

Principled Living (Part 1): Imitating Christ by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

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Follow Me: The High Cost of Discipleship

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This sermon will begin a short series of sermons that will tie into the Days of Unleavened Bread and will possibly go several sermons after that as well.

It is my hope to present one over-arching principle in each one of these sermons. I will then take this principle and "beat it to death" for one whole sermon.

These principles will cover large segments of Christian living—**large** principles. I am not going to necessarily be giving very many specific examples or suggestions of what we can do. I want you to understand from the very beginning that we are talking *big* principles here. These are the ones that we have to keep in mind all of the time to live by. So, these are going to be areas that every true Christian must cover during his walk to the Kingdom of God.

Now, if you will remember, many of you went to Ambassador College, or were associated with people who did, and they had a class there for first year students called, "Principles **of** Living." The only problem with Principles of Living was that our textbook was *The Missing Dimension in Sex* by Herbert Armstrong. It was basically a Christian sex education class.

That is not what I am going to be talking about. I am going to be talking about things that should have been covered in Fundamentals of Theology, which are the great over-arching principles of Christian living. All I remember from Principles of Living was the Christian sex education portions of it. I do not remember if we went into other things or not. I passed, though!

There is a commercial that I see every so often. It is usually while I am watching NASCAR race: A man walking to work on busy city streets, but he is not walking casually. This man is trying to get to work quickly. But he is walking right behind another person, within inches of them. And, he is in step the whole way as they are striding down the street; he is perfectly in step right behind the person.

When the man needs to change direction he slips out from behind the one person that he is following, and slips right behind another person going in his direction. He does this while going up steps, and even up an escalator. He makes several changes as he goes, and finally he gets into the office building. He is following this one guy, still in lock step

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with one right behind the other, and they arrive at the elevator. And the man in front turns around and says, "Johnson! Quit drafting me!"

Now obviously the man is a racing fan. Those of you who are not racing fans probably do not know what drafting is. Drafting is a racing term for one car following another so closely that their back and front bumpers actually touch while moving 190, 195, 200, 205 miles per hour, and they are following one another so closely that the combined aerodynamics make both cars go faster round the track.

The car in front (as the term goes) punches a hole in the air. And the other car behind in the slipstream does not have to, which gives him extra horsepower to expend for something else. He is not struggling against the air because the car in front is. And so, he is able to use that excess horsepower to push the car in front of him faster and faster and faster.

If a whole train of cars—five, six, seven, eight cars—get hooked up like this, they can literally leave the pack behind. One car punches the hole; the other cars follow, and make the whole draft go faster.

Now, lest you doubt, there is a spiritual parallel here.

Our leader Jesus Christ has punched a hole in the air. To use a different metaphor, He has blazed the trail before us. And we are the cars—the people—following right on His tail, able now to benefit from what He has already done for us. The hole has been punched. We just have to follow Him through it. So, we are now able to use this same metaphor to finish this race, and to finish it with a good finish! But how good a finish to this race depends on how closely we follow Him.

If you have not figured it out already, the foundational principle that I wish to pursue today is imitating Christ, or if you like, following Christ.

To me, if there is one great principle of Christian living, it is living as Christ lived. If we do this we will be one of those to whom He says in the resurrection, "Well done good and faithful servant."

Let us please begin in Matthew 4:18. This is the calling of the disciples, particularly Peter and Andrew and James and John.

Matthew 4:18-20 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the

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sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

I always get the picture of them just dropping their nets, jumping off the boat, and they were gone!

Matthew 4:21-22 Going on from there, [probably just down the dock], He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately [they did the same as Peter and Andrew], they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Move forward now to Matthew 9, and we will also read the calling of another disciple.

Matthew 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." And he arose and followed Him.

It is the same reaction as the other four men in Matthew 4 had.

Now turn to John 1. Here we will see two other disciples in their calling.

John 1:43-49 [This was after He had called Andrew and John himself] The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Now, He did not say here to Nathaniel, "Follow Me," however all it took for him to say

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was, "Oh, I saw you under the tree," and Nathaniel said, "I am in!" He went so far to even call Him the Son of God, and the King of Israel.

