

# Why Follow Jesus?

M. W. Bassford, 7-31-11

In life, human beings do things for reasons. We go to work so that we can earn money to support our families. We vote for particular political candidates because we agree with those candidates' views, or at least because we disagree with the views of the opponent. Even in something as trivial as recreation, we go see particular movies or buy particular books because we hope to gain some kind of enjoyment from our purchases. Our goals drive our behavior.

Typically, the more drastic the change in behavior, the better the reason has to be. I might go rent a movie from Redbox one evening on a whim simply because I'm feeling bored, and if the movie isn't any good, oh well, I'm out a dollar. On the other hand, when I was considering whether I wanted to ask Lauren to marry me or not, I thought about that decision for months. I knew that the decision to marry her would have dramatic consequences throughout the rest of my life, and before I proposed, I wanted to make sure that the case for marriage was a compelling one.

Nowhere does this hold more true in the spiritual realm. Even though many denominations require little commitment from their members, genuine Christianity asks a great deal from us. If we are truly disciples of Jesus, that decision will change the way we talk, the people we associate with, the way we spend our time, and the things we consider important. In short, becoming a Christian will change everything about the way we live. It is the only decision that I can think of that is even more life-altering than the decision to marry. It is a commitment to become a different person.

In the face of such a massive change, it's only reasonable for us to ask "Why should I?" Why should we obey the gospel in the first place? If we have already done so, why keep up that intense commitment? Why follow Jesus?

## His Example

The answers to this question group themselves into two main categories, and the first group concerns the example of Jesus. Because Jesus is such a great man, when we devote ourselves to imitating Him, we are following the highest possible calling. To put it another way, we should follow Jesus because being like Him is the right thing to do.

One of the most attractive aspects of Jesus' character is **HIS GOODNESS**. Peter highlights this attribute in Acts 10:37-38. We can summarize Jesus' days on earth by saying that He went about doing good, and no one was as committed to doing good as Jesus. This goodness is evident in two primary ways. First, Jesus was righteous. He had a life and a character that were completely pure and noble, untainted by even a single sin. Second, Jesus was compassionate. He felt the needs of others as though they were His own. He would use His miraculous powers to heal the sick from sunup to sundown, and even on into the night. Even when He was exhausted, He still roused Himself to teach the multitudes about God. He reached out to those whom other Jews considered scum, the tax collectors and the prostitutes, and invited those people to become His disciples. Every day of His life showed how much He cared about others.

When I look at how righteous and compassionate Jesus was, I don't have any problem recognizing that I'm not like that, but I want to be. I want that same holiness and concern for others to be evident in my life. I am disgusted by my wickedness and hard-heartedness, and I want to change. If we follow Jesus, He will teach all of us how.

Likewise, we can learn much from **HIS WISDOM**. We see the people of Nazareth comment on this in Matthew 13:54. As we study the record of the gospels, it's striking how brilliant Jesus was, but His intellect went beyond mere brilliance. He understood people, He understood how to reach their hearts with His words, and even more than that, He understood what was important in life and how it should be lived. When Jesus was crucified, He was about my age. Of that thirty-odd-year lifespan, He only spent about three years of it actively engaged in His ministry. And yet, He used that short earthly life so well that He has had a greater impact on the human race than anyone else ever has or ever will.

If we follow Him, those same characteristics of a life wisely lived will become evident in our lives. When we sit at the feet of Jesus, He will teach us how to interact with others. We will learn how to have better marriages, better children, better work relationships, and better friendships. What's more, He will teach us to spend our lives focused on what's important. If we take our priorities from Jesus, we won't spend our lives chasing down all of those dead ends that worldly people follow. Instead, we will lead a life that we can look back on with satisfaction, a life that will be well spent.

Third, we can take inspiration from **HIS DEDICATION**. We can find a striking example of this dedication in John 18:10-11. Jesus was entirely committed to doing what His Father willed Him to do, even when that included meekly going to His death on the cross. This reminds me of one of the most important lessons that my father has ever taught me. From what he saw when he worked in the FAA, he says that there are two kinds of men. There are men you can count on to work, and men you can't, and my father has always been a man who would get the job done. When he still worked, he worked hard. When his children have needed him, he has always been there. When something around the house has needed taking care of, he has taken care of it. When the Lord has needed him to do something, he has done it, whether or not it was burdensome. Through his life, I have learned so much about the dedication and character of Jesus.

Each one of us should ask ourselves if we are dedicated like Jesus was. Can God count on us to get the job done? Are we at services every time the doors are open, or do we make excuses? When there's work in the church that needs doing, do we step up, or do we hope someone else will do it for us? When a brother or sister is struggling, do we reach out to them, or do we wait for the problem to solve itself when they fall away? When God commands us to teach the lost, do we reply, "Here am I; send me!", or do we mutter, "Here am I; send someone else!" Can God and man alike depend on us and trust us, or are we untrustworthy and useless? If we want to be useful, Jesus will teach us how.

