that it's manifested in a life of following him as he wanted.

See when Jesus came to earth, he came in a human body. And when he went up to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit, he made the church his body, is given the same name, the body of Christ. So Jesus Christ has two bodies, one physical one in heaven, the one he walked on earth with, and the other is us.

And why is the church given the name, the body of Christ? Because people are supposed to see in us what they saw in Christ. People are supposed, we're supposed to carry on the same ministry that Jesus did in his earthly body. That's why we're called the body of Christ.

And we need to take this challenge seriously. This is our calling. In John's gospel chapter 8, Jesus said in verse 12, I want to show you these scriptures so that you understand in the words of Jesus himself what our calling is.

He said, I'm the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life. I can appreciate him, admire him, and walk in darkness.

But if you follow him, you'll never walk in darkness. Darkness is discouragement, gloom, a life of murmuring, complaining, bitterness, an unforgiving spirit. And everything that we inherited from Adam, the poison of the devil.

And Jesus said, promise there, if you follow him, we'll never walk in darkness, but we'll have the light of life. That's the way we are supposed to live. And the purpose of our coming together in God's house and church is to receive the prophetic word.

And the prophetic word also has a balance. The prophetic word challenges us and encourages us. We need both.

We need encouragement. God is our father, Jesus loves us, cares for us, he'll provide for us. And we also need challenge.

In scripture, we find both. And if we receive only encouragement, very often people come to church and say, I want to be encouraged. Yes, we need encouragement.

We need to encourage one another. But we also need the challenge of God's word calling us to God's highest standards. Jesus once said, you must be merciful as your heavenly father is merciful.

The standard he set before us was not of any human being. He says, exactly as God is merciful, we must be merciful. That's just one example of a challenge.

Let me show you that in Luke's gospel chapter 6, verse 36. It's a very high standard. Be merciful, Luke 6, 36, just as your father is merciful.

Think of that. Exactly as God has been merciful to me repeatedly, again and again and again and again. I have to be merciful to others.

Jesus encouraged people by telling them how much the father loved them, but he also challenged them with statements like this. And Christians very often are guilty of going just to the places where there are words of encouragement and ignoring words like this. There is absolutely no excuse, for example, on the basis of that verse, for me to have an unforgiving, unmerciful spirit to a single human being on the face of the earth.

Because God's been so merciful to us. The only person who can say, I will not be merciful to others, is one who feels God hasn't been merciful to him. There's no such human being in the world.

So you take that challenge and ask yourself, is there a human being in the world whom you have not forgiven, whom you are not merciful towards? It says when Peter sinned by denying the Lord three times, there's a word in Luke's gospel which says the Lord turned and looked at him. And I don't believe that was a look which said, I told you this would happen. No.

It was a look which said, it's all right, Peter. I forgive you. Let's move on.

There are many people perhaps who are waiting for a look like that from you. Will you follow Jesus here? That's the challenge. Jesus says, follow me.

This is the route to eternal life. To a life where there's no darkness at all. We can glory in the fact that our sins are forgiven and yet be defeated, defeated, defeated.

And God's not glorified by our defeated life. So I want to share with you this matter of following Jesus in two areas. First of all, in our life and in our ministry.

When we think of following Jesus in our life, we begin with having our sins forgiven. We must be absolutely sure that the blood of Christ has cleansed us completely. And the word of God is clear that if we come into the light and we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to cleanse us, to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That's where we begin. It's like a foundation. You can't move on unless you're sure that you've been forgiven.

Not only forgiven, but declared righteous and assured that God has promised your sins and iniquities, I will remember no more. Don't let the devil ever harass you by a sin you've confessed to the Lord and turned from. Very often the devil does that if you're ignorant of scripture, remind us of some terrible thing we did last year or 10 years ago.

And we know it was evil. We know sometimes some of those evil things we've done, there's no way of rectifying it. There's no way of even making restitution or apologizing.

We don't even know where those people are whom we have hurt. We're not to live with the guilt of that. If you live with guilt, it'll be like a chain on your feet that you'll never be able to move forward in your Christian life.

So you've got to finish with guilt. That's very, very important. When we glorify guilt, we're dishonoring the blood of Christ.