This evidently was Jesus' first command to each of His disciples. Maybe He did not say those words to each one but it seems to me that we have six or seven of the disciples being told basically the same thing, "Follow Me." And they straightway, immediately, left what they were doing, and they followed Him.

Now, "Follow Me," might appear on the surface to mean simply, "Go where I go," or to *tail* Him as in a draft; physically; to come behind.

But, there is *far more* to this command, "Follow Me." This "far more" is a thing that the disciples would learn over the next three and a half years. They came to know in their heart of hearts that "Follow Me," meant more than just, "east my dust." It meant a great deal more. Yes, it means walk behind Me but it also means "Do what I do." It means "Live as I do." And, "Experience what I experience."

We will see as we go through this that it also means "Suffer and die like Me." But on the other hand, it also means, "Share eternal life and My rewards, too." It runs the entire gamut of Christian life—"Follow Me."

Let us go back to the book of Luke 9. If you have a New King James you will see that the passage is titled, "The Cost of Discipleship." I could have gone to several different sections within the Gospels because many of them have a section like this.

Luke 9:57-62 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone [We find in Matthew that that someone was a scribe] said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." [just like the disciples] But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

There is a cost to discipleship. Following Jesus is not easy, nor is it risk-free. It is not without sometimes-severe sacrifices and hardships. It involves the commitment that most people are just not willing make because true discipleship involves absolute

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devotion and dedication to Christ Himself. That is why He said these things. He was testing these men, finding out what was really in their hearts; finding out if they were really willing to commit themselves to Him, to His way of living, and to His will.

As He says there in the final verse, everyone who is fit for God's Kingdom is willing to give it all—and I mean **all**. Maybe I should put it this way: Everyone who is fit for the Kingdom of God *must* be willing to give his all.

What happens here is that Luke pulls together three instances in which someone refuses to accept Christ's calling to follow Him. And they illustrate three general areas in which people get tripped up.

I do not know if you are aware of it, there is a book that has been out there for about 60 years, by a man named Dietrich Bonnhoffer. He was a German clergyman who lived under the Nazi regime. He wrote a book called, *The Cost of Discipleship*. In that he basically says this: that when Christ bids us come, He bids us come and die. Meaning He summons us to give everything we have. That is the cost of our discipleship to Jesus Christ.

As I am going to show you here, Luke shows three ways in which we normally fail.

The first reason is that the Christian life is one of discomfort. This is why Jesus tells the man that He did not have a place to lay His head. The Christian life is one of discomfort. We know that in many cases in God's Word Christians are called strangers and sojourners. That means that we have no fixed place of abode; we are travelers going through a land, or staying temporarily. We are not fixed at a certain place. We are not citizens of the lands in which we live in a spiritual sense.

So, we are travelers along the road of life toward the Kingdom of God and travelers live in temporary dwellings. They do not have all the comforts of home. They sometimes have to make do wherever they happen to be on the side of the road.

Jesus' life with His disciples is a good example of this. They would walk throughout the land of Palestine as a group, and when it was time to stop for the day, they stopped. They probably slept on the side of the road, or found a place in a cave, or some nice farmer's home, or whatever it was. But they had to make do. They had to live off of the land or the generosity of those were following listening to what Jesus had to say. They could not just stop and say, "Oh, there is a La Quinta! Let us pull in here; we will take six rooms. It will be nice. See you in the morning!" There were not Cracker Barrels all over the land of Palestine for them to stop in and get their favorite Southern food.

No, they lived a real life of hardship. The point is that we cannot allow the accoutrements of this world and of this life to hold us back in our devotions to Christ. Our homes, our jobs, our vacations, our clothes, our pastimes; none of these things comes anywhere close to the importance of this Christian life, of the discipleship that we have been given. We have to be willing to forsake all these things because the life that Jesus Christ has given us due to our summons from Him is one of discomfort. This is the way Christ lived, and it is the way that most Christians live in principle.

Once you were called and you accepted this way of life, I would bet that most of you would say that since that time, your life has been unsettled, beleaguered, and you have never really been able to settle down and rest. Christ did not come, He said, to bring peace on the earth, He came with a sword. He came to make your life—if you understand what I am getting at here—a living hell.