Finally, we can look to Jesus to learn from **HIS LOVE**. Jesus Himself describes this love in John 15:13-14. Even though the gospels paint such a vivid portrait of Jesus on earth, we can reduce His entire life down to one Greek word: *agape*, selfless love for others. He allowed Himself to be born for others, He lived for others, He died for others, and even now, He reigns for the benefit of others. Never do we see Jesus showing any concern for Himself and what He wanted. It was always about those He loved and what was best for them. Thankfully, God does not call any of us to die on the cross for the sins of mankind, but He does call us to be disciples of Jesus, and that means living an other-centered life. In everything, we must give to God first, our neighbor second, and only give what is left over to ourselves. To the fleshly mind, this seems like a miserable way to live, but in reality, it is more fulfilling than selfishness could ever be.

These are the things that Jesus stands for, and being a disciple of Jesus means striving for these things. Maybe that doesn't appeal to you. Maybe you enjoy being wicked. Maybe you have no interest in caring for the needs of those around you. Maybe you relish living an impulsive, destructive life. Maybe you prefer to be lazy and useless. Maybe you can conceive of no better way to spend your life than worshiping yourself. If that's who you want to be, discipleship has nothing to offer you, but if you want to be better than that, following Jesus has everything to offer.

### **Our Benefits.**

Of course, we don't follow Jesus merely because of His towering moral example. Instead, there are also a number of benefits we gain from discipleship. The first of these is **REST**. Let's look at the promise that Jesus makes in Matthew 11:28-30. As we all know, the world is not a terribly restful place, nor is life a terribly restful experience. All of us are constantly beset by problems and anxieties and fears, and of these fears, perhaps the greatest is the fear of death. None of us enjoy thinking that our lives on earth will end, but that is a certainty for all of us. When we consider these burdens we bear, Jesus' promise of rest is all the sweeter. No matter how dark our present or how ominous our future, we can be certain that Jesus will deliver us from every evil that threatens us. In Christ, even death cannot terrify us. It may seem that Jesus puts a great deal on us, but in comparison to the burdens he takes from us, His yoke is truly light.

When we are feeling especially burdened, though, we can seek extra divine help through **PRAYER**. The Hebrews writer illuminates the role that Jesus has in prayer in Hebrews 10:19, 22. Most Americans don't really understand how prayer works. They think that every human being automatically has the right to pray and expect a hearing from God. Sadly, that's not true. Prayer is a benefit that is only available to those who follow Jesus. When He died, He used His blood to open a way through the barrier that separated us from God. Sinners do not have the right to approach God, even through prayer, but because we have been cleansed from our sins, we have become a holy people that can approach God whenever we please. We can ask Him for whatever we wish and expect that He will give us whatever will most benefit us. The more we pray, the more we understand how powerful it is, as we receive blessing from God.

We see one of His greatest blessings, though, when He grants us **FORGIVENESS**. Paul tells us so explicitly in Ephesians 1:7. Ever had one of those dreams where you're back in school, and it's final exam day, except that you haven't been to class all semester, so you don't have the foggiest idea how to answer any of the questions on the test? I've had those occasionally, and they're miserable. However, they pale in comparison to what the day of judgment will be like if we don't have the help of Jesus. God will ask us about every sin we ever committed, we will know that our eternal destiny hangs in the balance, and yet, we won't be able to give Him a single answer that will satisfy Him. What a despairing feeling that would be, to stand there before His throne and realize that He is going to condemn us! What a horrifying thought! When we consider that solemn day, it helps us to understand how significant the forgiveness of our sins is. If we are faithful disciples of Jesus, and we stand before God in that position, He will consult the record of our lives and say, "I don't see anything here that would condemn you. There's no reason for Me to keep you out of heaven." That won't be because we lived perfectly. It will be because the blood of Jesus erased all of our sins from the record.

Ultimately, though, we should follow Jesus because only His footsteps lead to **ETERNAL LIFE**. Jesus Himself makes this promise in John 10:28-30. All of us have heroes. When I was in high school, I had a math class with a guy who went on to be Mizzou's starting quarterback when I was in college. I'd see him in the library sometimes, and we'd stop and talk a little bit, and I thought it was just the coolest thing that the quarterback knew who I was and thought I was worth talking to. Brethren, eternal life means that we get to spend forever in heaven with God, and God is more wonderful than all of the earthly heroes we can imagine rolled into one. Heaven is a place of perfect joy, perfect rest, filled with all of the righteous people who have ever lived. It's the best place ever, and we get to go there through Jesus.