

Following Jesus  
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Matthew 16:13-26

Opening: “Follow the Leader” was a fun game for kids. Deciding to follow a leader should not be “child’s play.” Why do people follow a leader? What things make us want to follow their leadership? Why should we be careful about the leaders we follow?

Ten or fifteen years ago I shifted to referring to myself as a “follower of Christ.” I did it for strategic reasons. “Believer” can be misunderstood. Everyone believes in something. The term “Christian” is accurate but lots of Americans think they were born a Christian. I definitely reject being labelled “religious.” When I say I am a follower of Christ there is no misunderstanding about Who I follow, but what does it really MEAN to follow Jesus?

A.W. Tozer wrote: *“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”* It’s a point to ponder. God is God but what is my perception of Who He is? In today’s text Jesus asked his disciples, *“Who do people say I am?”* Then He asked them the question He also asks of us, *“Who do YOU say I am?”* Jesus is God’s Son and my Savior and Lord, but the real question is how has following Him changed me and how I live?

The Point: Following Jesus fully means understanding and accepting Who He is completely. Following Him fully means embracing His mission as Messiah and Savior. Following Jesus fully requires sacrificing my agenda to His and following Him as Lord.

**(NLT) — 13** When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” **14** “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” **15** Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” **16** Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” **17** Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. **18** Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. **19** And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” **20** Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

- Following Jesus fully means understanding and accepting Who He is completely.
- Peter clearly recognized who Jesus is, and Jesus commended him because this truth had been revealed to him by the Father.
- Before we give Peter a “gold star,” in a moment we will see he had more to learn.
- The meaning of verses 18 & 19 has been debated for centuries.

- Jesus engaged in some wordplay about Peter’s name (“Petros” meaning small rock) then used the word “Petra” (which means bedrock or foundation stone).
- What did Jesus mean when He said, *“On this rock I will build my church...”*
- The Roman Catholic church insists the church is built on Peter (the first Pope.)
- Why would we find that a flawed understanding of this text (clue: verse 23)?
- Who does scripture indicate is the foundation stone of Jesus’ church?
- **Ephesians 2:20 (NLT) — 20** Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.
- **1 Corinthians 3:11 (NLT) — 11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.
- It may be that Jesus was saying, *“Peter, your name means rock, but the rock on which I will build my church is the truth you have just confessed—that I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*
- Later, Peter would write to Christ-followers in **1 Peter 2:5 (NLT) — 5** *“...you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple...”*
- Jesus is the cornerstone, truth that He is the Savior of the World and Son of God is the foundation, and those who follow Him get to be “little rocks” in His church.
- What about the “gates of hell” statement? Jesus promised even the strongest power of death and darkness will never be able to stop or destroy His church.
- Verse 19: *“the keys to the kingdom of Heaven.” “binding & loosing.”*
- Bible Knowledge Commentary: “A “key” was a sign of authority, for a trusted steward kept the keys to his master’s possessions and dispensed them...<sup>i</sup>
- The apostles were given special authority to declare heaven’s terms for the kingdom—proclaiming the gospel, affirming forgiveness for believers, warning those who reject Christ, and establishing the foundational teaching of the church.
- The Apostles had unique authority and power. There are no “new” apostles today.
- The role of the church today is to faithfully proclaim the gospel, opening the door to those who believe and affirming the authority of Christ’s Word.
- Jesus told them to keep His identity a secret for the moment. Then He shared a more troubling reality.

**21** From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. **22** But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!” **23** Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

- Peter went from being called “blessed” one minute to being rebuked the next. He understood who Jesus was but still did not understand what Jesus came to do.
- Some translations say Peter “the rock” had become a “stumbling block.”
- Humanly speaking Peter didn’t want Jesus to be crucified and killed. You and I would have felt the same. That is seeing things from a “human point of view.”

- An important truth: Human emotions must never interfere with Heavenly plans.
- Jesus wasn't calling Peter "Satan." He saw that Satan was manipulating Peter.
- Truth: If we try to re-write God's sovereign plans to suit our human perspective, we risk becoming Satan's tool for hindering those plans.
- The cross looked like defeat from a human point of view, but it was the heart of God's salvation plan. That is why we must trust God's Word and not our feelings.
- While on earth Jesus was fully God and fully man. Later, in His humanity, Jesus would pray, "*Father, if it be possible, let <sup>s</sup>this cup pass from me...*" Then immediately, in His divinity, He prayed, "*not my will but Yours be done.*"
- Following Jesus fully means embracing His mission as Messiah and Savior and we cannot allow our human feelings and agendas conflict with His sovereign will.
- Speaking of our human agendas. Look at verses 24-26.

**24** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. **25** If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. **26** And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"

- "*If any of you wants to be my follower...*" Jesus' invitation is open to anyone who wants to follow Him, but the terms are the same for everyone: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.
- Following Jesus fully requires sacrificing my agenda to His.
- Following Jesus is a paradox: to truly live is to surrender our lives to Him. Holding tightly to our own agenda leads to loss; surrendering to Christ leads to life.
- After revealing the price He would pay on the cross, Jesus explained the cost required of anyone who would follow Him: Give up, take up, and follow.
- **Give up your own way (deny yourself):** This does not mean self-hatred or denying ourselves small pleasures. It means renouncing the right to be the ultimate authority in our own lives.
- To deny yourself is to say:
  - My will is no longer supreme.
  - My plans are not the final authority.
  - Christ determines the direction of my life.
- **Take up your cross.** What does that mean?
  - Accept suffering for His sake
  - Endure rejection for identifying with Him
  - Die to self-centered living (die to self and live for Jesus' agenda)
- This is not about seeking suffering, but about being willing to suffer rather than abandon Christ.
- **Galatians 2:20 (ESV) — 20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- **Follow me.** After surrender and sacrifice comes active obedience.
- Following Jesus means:

- Trusting His leadership
- Walking in His teachings
- Patterning our lives after His example
- It is not simply believing about Jesus; it is ordering our lives around Him.
- Luke's account of Jesus statements adds the word "daily" (Luke 9:23).
- Why do you think we need to do these things daily?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Following Jesus fully means understanding and accepting Who He is completely. Following Him fully means embracing His mission as Messiah and Savior. Following Jesus fully requires sacrificing my agenda to Him as Lord.
- What does that look like practically speaking?
- Jesus asked, "*Who do YOU say I am?*" He's asking His followers that today.
- If we (like Peter) confess the truth that He is God's Son and our Savior and Lord, then it begs a second question: How has that belief changed how I live?
- There was an expression from old western films: "*There's a new sheriff in town.*"
- Usually, it meant that the town had been filled with crime and corruption under the "old sheriff" but the new sheriff was putting an end to all that.
- Before trusting Christ, we think we are the "sheriff" of our lives, but often sin is really wearing the badge (John 8:34).
- If we have really trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, we realize there is a new Sheriff in town and He's cleaning up the old chaos and corruption in our life.
- When we see Jesus clearly in that role then we will gladly:
  - Give up our authority.
  - Take up His cross.
  - Follow His lead.

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<sup>i</sup> Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). Matthew. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 58). Victor Books.

<sup>s</sup> See ch. 20:22