Now I do not want you to take that to extreme. But He puts us through the paces to see if we are—many hate this word—*qualified* for entrance into His Kingdom. He does not want anybody there who will not pull his share.

And so what He does is that He calls us, and He says, "Now you have to live the rough life that I lived so that you will have what I have received." We will not receive what He received—His reward—unless we are able to bear the burdens of the life that He lived as well.

Like I said, discipleship is no easy ride. This is what Jesus himself said. Are you willing to live a life where you do not have a place to lay your head? And, then think about all of the other things that might imply. The Christian life is hard.

Number two is that the Christian life is sacrificial. This is what He says to the second man in principle when he asks to go back and first bury his father, and He says to let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God.

We, because of our calling, must often forsake the customary duties, privileges, associations, and activities of normal life. What could be more normal than a funeral for a family member and the duties that a son would owe his father for getting that done? Jesus said, "No, there are people who do that. You preach the gospel."

Tough words are they not? You would think that he would say, "And Jesus was full of compassion, and said, 'Go home and bury your father, and meet Me down the road, and then you can preach the Kingdom of God.'" No. He says, "Do not! You come with Me and preach the Kingdom of God. Let these other people bury the dead."

The dead are those of this world who have not been called, and who do not have the truth of God. The Christian's focus, Jesus is saying here, is on the living. And the living are those whom God has called and given the truth. And, their focus should also be on the church's work of proclaiming God's Kingdom. That is the part there at the end of verse 60, preaching the Kingdom of God.

If you want to be a disciple, you have to be willing to forsake all those niceties of culture and civilization at the drop of a hat, and do God's will. Whether they are duties to your family or duties to society, it does not matter. When God calls you, His will comes first.

So, we end up "missing out" on many of this world's activities. Do you miss them? Or is it more exciting to you to let the dead bury their own dead, and you preach the gospel? It depends on where your priorities are—what you enjoy more, what you have dedicated yourself to. And, that is what Jesus is saying trips people up. Their ties back to the world. He says that you have to cut them off in many respects.

Which leads into the third point: the Christian life demands new loyalties. Remember that this third man said to let him bid farewell who are at my house. Evidently, they were close friends and family. And Jesus said that anyone who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God. Many Christians are the only ones called from their particular families. And in many cases they find over days, months, and years of time, that they have to forsake them in a sense, because they eventually find that they have little in common even with their own blood, because the way of life just diverges so dramatically. But, in the church they find a new family, a new identity; a new purpose; a new way of life.

And though blood is strong, obviously in many cases it is thicker than water, Jesus warns that our devotion to Him and God's family must be stronger. And it is an act of will that makes our devotion to Him stronger than our link by blood to anyone else.

The Holy Spirit is not just going to infuse us and make us totally committed to God. We have to set our will and say that God is my first priority in life, and I will go where He says to go. So, the Christian life demands new loyalties.

We see an example of this in II Timothy 2 where the apostle Paul is giving instructions to the evangelist. Paul was trying to cram as much instruction into this letter for Timothy because it would be the last one that Timothy would get before Paul was martyred. So, he wanted to give him some parting advice if he could, and this which we have just gone through is one of the things that he mentions.

II Timothy 2:1-4, 7-10 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

This passage parallels Luke 9:57-62. But, he changes the metaphors a little bit. Instead, he talks about being drafted into Christ's army. And as a recruit, we have to take whatever our commander, the battlefield, the battle, and the vicissitudes of our earthly situation dish out to us, because we are soldiers.

A loyal soldier does his job as instructed. He does not waste his time and energies on outside affairs. A soldier cannot be part of some social group because the soldier has to be at the front lines fighting. He cannot spend all of his time down at the fire station with all of his buddies shooting basketball or whatever. He is required to be at the range shooting, honing his skills, learning whatever he needs to do his job as a soldier.

And you know this probably from your associations, we all just know this because we are part of this country, but when a man signs up as part of the US Armed Forces, he is theirs. They take him, they break him, they build him up, they put him in a job, and he stays in that job according to their rules and regulations for as long as he signed up for. It has gotten softer these days, but that is basically what used to happen.

