

“If you love me...then follow me.” Sermon

Last week we began this new series focusing on two key passages of Scripture.

1. John 14:23 (NIV) *“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”*
2. The Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) where Jesus told his disciples to go make disciples by first *baptizing them* and secondly teaching them to *obey everything He commanded us*. So, for the next several weeks, we’re going to be discovering most of the commands that Jesus gave which apply to us today. And my hope and prayer is not just that we just learn them but that we begin to apply them to our lives and thereby show God’s love and glory to a hurting world.

In your bulletins this morning is an outline of this sermon series so that you’ll know where we’re headed.

This morning we’re going to focus on the commands that are essential for us **entering into a relationship with Him**. It’s important to remember that obedience to Jesus’ commands, were not intended to be stand alone, but were meant to flow out of a relationship with Him. .

- Obedience without a relationship is legalism
- And claiming to love Jesus without obeying Him, James says makes us liars (1 John 2:4).

So, taking your outlines as our guide, let’s jump into what Jesus says it takes to enter into a relationship with Him.

1. **Come to Jesus if you’re weary**: In **Matthew 11:28-30 (show this verse on the screen)** Jesus issues an invitation to anyone who is weary to come to Him and He will give you rest. Anyone here this morning weary, is there anyone here who could use some rest? But then in the next two verses, we discover exactly what it takes to enter into this rest Jesus offers.

Matthew 11:29-30 (NIV) *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

There are a couple of things to understand about this invitation.

There are **two commands** here.

- *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.* At that time the “yoke” of a rabbi referred to their individual teaching, which makes perfect sense that Jesus follows that command up with “*learn from me.*” But also what Jesus is implying that you don’t have to obey his commands all on your own. The purpose of a yoke was to join two animals together so that they could work together and not have to rely on just their own strength. Jesus is offering to work with us in living out our lives in a relationship with Him. And that’s exactly what Jesus does with and for us. Through the Holy Spirit, He lives inside of us and provides us with the strength and wisdom and encouragement to live our lives for Him every day. So, when you’re weary in life, try to picture Jesus right there beside you giving you the strength and hope and encouragement to carry on every day. You don’t have to do life alone. Some of you need to take time to quit trying to do it on your own and spend time resting in Him and letting Him empower you to accomplish what He’s called you to do.
- *for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Jesus’ teachings differed quite a bit from those of other rabbis at the time and actually from most other major religions back then and now. All other religions require you to work for your salvation. To earn your way to heaven. Jesus’ teaching emphasizes that you can’t do enough to “earn” God’s love or your salvation. You’re a sinner in need of a Savior – and Jesus came to be that Savior, through His death on the cross. From that position of need, God offers us His amazing grace and invites us to enter into a relationship with Him where He’s done all the work. And now, out of that position of acceptance and love, Jesus invites us to go show the world that same type of love, acceptance and grace. On a practical level, people shouldn’t have to earn our love and acceptance. We should be able to give it, because of the freedom, love and acceptance we already have been given through Jesus. Do you see how this type of teaching, can free us from a life of uncertainty and weariness and free us up to **live a life of love** and **power** and **hope**?

2. **Repent:** From early on in Jesus' ministry, he began to call people to repentance because the kingdom of heaven is near. The word refers to an **internal change of your mind and heart resulting in transformed actions**. It implies that if you want to live in Jesus' kingdom, you've got to live life differently. **Zacchaeus** understood this when, after his lunch with Jesus he offered to repay anyone he'd cheated through his collection of taxes. You see while repentance begins in your mind and heart, it can't stay there. It's got to then make a difference in the way you live your life. You begin to live each day not asking what you can do today to improve your life - but instead you ask "**God what can I do to reveal your goodness and greatness today?**" It's a whole different way to begin and live every day.
3. **Believe in Jesus:** One night Jesus had a private, one on one, meeting with one of the leading members of the ruling Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. The man's name was **Nicodemus** and he was obviously curious about who exactly Jesus was. Nicodemus begins by complementing Jesus but Jesus jumps right to the chase and begins to talk about the importance of every person to be "**born again**". Jesus explains what this looks like, that you need to be **born of water and the Spirit**. And then he utters this well known sentence: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* And then Jesus goes on and continues to emphasize then importance of belief in Jesus.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This statement separates all of humanity into two categories.

- Those who believe are saved from their sins
- Those who don't believe are condemned.

It's important to understand what "**belief**" is because in our culture we've redefined "belief" into merely **intellectual ascent**. But in that culture to believe in a rabbi meant that you **committed yourself** to following that rabbi. And that's what Jesus is calling us to when He calls us to belief in Him. Not just believing in his existence but believing in his message and committing to following Him as your Savior and the Lord of your life. To believe in Jesus means that you commit to allowing Him to direct your life rather than you direct your life. You allow you to be the Boss because He's earned that right. And that leads us right into the 4th command of Jesus.