Now, if you have not confessed your sin, you're not turned from it, you're not sorry for what you did, then you need to have guilt. But once you've confessed your sin to the Lord, I want to encourage you to believe

the blood of Jesus has cleansed you. And the Lord says in Hebrews 8, 12, I will not remember your sins anymore.

And then we move on. So that's our foundation. And from then on, we had to listen to that word of Jesus, which said, follow me, follow me.

Jesus is not only our savior. There's a title of Christ's that is not so well known among many Christians. It's in the book of Hebrews.

And unfortunately, Hebrews is not a very popular book with many Christians. But it's a very important book because it shows us the humanity of Jesus Christ more than any other book. We need to see Jesus Christ as God.

The deity of Christ is fundamental, but we also need to see his humanity. If I only see his deity and I don't see his humanity, my Christian life will be incomplete. In Hebrews chapter 6, and verse 20, it says here that Jesus has entered as a forerunner.

Have you ever heard that word before? Forerunner, one who has run in front of us, the same race that we have to run. I want to show you another verse in Hebrews 12, where it says in verse 1, in the last part of verse 1, Hebrews 12, verse 1, let us run with endurance. The last part of that verse, the race that is set before us.

And the next verse, verse 2, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. So, we run this race, looking at Jesus, the way he went. In every situation, he was tempted like us.

We can see his footsteps where he overcame temptation. That's the race we are drawn. That's what it means to follow him, not just admire him, not just say, wow, what a wonderful life he lived on earth.

But the Bible challenges us to see his footsteps and walk in his footsteps, to forgive as he forgave, etc. And this will encourage us too, because the Bible also says in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 15, Hebrews 4, 15, we don't have a high priest who cannot sympathize with us, our weakness. But one, listen to this, this revolutionized my life nearly 38 years ago, when I learned this truth that he was tempted exactly like me, and yet without sin.

He was not tempted in a different way. He did not have access to resources to overcome temptation that I don't have. He had the same Holy Spirit that he offers me.

That's why we can follow him in the way he lived. Otherwise it would be impossible. I mean, if Jesus lived on earth as God, how in the world could I follow him? It's like an angel coming with the wings and telling me to fly across, follow him when he flies across the river.

I say, I can't do that. There's a force that pulls me down that's not pulling you down. Get rid of your wings and come with a body like mine and then teach me to swim.

It's so important to understand Jesus became like us. You know, for many years in the back of my mind, I was always thinking he couldn't have been like us. He couldn't have been.

I mean, we're such sinful creatures. How could he have come down to it? He did not have sin in him, but he was tempted like us. He faced temptation exactly like us.

And one of the illustrations that came to my mind was this. There are many poor people who live in the slums in India who earn very little money. They work carrying bricks or doing all types of odd jobs.

Sometimes they don't get work every day and their income may be, you know, one, two, three dollars a day, say a hundred dollars a month. And it's very difficult to live in the cities with that amount of money. Now, supposing some rich man from a wealthy country went there and say, I want to teach you people to live within a hundred dollars a month.

And I'm a billionaire, but I'm not going to use my credit card when I come here. I will live in your midst, work like you, earn my living just like you and teach you how to live within this amount of money and keep your little hut clean, etc. Is he a billionaire? He is, but he refuses to use his credit card while he's there and he works just like anyone else and teaches people how to live within that income and never get into debt.

This is one of the pictures the Lord gave me of how he came to heaven, from heaven to earth. He had a heavenly credit card that he could have used anytime, but he didn't. I don't have one.

I'm a man. How could he ask me to follow him if he was not exactly like me? I emphasize this because in the back of our minds, there's something that says we can't follow him. We can't follow him.

He was not like us. And that's why I want you to know he was like us. He was tempted exactly like us.

And he had the same Holy Spirit. We have the same Holy Spirit that he had. It's to me, it's such an exciting thing that the Spirit of God that dwells in me, the same Holy Spirit that was in Jesus that helped him to live on earth and overcoming pure life.

We must have faith for that, just like we have faith that his blood cleanses us from all sin. He sent the Spirit so that we can follow him in his footsteps. Whatever situation we may face, he didn't face all our circumstances, but he was tempted in all points like we are.