It is the same thing with us. When we enlisted into God's army, we are His. We do what He says, we fight the battles He sends us to fight, and we do His will. And, as Paul says here, the reason why we do it is found in verse 4 above, that we may please Him who enlisted us as a soldier. We are totally His, but we love Him so much that we do what He asks us to do with joy so that we can please Him.

That is how far the devotion has to go. It is not like a grunt in the army who does it because the sergeant tells him to—this is totally different in that regard. We do what we do as God's soldiers because we love Him and we want to please Him.

So, as we get down to verses 7-10, Paul shows that this is how he looked at his life and practiced his craft as an apostle. He was wholly Christ's. His job was to serve the elect, he said, so that they could make it to the Kingdom of God. That was his whole reason for being.

And if God wanted to take him, and let him die as a martyr, if it will please Christ, so be it. That is what he would do, and that is what he did. He was so devoted to being Christ's soldier that he would give himself to the last drop of blood to complete his mission. And he did. He gave his all. And he is not even the one that we are supposed to follow. Even though he did say in I Corinthians 11:1, "Follow me, as I follow Christ." Let us go back to the gospel of Mark please.

Mark 8:34-38 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Jesus, in the gospels gives us plenty of warning that following Him will be arduous, exhausting, and consuming. When called we have the responsibility to consider the road ahead. We call it "counting the cost," right? We often go to Luke 14 where it says very plainly that He wants us to count the cost to see if we can finish this project—f we can hoe the row that He has given to us.

We need to determine if we have what it takes to fulfill the requirements of our calling. And you know most of us are so dumb that we never take this opportunity fully, because we do not know—we are not really aware of what is coming ahead. We do not even know God's Word well enough to figure out exactly what our life is going to be like after we are converted.

But, we are given enough warning to know that if we sign on, life is going to change dramatically. And, it is going to take everything that we have to finish what we have been given to do. So, we are able at this ignorant stage in our life to either accept or reject the assignment. And I am sure that God knows very well that we are like babies at

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the time. They do not know if you told them to go clean out the garage that it is going to be a task that would take them weeks, rather than just a few minutes because of all the detritus of fifty years of collecting things.

But He, I am sure, makes up for all that. Once we sign on we are in for a penny, in for a pound. Once we sign up, once we figure out the way that things are going, the only wise course is to plunge into our calling with everything that we have, because we have already signed up. There is no backing out. When we "sign on the dotted line," it is in our own blood, as it were.

Does not Jesus Christ say that we have to love Him with **all** our heart, **all** of our soul, and **all** of our mind? Do you know what that means? He did not leave one part of us excepted—heart, soul, mind—everything is His. So, what does Jesus instruct us to do?

The first thing that He says is that if a person decides to become one of His disciples, he must deny himself. Are you aware what "deny yourself" means?

It means to *renounce* yourself. It means to *reject* yourself. It means to *give yourself up*; to *surrender* yourself; to *forsake* yourself; even to *abandon* yourself.

I do not think that any of us have done that yet. And do you know why I know that? We still indulge ourselves, pursue our personal ambitions, seek our own good and our own comfort; and we almost invariably prioritize ourselves first! I know that I do. I do it all the time. And, it is not just between me and God, it is also between me and my wife, or me and my kids, or me and my acquaintances; I always prioritize myself first.

Jesus said to deny yourself; renounce yourself; forsake yourself; abandon yourself; give yourself up. Reject yourself—reject all those desires for self-fulfillment. We do not do that. We always prioritize ourselves first.

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Those are pretty strong words!

I know we like to get around this a bit by saying that hate means love less by comparison. Do not take it that way! Jesus, I am sure, used these words specifically to get us to understand what renouncing or denying our self really means. We have to be

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willing to give *everything* up! And yes, our own lives also. Otherwise, we cannot be His disciples! It just does not work. He wants everything. We mean nothing anymore to ourselves. He means everything.

None of us have reached the point of being totally committed, living sacrifices. But, that is what Christ requires. He does not just ask it, but He requires it of us.

Let us go from this "cheerful" subject to the next one. The next thing that He says is, "Take up your cross."

Do you realize, I am sure you do, that the cross is an instrument of torture and death? Do you understand where He is coming from? Think of Jesus Himself.

