

Follow Him Into His Church

Delivered: April 21, 2024

Scriptures: [Matthew 16:18](#)

Recap

Last week we looked at [John 2.23-25](#). We saw how many believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles, but they did not have the faith that follows Jesus into the unknown, the uncomfortable, or the misunderstood. For example; many left Jesus when He began to say things like “eat My flesh and drink My blood.” The true disciples may not have understood Jesus in that moment, but they trusted Him enough to follow Him into the mystery...”where else will we go, Lord, You have the words of life.”

I made the statement:

when faith gives birth to following, then you know you're a true disciple of Jesus.

The invitation of Jesus is to follow Him. Believing is essential to following Him, but if believing doesn't give way to following then we are in danger of being those who believe because of the benefit that He is to us...but when pressure comes, and when He begins to move us into a situation that no longer seems to benefit us, we then have to decide am I a follower of Jesus or just a believer in His benefits?

It's easy to believe when He's multiplying my bread and healing my diseases, but am I following Him when He...

is loving my enemies

is forgiving those who have wronged me

is praying for those who have spoken against me

is seeking the lost

is serving the poor

is extending grace and mercy to those around me?

To put it another way; am I following Him in the midst of His church?

Follow Him Into His Church

Jesus is always in the midst of His church. He may have found you out in the streets, but make no mistake about it, He has brought you into His house and made you part of His family. Following Jesus is a team sport. As much as we would like to have Jesus all to ourselves, we cannot avoid the truth that Jesus died to bring us into His family. **And the authority and the power and the glory and the presence of our Savior is found most evidently in His church.** Where two or more are gathered in My name...

An individual may enjoy many spiritual things, and sometimes attain great spiritual heights, but God has committed the ultimate spiritual things in this age to the church.

Watchman Nee writes this in his book, *Further Talks on the Church Life*, "When a person seeks heavenly things as an individual, he cannot obtain them all. This does not mean that an individual has no blessing, but it does mean there are certain things of God that he cannot obtain by individual seeking. God's riches today are in the church."

"Upon This Rock..."

13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that I am?"

14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

When Peter receives the revelation of Jesus' Messiah-ship, His kingship, Jesus responds by giving him the revelation of the church.

2 Things

1. The keys of the kingdom are given to the church.
2. The promise of victory and safety against attack is for the church.

This doesn't mean that we won't have individual assignments, or that we won't have protection from the enemy as individuals. But the principle that Jesus is laying out is this; the keys of authority are given to the church, and the eternal plan of God of establishing heaven on earth is accomplished by the church.

The Ceiling

My experience has been that I can only go so far in my walk with Jesus before I hit the ceiling of what I can do on my own.

I can't hold myself accountable.

I can't see my own blindspots.

I can't prophecy over myself.

I can only teach myself so much.

It's difficult to encourage myself in the midst of the storm...not the way a brother can.

I must go to the Body to find the unlimited resources of heaven. When I join myself to the Body, the fullness of the Head flows to me freely.

The concept of living life as a follower of Jesus not committed to the local church is a very modern, western concept. The idea of not committing yourself to the church was foreign to the church of Acts. For the early church, and really, the church up until the mid 20th century, the nuclear local church family was everything. To be outside of the that local church family was like being outside of Christ.

Devotion

What did the early church devote themselves to?

“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, the breaking of bread, to fellowship, and to prayer ([Acts 2.42](#)).

How did the early church spend their time?

“Daily they were with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to

house, eating together with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily (Acts 2.46-47).

You can't separate the connection between the Lord "adding to the church daily" and them being together in a regular rhythm of life...our prayers for God to do new covenant miracles are hollow if we aren't devoted to new covenant ways.

We can't pray for the Lord's blessing of salvation and miracles and revival to touch our community when there is no devotion to the instrument that Jesus always extends those blessings through. That's like me expecting my car to drive when there is no gas tank to hold the fuel. In this age, the church is the wineskin that holds the wine of heaven;

"...now the manifold wisdom of God is made known BY THE CHURCH to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3.10).

"Now, to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we could ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory IN THE CHURCH" (Ephesians 3.20-21).

The manifold wisdom of God is made known to the world by the church.

The glory of God is demonstrated to the world through the church.

Even though she's not perfect

Why do the majority of us have resistance to this truth?

We know it's true, but why are we uncomfortable with it?

Because we've been hurt by the church...we've been disappointed by the church...and you told yourself you can't trust the church anymore.

As someone who has also felt the sting of church hurt let me say this, just because the church isn't perfect doesn't mean we get have permission to separate ourselves and follow Jesus on our own. The solution to broken church isn't separation from the church. The solution to broken church isn't to become non-committal...

it's to be the solution that you long to see IN THE CHURCH.

The solution to broken church is to become the answer to your own prayers FOR THE CHURCH.

Take your seat at the table with the family and determine that you're going to love, you're going to serve, you're going to be like Jesus, you're going to be for someone else what you prayed someone else would've been for you when the church was not acting like the church. The solution to darkness is always the same...more light. When we bump up against bad church, and our response is to isolate and become non-committal, who wins? The enemy...the gates of Hades.

I understand that some of us have experienced some of our deepest wounds at the hands of people who claim to love God...so did Jesus. Some of us have been deeply hurt by churches...but we must be careful not to project that experience onto Jesus and His church. He weeps with those who weep, and bends low to heal the brokenhearted. His light will shine on all that has been done in secret and He will expose injustice and injury.

But the fact remains, we simply cannot find anywhere in Scripture that justifies separating ourselves from the Body and following Jesus on our own. That's like me saying because my first girlfriend broke my heart that I will never associate with another girl again. I only hurt myself by doing that. I only hurt myself when I project my heartbreak on the entire female gender. The problem was the girlfriend, not all girls. And the wounds we've suffered may have come from something that called itself church, or looked like church, or we assumed was the church...but it was not representative of the church that Jesus loves.

The church, in spite of herself, is still God's plan A, and there is no plan B.

I heard a story that illustrates the point:

when Jesus returned to heaven after He ascended, the angels gathered around Him in amazement. They gazed at the wounds in his hands and feet, and astounded at what He had suffered.

After some time, the angel Gabriel spoke: "Lord, you suffered so much down there. Do they know and appreciate the extent of your sacrifice."

"No," said Jesus. "Not yet. Right now only a handful of people in Jerusalem understand."

“Then what have you done to make sure everyone else understands?” asked Gabriel.

“I’ve asked Peter, James, and John, and the others to spread the news. They’ll tell others who will then tell others until the message spreads to the ends of the earth.”

But Gabriel, knowing the nature of people, asked, “What’s Plan B?”

“There is no Plan B,” replied Christ. “I’m devoted to them...they are My Body in the earth...they are My Church.”

The church, gathered and beautiful, in-spite of her blemishes and defects, is still His one and only plan. The church is the one who prevails. The church has been given the keys of the kingdom. Take your seat at the table...devote yourself to what Jesus is devoted to.