And we can respond in times of temptation exactly like he did. I remember about 15 years ago when some religious people in India took me to court for, you know, exposing their wrong doctrines and suing me for defamation. And I'd never been to a court in 59 years of my life.

I never had a lawyer, any such thing. It was a new experience for me. And naturally, there was a little fear.

Whenever we face a new experience, it was like being thrown into a swimming pool, not knowing how to swim. Whenever we face a new experience, we can have a little bit of fear. And so as I went into the court that day, I heard the Lord say to me, don't be afraid.

Just like he said to those disciples. Religious people, he said, took me to court as well before you. So look for my footsteps in this court.

That encouraged me. The footsteps of Jesus in a criminal court. And I saw that those footsteps were footsteps of faith and love.

Faith in a sovereign God who would make everything work together for my good. Who's sovereign in control, who permits things, sometimes evil things, for people to do evil things to make me a stronger Christian. That's faith.

And the second footstep of Jesus was love. That I was to love those who accused me and those who hated me and those who had taken me to court and whatever they had against me. And I asked God for grace in the fire of the Holy Spirit.

And that's how I faced that in those years. It was a tremendous experience. It was an honor God gave me as I stood there with all those criminals.

And I thought of that verse which says about Jesus, he was numbered with the criminals. Dear brothers and sisters, if you really take this matter seriously of following in Jesus' footsteps, you'll find you have amazing experiences with other Christians never have. God will be able to give you a ministry that comes not out of Bible study, but that comes out of your own personal life and experience.

That's the way God wants us to serve others. So let's take this matter very seriously, because it says here in Hebrews 4, 16, because Jesus was tempted like this without sin, Hebrews 4, 16, the next verse says, therefore, therefore what? You remember therefore goes back to the previous verse, which is Jesus was tempted like us and did not sin. Is that just a statement of fact that we are to just leave there? No, therefore there's a consequence to that.

Let us now, because of that, come near with great boldness to the throne of grace, so that first of all, we receive mercy. Jesus never needed that. He never needed forgiveness.

We need that. But then to find the same grace that Jesus found to help us in our time of need. And in relation to the previous verse, our time of need is when we are tempted.

Some circumstance, some situation, which we feel it is too much for us. It's not too much for us. We can follow in Jesus' footsteps.

He will give us the power of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 10, verse 13, this is a great verse. 1 Corinthians 10, verse 13, it says here in the middle of this verse, see the middle of this verse, God is faithful.

He will never allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able. We must believe this, my brothers and sisters. Don't ever say in any situation, oh, that's getting too much for me.

You know what you're saying then? God is unfaithful. Or we're saying in this particular moment, the devil sort of taken over control of the world. He hasn't.

God is still on the throne and he never forsakes his own. Never, never, never. Christ defeated Satan on the cross.

You know, one of my big problems in the earlier part of my Christian life was to be discouraged frequently. But I'll tell you the honest truth, it's disappeared from my life for many years. As I've come to faith in God's word, whenever Jesus was tempted, he never discussed things with the devil.

He never discussed events or circumstances. Eve made that mistake of getting into a discussion with Satan. Jesus only quoted God's word.

When he quoted God's word, the devil left. He'd come with another temptation, Jesus would quote God's word and the devil would leave. So I want to say this to you when you're discouraged.

You know, Jesus was never discouraged. He was never in a bad mood. This is the thing that challenged me.

He was never worried or anxious or tense about anything. He was concerned, but he was not anxious. There's a lot of difference between concern.

We need, I mean, if you love people, you'll be concerned about them. But to be anxious as though God's forsaken us and the father has given up control of this universe, that's never to be found in our lives. And I said, Lord, if I want to walk like you, if I'm to walk like you, if you told me to follow you, is it possible for me to follow you in a life where I won't get discouraged and I'm never in a bad mood, no matter how other people around me behave? And the answer is yes.

According to your faith, be it unto you. God can help you, my brother and sister, to live like this. We've got to quote God's word.

That's important. Even Jesus never overcame Satan without quoting God's word. Man shall not live by only food, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth.

And so, for example, when some terrible circumstance, which I didn't expect, comes to me, I say, how shall I follow Jesus here? Did Jesus get into a panic when there was a storm in the lake or when the soldiers came to capture him? Never. He said, whom do you seek? Jesus of Nazareth? Well, that's me. Take me.