He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. And what did He have to do? He had to pick up a cross, a stake, and carry it to the place of execution. Everybody in Palestine knew this was part of Roman torture. It showed the condemned person that he was squarely under the thumb of the Roman system. The Romans would make him submit to even the worst thing, which is carrying your own instrument of death to the place of execution. So they humbled a person by making him do this. By making him show one last time that he was squarely under the power of the Roman judicial system.

Jesus tells us that we have to do this ***voluntarily***.

We are not under the Romans. We are under Jesus Christ, and He is not trying to humiliate us by this, but He is saying that the disciple's character that He is looking for is one who is willing to go this far—to voluntarily take up the instrument of his own torture and death, and bear it.

We are to pick up that cross, that stake, put it on our shoulders voluntarily. He asks us to submit willingly to whatever God's will is for us no matter where it leads. That is what He means.

Not only must we renounce ourselves—deny ourselves—we also have to be willing to voluntarily submit to God's will even if it means torture and death.

Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When God bids you, He bids you to come and die," to give everything that you have.

Peter, I believe, grasped this concept. Please go back to I Peter 4. He ended up writing extensively about this concept, both of denying oneself, and taking up one's cross. And,

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of course, the overall idea of following Christ.

But as we will see, it was something, a concept that Jesus specifically impressed upon Peter.

I Peter 4:1-2, 14-19 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. [Meaning, he has voluntarily taken that cross upon himself so that he will submit to whatever God's will is for him.]? If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. [He is talking about making a witness here.] But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved [Here we give everything that we have, deny ourselves, willingly take up the cross to torture and death, and we are still **only scarcely saved**], where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" [How much worse will it be for them?] Therefore [a concluding statement] let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Like Job's wife, most folks would say, "**Curse God, and die!**"

Peter says, "No. Commit your soul to God and do good, even though you are being tortured and killed (possibly)."

Taking up one's cross is a willingness to bear whatever God sends our way. And I mean whatever. It is complete submission. Absolute, complete submission to God's will. If it is extreme self-denial, so be it. If it is suffering persecution, so be it. Blessed by the name of the Lord! If it is death, fine. Die as a Christian.

Whatever it is, we are resolved as Christ's disciples, committed to doing good, and being faithful through it; and this is the last line of what Peter says here in verse 19. We know that God will likewise be good and faithful to us. He will not let any sacrifice of that nature go unrewarded.

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So, it is not as bad as it might seem. Even though we are asked to give everything we have, God will reward us with everything that *He* has.

Now this sets up a paradox.

Mark 8:35 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

This is the paradox. The only way to attain eternal life is to sacrifice our lives voluntarily to and for Him now. Following Christ—imitating His life—is a death sentence of sorts. As a matter of fact, the first thing we do as disciples of Christ is die! Are you aware of that?

Baptism is a death. We die with Christ, and we are raised to newness of life. But, do not you know that once we are raised to newness of life, we asked to sacrifice ourselves day in, and day out until we really do die. And it is only then, that we are given eternal life in its fullness.

So, we pledge to die to ourselves, to this world, to our physical, material hopes and dreams, to gain a reward that we will never receive in this life! Oh, but the reward is worth everything that we sacrifice, and more!

Turn to Hebrews 11—the heroes of faith—and this is the way they faced all that they had to go through:

Hebrews 11:13-15 These all died in faith, not having received the promises [just like we will not receive the promises, not until we after we die and are made alive again], but having seen them afar off were assured of them [because God is a faithful Creator], embraced them [with all they had] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. [Meaning that they would live like Christ without a place to lay their heads] For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland [a country, another civilization that is really theirs]. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out [meaning this world now], they would have had opportunity to return.

And boy, every time we look back, we turn into a pillar of salt, do we not? That is why we are not supposed to look back! When you put your hand to the plow, plow a straight furrow, because if you look back, your furrow will get all crooked, and ruin the field.

Do not look back! You are absolutely and totally committed to Jesus Christ and His will.

Hebrews 11:16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

And more than a city.

Turn back to John 21. Remember that I said that Christ specifically impressed upon Peter this idea of totally giving his will to Jesus Christ, and God, and we find this at the end of Christ's appearance upon the earth. This is the last thing recorded about Him, basically, other than what is in Acts 1.