4. **Follow Jesus Completely:** Mt 4:19 "**Come, follow me**," Jesus said, "**and I will send you out to fish for people.**" And the amazing thing is that when Jesus asked his apostles to follow him – they immediately dropped everything and went and followed Him. Jesus isn't just looking for people who are fascinated by him or think he was a great teacher on morality. He's not looking for people who simply gather together at a church and learn more about him week after week. Jesus is **calling people out of the stands and onto the field**. Yesterday, I spent three hours watching the Vikings season come to an end. And while it was disappointing, after it was over, I simply picked up the remote and turned it off and went and had dinner with people I love. My body didn't hurt and my season didn't end. Because I'm merely a fan in the stands. But with Jesus, that's not an option if you want to be a follower of His. To be a follower requires living life differently. It involves getting down onto the field of life and living your life from a whole different mindset and heart commitment. Following Jesus means several things.
- a. **Following Jesus is not passive** – it requires a complete commitment
 - b. **You are not in control** – Jesus is now in control and he sets the direction for the day
 - c. **This is about a relationship**. Notice, Jesus didn't invite you to follow His rules but to follow Him. If I'm venturing into a whole new adventure it's very reassuring to have someone who's been there before and knows how to get to the finish line. Jesus knows what his plans are for your life and he wants to lead you and empower you to live it fully.
5. **Enter through the narrow gate:** There's a widespread belief that there's all sorts of ways to get to God, and really you just need to find the road that works for you. Perhaps it's through one of many religions that are out there. Or maybe it's through being a good moral person and attempting to do

more good deeds than bad. But Jesus didn't allow any such options. He made it pretty clear that there's only one way to get to heaven.

Luke 13:22-27 (NIV) Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, *"Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"*

He said to them, 24 *"**Make every effort** to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'*

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

26 *"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'*

27 *"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'"*

The "**make every effort**" is not a suggestion but is a command. Jesus draws a clear distinction between "**hanging out**" with Jesus and actually **committing your life to following him**. Some of you are merely acquainted with Jesus and maybe even made a commitment to Jesus at some point in your life. But right now you're pretty much just hanging out with him on Sundays. You're not allowing Him to transform your life in the ways you think and feel and the choices you make every day. It's probably pretty obvious to the people who know you best that you're Lord of your life and not Jesus..

A complete commitment to following Jesus is the only way to be a real follower of Jesus. He is the narrow door. And one day that door is going to close and if you read on in this text you'll hear about those people's reactions.

So, let me ask you – are you merely "**hanging out with Jesus**" or are you "**all in**"? What would those who know you the best say?

6. Take up your cross:

Luke 9:23 (NIV) *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must **deny themselves** and **take up their cross daily** and **follow me**."*

Entering through the narrow gate requires daily sacrifice. And I don't know what that looks like for you.

- It could be giving up on some of the relationships in your life that are toxic to your walk with the Lord
- It could be giving up some habits that are sinful, or perhaps their aren't sinful, but they are consuming time away from the Lord.
- It could be letting go of hurt from the past and letting God heal your heart
- It could be letting go of worry (based on a medical condition or financial difficulty)

The "cross" meant death and so to take up your cross daily means dying to your will and desires and pursuing God's will and desires for your life.

The apostle Paul was a very motivated Jew growing up. But after Christ called him into his service he declared: **Galatians 2:20 (NIV)** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Can you say that for where your life is at?

7. Remain in me

John 15:4 (NIV) ***Remain in me**, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

As a follower of Jesus, it's critical that every day you live connected to Christ. How do you do that?

- By reading and studying His Word everyday
- By spending time talking with Him and listening to Him through prayer.
- By relying on Jesus for the strength and wisdom and direction to live your life every day.
- By believing that you're loved by Jesus always (don't listen to the lies of the devil)
- By believing that Jesus has a plan for your life that's better than yours and it begins today)too many Christians are living in regrets or heartaches from the past and not allowing Christ's healing power to take them into the future. They are stuck in the past).

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- Obedience without relationship is _____
- Claiming to love Jesus without obedience makes us _____

What it takes to follow Jesus:

1. **Come to Jesus if you're** _____ (Mt. 11:28-30)

Two commands:

- a. Take my _____ upon you
- b. _____ from me

What is it about Jesus' teaching that gives us soul rest?

2. _____ (Mt. 4:17)
This is an internal change of your _____ & _____
resulting in transformed _____

3. _____ **in Jesus** (John 14:11)
What is this in a Biblical sense?

4. **Follow Jesus** _____ (Mt. 4:19)
 - a. Following Jesus is not _____
 - b. You are not in _____
 - c. This is about a _____

5. **Enter through the** _____ (Luke 13:24)
Q: Are you "*hanging out with Jesus*" or "committed"?

6. **Take up your** _____ (Luke 9:23)
Taking up your cross meant _____
How often do we need to take up our cross?
What is the cross you still need to take up?

7. _____ **in Jesus** (John 15:4)
How are you currently "remaining" in Jesus?

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