I said, Lord, give me that. When he stood before Pilate, and Pilate threatens him saying, don't you know I have power to crucify you or to release you? And Jesus is so calm and quietly says, you don't have any power over me except what my father gives you. It's wonderful to live on earth like this with evil people around us and people who threaten us or people who frighten us.

No one has power over us. So, I've learned to quote God's word to assure myself in a time of when there are pressures or discouragement, how to follow Jesus. To say God is on the throne.

That's always true. He runs this universe. Jesus said, I've got all authority in heaven and earth.

That's always true. My sins are all forgiven. It's been blotted out in the blood of Jesus through the blood of Christ.

That's always true. The devil was defeated 2000 years ago and Christ is coming back for me. Well, the most important things are all okay.

A few minor things like some other little problems here and there. It doesn't matter. This is the thing that's helped me to overcome discouragement, to confess these truths of God's word.

We can follow him. So, don't let the devil ever tell you, you cannot follow Jesus. Oh, it'll be impossible for you in this evil world to be an overcomer and to be free from anger and discouragement and anxiety.

We may be failing in all those areas, but I want to invite you to set your mind on that mountain peak. It may take time for us to reach the top, but we are going to get there. So, I see following Jesus like climbing a mountain.

Jesus has already reached the peak, the top. He was tempted in all points as we are, never sinned and reached up to the top. And there are others through the centuries who have followed in his footsteps.

Faithful men like the apostle Paul, who could turn around and people said to say to people, follow me as I follow Christ. He hadn't reached the top. He said, I'm not yet attained.

I'm not perfect. But he said, I'm pressing on. In fact, there's only one thing I do.

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus to be exactly like Jesus. That's our calling. And he said, I'm following, I'm following, I'm following.

He looked for the footsteps of Jesus on that mountain slope in the snow. And he walked and walked and walked and he was an overcomer. And he looked down at others who were behind him and said, follow me as I follow Christ.

1 Corinthians 11, 1. Follow me as I follow Christ. And do you know that every one of us, if we've been Christians for a while, should be able to say to those who are younger than us in Christ, who are a little lower down the mountain slope, we should be able to turn around to them and say, follow me as I'm following Paul and as I'm following Christ. There are footsteps in front of us of godly men who have overcome.

We must not ever get discouraged and think we cannot press on in their footsteps. We can. Because Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame.

See, most Christians are satisfied with the forgiveness of their sins. They say, well, I'm going to heaven, that's about all. But I don't want that to be all in my life.

When I get to heaven, I see the tremendous love that Jesus had for me and the tremendous price that he paid on the cross for my sins. I don't want to see myself as having lived a selfish, self-centered life here on this earth. No.

I want him to be able to look at me and say, well done, good and faithful servant. The same for every one of us. Our whole life must be an expression of gratitude for Christ having died for us on the cross.

That's how I started my Christian life when I was 19 years old, 55 years ago. When I gave my life to Christ. I didn't give my life to Christ to go to heaven.

No, I didn't give my life to Christ to escape hell. I'll tell you honestly, I gave my life to Jesus because I saw how much he loved me and gave himself for me completely. There was no hesitation or any limiting of himself in the way he gave.

And I say, Lord, I want to give myself to you like that completely, totally. And I want my whole life, I want to respond to you out of gratitude for the love that you've manifested to me. I remember about 20, I think it was about 20 years ago, 21 years ago, I was riding my little two wheel moped in India, in Bangalore and I was crossing a railway track and the man who was lowering the bar, that they lower when the trains come, made a mistake and I ran right into it.

He didn't see me crossing and knocked me down and I fell on the railway track unconscious. And someone picked me up before the train came. And a little later, I didn't know how long I was there.

I still don't remember it. And I saw myself standing there and I said, Lord, I have not finished saying thank you to you for dying for me on the cross. Give me a few more years to serve you.

I want to say thank you to you a little more. And God's given me 21 years more. My service for the Lord is not a burden.

It's never inconvenient for me to serve the Lord. Anytime, morning, noon or night, I'd be happy to serve him because no matter how much I do, I can never finish saying thank you to the Lord for what he did for me on the cross. And I hope my brothers and sisters that you're seeking to live a godly life or you're doing anything.