John 21:17-19 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, [John says] signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

"Now, Peter, that you know what the end of your story is, follow Me."

Do you remember what Peter had done just a few weeks before? He had exposed to the whole world that he was not willing to bear the cost of discipleship. Instead of being totally loyal to Jesus Christ, he had instead denied him and saved his own skin. It was a perfect opportunity for Peter to shine as Christ's leading disciple, and he failed miserably.

You could say in a way that this is Jesus' correction of Peter. He said, "Look, Pete, remember what you just did? Well, sorry to put it to you this way, but you are going to have to die that way anyway. Sometime after a life full of work in My behalf, someone is going to lead you to the place of execution. Follow Me."

I think sometimes we think of Jesus Christ as a "pantywaist taskmaster." How would you

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like for your Savior to say this to you:

"Okay. Time to get to work now! We will send you to Joppa and then to Caesarea. We will make you go around Palestine and we will see how many Samaritans you can convert. Then we will send you up to Babylon, there are a lot of Jews up there, probably many people receptive to what you have to say, and then you will make your way across Galatia, and several other places; and then when you hit Rome, do as best you can, and then well, you are dead. Follow Me."

That is basically what He told him. I am kind of making light of it. But I want you to see that this is what He told him.

"Your life is totally committed now, Peter! This is the way that it is going to be. You are going to work, and you are going to work, and you are going to work, and you are going to work, and you are going to give everything that you have for Me. And then finally when the time is come, you are going to give everything for Me one last time."

And then Peter says, "Uh, Lord?"

John 21:20-21 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?"

"But how is it going to go for John? Give me something gruesome for him!" It is almost in the background there.

And Jesus said to him (I can just imagine this in my mind's eye):

John 21:22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? *You follow Me.*"

Do you understand what is going on here?

What God requires of you maybe something radically different from what He requires of the one sitting right next to you.

Do you understand how close Peter and John were? They had grown up together

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around that lake. Their families knew each other. They had gone into business together—Zebedee's family and Jonah's family. They went out fishing every day together. They had probably spent just about every day of their adult lives together up until this point. And do you know what?

They had become Jesus Christ's disciples together too. They had spent the last three and a half years together following Jesus Christ all the over Palestine, wherever He went. They had eaten all these meals together. They had walked the roads together. They had discussed Jesus' sayings together. They had gone through the crucifixion together. They had been the two that had run to the tomb together on that Sunday morning, and found it empty. They had palled around for the last 40 days together wondering what was going to happen; probably having some good fireside chats about how things were going to go from here on out. And at this point, they had gone back fishing.

But, what Jesus required of John was very different from what He required of Peter.

Remember what Paul says later on in II Corinthians? He says, "Those of you who are comparing yourselves among yourselves are not wise." Because, one person's job as a Christian soldier may be cleaning out latrines, while another person's job may be to lead the charge, while yet another person's job may be something else entirely different.

So, it does not matter what the other person is charged to do. Everything is based upon what we have decided to devote to God. Everything is based on our own personal devotion; and what happens to him or what happens to her does not matter to us.

"What is that to you? You follow Me!" It is personal between you and Jesus Christ. He is the commanding officer; we are His soldiers. Each one of us devotes our self individually and totally to Him. "Follow Me."

We are often called in the New Testament His slaves. If you want to look at one place it is Romans 6:22. We are called God's slaves there.

Under Roman law, a master had total control over his slaves, even to the point of death if he wanted to or if had a need to kill them for some reason. We, of course, have a benevolent Master, but He is still our Master.

Now, for us being children of liberty as it were under how many centuries of western civilization, we have a hard time with this concept of being Christ's slaves. But, it is part and parcel of following Christ. It is the same as the soldier metaphor. It is just slightly

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different. In this regard, we have to develop a slave mentality. Not the slave mentality that we have heard of in secular discourse, but the slave mentality of being willing to jump up when that Master says "jump," and do what He says to do immediately, so that we willingly and cheerfully obey the will of our Master in all things, even to the point of death.

This is all part of following Christ—of imitating Him—because He did all these things Himself. He is not asking us to do one thing that He did not do Himself.