For example, when you forgive someone, you may find it difficult because they've done so much evil against you, but do it as an act unto the Lord. Don't wait for people to be grateful to you for the service you do for them. I remember once the Lord spoke to me about that.

Well, there was a young brother who used to come to our house church and we served him a lot and he grew up, got a good job and went away and to another place. And we hardly ever heard from him. And I was thinking what an ungrateful person he is.

After all that we did, he hardly ever writes a note to thank and the Lord said to me, the fault is with you. I said, me Lord, what did I do? He said, in as much as you did it to the least of these my brothers, you've done it to me. So don't expect gratitude from him, expect it from me.

I learned something that day. I learned something that when I serve others, whether it's in the ministry of the word, in practical help or any other way, I must not expect gratitude from them. I must do it as unto the Lord.

Even if it's the least of God's saints, we're doing it as unto him. Everything we do is an act of gratitude. Lord, you did so much for me.

How can I, if I spend my whole life serving you, it'll never be enough when I think of how much you did for me. You have that attitude my brother of wanting to really follow in Jesus' footsteps. You'll have a glorious entrance into God's kingdom, an abundant entrance like the Bible says.

Then I want to say about ministry. We're to follow Christ in our life and also in our ministry. All of us have got a ministry.

The body of Christ means every single one of us who's born again is a part of Christ's body. There's something that you have to do. Just like a human body, there's no part of this body which has no function.

Every part of the body has a function. I often take the example of the nails. Some people say, I'm not even a little finger.

I'm just a little nail. I'm not the heart or the liver or the kidney or any important part like that. But do you know when you feel itchy and scratchy, it's that despised member that comes to your aid.

Your heart and liver and kidney can't help you then. So don't ever say, oh, I'm just a little small member. You're a very useful member.

And do you know what this ministry of scratching people's back really is? It's called the ministry of encouragement, encouraging people. Is there anybody who can't do that? Is there anybody who can't say to a person, God is on the throne. He'll help you, brother.

Don't give up. Two sentences. When you're talking to somebody on a cell phone, where most of the others spend their time gossiping, why not use a few words of encouragement or a last sentence in that email that you write.

Add another sentence of encouragement. Just scratch the person. He's itching somewhere.

Scratch his back and help him. It's a ministry every one of us can do. You don't need to be a scholar.

You don't need to be a Bible teacher. You don't need to be anything. We can all fulfill this ministry of encouragement.

That's following in Jesus' footsteps to say something good to people. We're so hesitant sometimes to appreciate and say good to people because we think, oh, they may get puffed up or something like that. You remember Jesus once saw a Roman military man, a military man, a man who's killed so many people.

The Romans were pretty ruthless. And this man had a servant who was sick. And he came to Jesus and said, I believe Lord that you can speak the word and my son will be healed over there.

And you know what Jesus said to him? He turned around to the people and said, I've never seen such faith in all of Israel. Can you imagine what that did to that man? Some of us would have may have gone to Jesus and said, Lord, don't say that about him. The guy's unconverted.

He's a Roman man. He's a military man and so many things wrong, but Jesus wouldn't be hindered by all that. Where he saw faith, he appreciated it.

He looked at an unconverted Nathaniel coming to him one day. Philip brought Nathaniel to him and Philip said, we've seen the Messiah. Nathaniel said, where from? He said Nazareth.

And Nathaniel said, this is all in John chapter one. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? That was his attitude to Jesus. And when he came, Jesus said, there's a man in whom there's no guile.

Imagine saying such a word. He was not converted, but he was absolutely honest. And I see many instances like that, where Jesus appreciated somebody and expressed his appreciation is the easiest thing that we can do to appreciate someone, to follow in Jesus' footsteps here.

This is what it means to follow, not just to sing praise and thanks to God on Sunday morning, which is all very good, but to follow him. In the ministry of Christ, there was one part of it, which was doing good. It says in Acts chapter 10 and verse 38, that Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good.

That's a great ministry, which all of us can fulfill. Acts 10, 38, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, and he went about doing good. When we are anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, the most important thing we will do is going around doing good.

That's what Jesus did, for God was with him. When God is with a person, he goes about doing good. A lot of things we can learn from that one verse.

What the anointing of the Spirit does, what a man does when God is with him, he goes about doing good. He healed the sick, he opened blind eyes, and he did so many good things. But that was one aspect of Jesus' ministry.

And there was another aspect, that is, he trained 12 disciples. He trained, one fell away, but there was 11 whom he trained, whom he prepared to build the church. He came to earth, not just to do good, but to build the church, to show people the path of discipleship.

And if we go around doing only this one part of Jesus' ministry, doing good, you know, that's, Christians have been known throughout the world for that ministry. The greatest orphanages and lepers' homes and, you know, ministry to AIDS patients in third world countries, they're all done by Christians. I know I live in India where only 2% are Christians, but the best schools and the best hospitals through the years have always been Christian ones because this ministry of doing good has been practiced by the missionaries who have come to India through the years.

And I praise God for that. And that's one aspect of Jesus' ministry which even the world can appreciate. And there are people who do that.

I mean, Mother Teresa has done a tremendous job of caring for the poor in the streets of Calcutta in India. She got a Nobel Peace Prize. It's one aspect of Jesus' ministry which the world appreciates, and that's necessary.

But there is another side to Jesus' ministry, and that is leading people to godliness and holiness and becoming disciples. That's not appreciated so much. And when you do that part of Jesus' ministry, you're not going to get the Nobel Prize.

No. It says in Matthew chapter 10, verse 22, Matthew 10, 22, read these words, you will be hated by all because of my name. For what ministry is that? Is it because you run an orphanage or care for the lepers that you're hated by all? Nobody ever hates anyone who cares for orphans and for poor widows and for the sick and or for the mentally challenged and all.

That's a great ministry, but you're not hated for that. But there's this other aspect of Jesus' in his ministry which can lead to people hating you. And it goes on to say in verse 23, the next verse, when they persecute you, they don't persecute people who look after orphans or care for the sick.

Why do they persecute you? And he goes on to say in verse 24, a disciple is not above his teacher, a slave is not above his master. And verse 25, it's enough that the disciple becomes like his teacher and the slave like his master. And now listen to this, this middle of that verse, if they called the head of the house Beelzebul, prince of devils, is there a ministry of Jesus that would end up in his being called prince of devils? And if they did that to the head of the house, how much more will they malign the members of his household? Have you ever been maligned because you follow Jesus? That's one aspect of his ministry.

When we stand up for the truth and stand against unrighteousness, let me turn you to second Timothy and chapter three and verse 12. And second Timothy chapter three and verse 12, it says, second Timothy 3, 12, all, that's an important word, all, do you believe this is God's word? All who decide to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. You will not be persecuted if you just concentrate on just that one aspect of Jesus ministry of doing good and helping the poor and washing people's feet, et cetera.

But if you're going to live a godly life and stand up against unrighteousness in the world, you will be persecuted in one way or the other. I remember the years when I was working in the Indian Navy. There were things that my senior officers would ask me to do, which they knew were wrong.

And I would stand up and say, sir, I'm a Christian. I was just 23 years old, a young Naval officer eager to press on in my profession. And I knew that if I stood against this officer, he would trouble me in many ways and write bad reports about me.

But I had a choice there. Am I going to follow in Jesus' footsteps or not? Am I going to violate my conscience and do something against my conscience because I want to please a man or will I seek to please God? Those are the situations you may face in your place of work or in some situation in your life where you have a choice between pleasing men or pleasing God. And I said, sir, I'm sorry.

I'm a Christian and it's against my conscience. I can't do it. And he knew he couldn't force me to do it because it was wrong.

But at the end of the year, in the annual confidential report, he would write something negative about me so that I wouldn't get my promotion. So I decided that if I want to follow Jesus, I've got to forget about promotion. I've got to please the Lord and the Lord will take care of whatever promotion I should get.

Now, those are not the extreme forms of persecution that our brothers and sisters faced in the first three centuries. But remember, the disciples of Jesus, those who followed in Jesus' footsteps for 300 years from the day of Pentecost were thrown to the lions. They were burnt at the stake.

They were crucified. They were killed. All the apostles, except John, were killed.