He labored throughout His life, especially through His ministry, 24 hours a day, giving everything that He had, exhausting Himself, healing people, discussing their problems, casting out demons, preaching to them, to the point where the sea was just about to swamp their boat, and was sleeping because He was so tired. He traveled around the country doing these same things day after day, not even stopping for the Sabbath (of course not, that is the day that God works and does most of His preaching, most of His activity).

And then He gets to Jerusalem for the final time, and He gives it all there—His entire life. He spills it for us. So, He is not asking us to do anything that He has not done Himself.

Turn to John 14. We will be reading this next Friday night on Passover.

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

Beautiful words for us to keep in mind.

John 14:2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

He is going to make sure that our reward is there secure for us, and waiting for us when we get there. And, preparing us for it!

John 14:3-4 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. "And where I go you know, and the way you know."

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See? He is a faithful Creator. He has given His all for us. And now, He asks us to give our all for Him. And He will be faithful to make sure that the reward is there at the end of the road.

John 14:5-6 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

There was a Roman Catholic priest in the early 15th century by the name of Thomas a Kempis, and he wrote a book titled, *The Imitation of Christ*.

Here are his comments on verse 6, from book 3, chapter 56:

'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth there is no knowing. Without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou shouldst pursue, the truth which thou shouldst believe, and the life which thou shouldst hope for.

Many books have been written on these three self-identifications of Jesus. There have been many interpretations. But, if we want a simple, nutshell-type interpretation, I think that we can get none better than what the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 1:23 and Colossians 3:11, and I just want to pull out the phrase: Christ is all in all.

He is the way, the truth, and the life. That covers everything. He is all in all.

He is the way to God, as well as the way we live. He is the embodiment of the truth we believe, as well as being the only reality in our lives. He is the source of life, the model of life, and the goal of life.

He is everything.

In essence, what He told Thomas is very simple, but like many simple truths, it is infinitely profound. What He said is, "Follow Me. Imitate Me. Mimic Me. Do what I do. Answer as I answered. Work as I worked. Sacrifice as I sacrificed. Resist temptation as I did. Serve people as I did. Teach as I did."

I think you get the point. The way to the Kingdom of God is by walking as closely in the footsteps of the Forerunner as possible.

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Simple, right?

Hardly, but that is the basic principle. He has blazed the trail. He is the Captain of our salvation. There is no other way to reach the goal that He reached except by Him.

Let us conclude in John 10:27-30. I am very happy to know that this is the motto of The Church of the Great God on our seal.

John 10:27-30 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. "And I give them eternal life [this is the reward, this is what happens when we fulfill that verse], and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. "I and My Father are one."

Do you understand how safe you are in your discipleship?

Even though God asks so much of us, even to the point of giving everything that we have—body, soul, mind, spirit, what have you—we are safely tucked into the palm of His hand, and there is no power in heaven and earth that could take us out of His hand. He says, "You are in My Father's hand, and there is no one stronger than Him. And, I am just like He is."

Do you understand the hope that is there? Do you understand the strength that is there? Do you understand the **power** that is there to help you give everything for Christ?

So, I have a few questions:

Do we hear His voice?

Of all people on earth, we should know the life of Christ the best. How well do we know the gospels? Can we quote Jesus' words? Do we know how He reacted to situations? Do we understand how He controlled His emotions?

Do we know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Do our lives look like His in *any* respect?

I think Ted Bowling's sermonette this afternoon is a good place to start. Ted spoke, for those who did not hear it, on the foot washing. Jesus Christ was willing to take on the

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role of a servant and do a disgusting job for His disciples who were still clamoring over who would have the chief seat. But, that is a good place to start in this Passover Season about how well do you know the life of Christ? How well do you are you imitating Him?

Passover begins this Friday evening after sunset. It commemorates Jesus Christ's sacrificial death for us (and as we have heard in recent weeks) putting us in deep obligation to Him for the manifold grace of God that we receive from that.

The best way that we can "repay" Him is to commit our lives fully to following Him, and living as He lived.

Passover is the time to rededicate ourselves to the endeavor of living by this fundamental principle of Christian living, imitating Christ.