For what? For following Jesus. Are we really following in their footsteps or are we so careful to avoid anything that will make us unpopular? When you stand up for the Lord, my brother, sister, you will not be popular in this world. The world is not any different from what it was 2000 years ago.

If they crucified Christ because they didn't want him, if he came to the earth today, they'd kill him again. Even though a lot of people talk about admiring him at all. Why was Jesus crucified? It's not because he washed people's feet and opened blind eyes.

Because he stood against sin and he exposed corruption and tradition in religion, in the religious system. Because he stood against people making money in the name of God in the temple. And he chased them out, took a whip and chased them out.

And you stand today against the television preachers who make money from poor people in the church. And you won't be popular either. No.

You stand against the corrupt gospel, which is not leading people to be free from sin, but just telling people how they can be healthy and wealthy. That's not what Jesus came for. You won't be popular even among Christians.

You preach the way of the cross, the way that Jesus walked. He said, if anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. That means let him die to himself every day and follow me.

That's not a popular message. Let me turn to John's gospel, chapter six. John chapter six is one of the most amazing chapters in the Bible.

If you want to know how to reduce a large congregation to a small one, John chapter six, that's the one. In a good way. John chapter six, verse two, a great multitude was following Christ.

That's how it began. A huge crowd of people following in Jesus' footsteps. And that's how John's gospel, chapter six, verse two begins.

They saw the signs that he was performing. He was extremely popular. In fact, he was so popular, it says here that they wanted to make him a king.

In verse 15, Jesus perceived that they were going to make him a king. He was so popular, a very popular preacher. He didn't want to be a king, says he withdrew and went alone.

And then by the time you come to the end of that chapter, you read it says in verse 66, it's the same chapter, John 6, 66. Many of his disciples withdrew and they were not walking with him anymore. And verse 67, there were 12 left.

That's what I said, that John chapter six is a great chapter that reduced this huge multitude to 12. Why would Jesus preach in a way that reduced the numbers? Because he said the way to life is narrow and few there be that find it. Paul said to Timothy in the last days, people who have itching ears, they like to have preachers who would just comfort them, tell them stories and not preach God's word in all its power.

Entertain them and use cycle methods of psychology to comfort them. There'll be crowds. But if you preach the cross, that's what Jesus preached here.

Luke John 6, 53 says, you got to eat my flesh and drink my blood. If you want to have life in yourself, John six and verse 53, that's the message they got offended with. You got to eat my flesh and drink my blood.

If you want to have life in yourself, it was not physical flesh and blood. He was talking about choosing the way of the cross, flesh and blood there speak about the death of the cross. If you choose this way of death, you'll have life in yourself.

That's the message that reduced this huge crowd to 12. We will discover in the final day that the way to life was really narrow and very few found it. And we'll also discover that there were very few preachers in Christendom who preached the truth faithfully because they didn't care for numbers.

They didn't care for the offerings. They didn't care for money. They proclaim the truth of God.

I want to be in a church where the truth of God is proclaimed. I don't care about numbers. That's the principle we have followed in India for 40 years.

We planted about 40, 50 churches in different villages, et cetera. We've never, never, never cared for numbers. In fact, we've always seen the numbers go down.

And I've noticed another thing is the rich people who get offended and leave first. And God has chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith. That's what James chapter two says.

And we've seen that in India, but God's not building a club of rich people. He's building the body of Jesus Christ, of people who want to follow in Jesus' footsteps, whatever the price, who want to be filled with the Holy Spirit and manifest Christ in their life. Abundant life, go that way.

Let's stand up and pray to the Lord and renew our dedication to Him. We can never give back to the extent that He gave to us when He died on the cross. Even if we devote our whole life, it'll be a very small offering.

Let's repent of our sluggishness in past days, laziness, ingratitude. Say, Lord, I want to give my whole life to you. I want to be a very useful member of this body that meets here.

I don't want to be just a meeting attender. I want to be an effective member of the body of Christ in this place. I want to work with you and with my brothers and sisters to build up your testimony for your name.

Help me, Lord. Fill me with the spirit. Forgive my sin.

Help me to press on. Help me to make a new beginning, perhaps today, to go this way. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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