

Ranui Baptist Church 2024 – BIG BITES- Keep our Eyes on Jesus

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. Mark 2:14.

The call goes out to Alphaeus and he responds immediately. Interestingly, there is no confession of faith, just obedience. Some have asked the question whether the tax collector had known Jesus previously and therefore was prepared to answer the call of Christ, the text is stubbornly silent on this point. Everything depends on the call and then the act of obedience to follow Jesus.

There is no miracle or interaction between Jesus and Levi. One thing is clear, the call comes from Jesus Christ himself. This is why the tax collector follows. This encounter gives witness to Jesus' unconditional, immediate and inexplicable authority. Nothing precedes it and nothing follows except the obedience of the one who is called. Jesus has the authority to call and to demand obedience to his word.

Jesus is presented, not as a teacher and a role model, although he is both but as the Christ, the son of God. No praise falls on the follower, just on the one who calls. The call to discipleship is a commitment solely to Jesus Christ. It is a gracious call, a gracious commandment. Christ calls and the disciple follows. Discipleship is a commitment to Jesus.

Things used to be different. They could live quietly, unnoticed in their work, keep the law and wait for the Messiah. However, now he is here, now his call came. Faith no longer meant keeping quiet and waiting but following him. Sacrifice, burning bridges, leaving others behind become necessary to follow Christ.

There was a provocative series of encounters worth noting, captured by Luke. It was between Jesus and some who said they wanted to be his followers.⁵⁷ **As they were going on their way, a man said to Jesus, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."** ⁵⁸ **Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes. Birds of the sky have nests. The Son of Man has no place to put His head."** Luke 9: 57-58.

This person seemed to be willing to follow Jesus. He was quick to say, "count me in wherever, whenever, however. You would think that Jesus would be thrilled that someone would have that kind of attitude. Did you notice how Jesus responded? In essence, he said, "I don't think you get it". To really follow Jesus is to know what it is you're choosing and then commit to that choice.

Jesus knew that commitment was not to be taken lightly; once he even said-²³ **Then Jesus said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow Me, he must give up himself and his own desires. He**

must take up his cross every day and follow Me. Luke 9: 23. Jesus wasn't trying to be dramatic. It was literal. Jesus knew that his cross was real - an instrument of ancient, cruel torture that resulted in humiliation, raw, excruciating pain and eventual death.

Following Jesus is not about sitting at the feet of some guru for a seminar at a retreat. It isn't about having a nice, comfortable, safe dose of spirituality in your life to make you feel good. Jesus called people to follow him and there was only one place he was going... a cross. Following Jesus means sacrifice and commitment.

Then there was a second person Jesus encountered: ⁵⁹ **He said to another, "Follow Me." But the man said, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father."** ⁶⁰ **Jesus said to him, "Let the people who are dead bury their own dead. You go and preach about the Kingdom of God."**

This person wanted a life with Christ but wanted to put off what it would take. When this man said that he wanted to go back to bury his father, that didn't mean he simply wanted to go back and attend his father's funeral. It was a Hebrew phrase that meant he wanted to go back and wait for his father to die. He wanted to be available just in case his father died.

His father may not have even been sick. It was that his life, with its issues and concerns and responsibilities were more important than following Jesus.

So, when it came to the call to follow Christ, he essentially said "Not now Jesus, it's kind of a bad time for me. My life is really full and I've got a lot on my plate but I really want to follow you, but it's just not a good time". Jesus never let anybody get away with anything. Did you notice how he replied? *Let the dead bury the dead.* To paraphrase, "let those who are spiritually lifeless order their life around things that don't have any eternal significance".

Then came a third encounter; ⁶¹ **And another one said, "Lord, I will follow You, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at home."** ⁶² **Jesus said to him, "Anyone who puts his hand on a Plow and looks back at the things behind is of no use in the holy nation of God." Luke 9: 61-62.**

This man didn't jump in and say yes without thinking about the cost. He didn't put Jesus off and say, "well, maybe later". He said I will follow you but he added a condition. He inserted a qualification about the degree to which he would follow Jesus. In this case, the qualification seemed reasonable. All he wanted to do was to go and say goodbye to his family. That wasn't really the issue. The issue wasn't saying goodbye. We can see this from how Jesus responded to him.

Jesus saw right through his words to what was really going on. It wasn't about saying goodbye to his family. He didn't want to say goodbye to his previous life. He wanted to say yes to Jesus while holding on to what he had been following and to the priorities he used to pursue. Jesus' reply made it clear that he had no use for this kind of following.

It's worth noting that not a single one of those men wanted to turn Jesus down. Not a single one. They wanted Jesus in their life. They knew there was something about this Rabbi. However, what they lacked was commitment. All in for Jesus or all out for Jesus. There is no room for competing loyalties.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. Philippians 3: 7-9.

According to Paul, knowing Jesus, having Jesus, being in relationship with Jesus made everything else pale in comparison. In fact, all those other things he now viewed as garbage. Even the word he used for garbage revealed the depth of his commitment. The word that Paul used was the term for manure or dung. That was how Paul evaluated choosing the World over Jesus.

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5: 25. More than two thousand years ago the power of God was reflected in a single life with such a clear demonstration of might and energy that all of all human history was forever changed. Jesus was raised from the dead. Through the resurrection of Jesus, God demonstrated his ultimate power because there is no greater power on earth than power over death.

As if that was not enough, the Bible says that power can be there for you as well. As a follower of Jesus, we know that death does not have the final word. We look forward to spending eternity with God. Somewhere deep down inside we all long to hear these words when we stand face to face with God, well done good and faithful servant and now come in and enjoy what I have prepared for you.

Right now, though, while we live this one and only life that we have been graciously given, we need to stay in step with the Holy Spirit. Here is what is key. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is in you. When you cross the line into the faith, the Holy Spirit enters your life. Inviting Christ into your life is essentially inviting the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus talked about this a lot, particularly toward the end of his ministry here on earth. He wanted to help his followers to understand what transition would take place when his time on earth was over. **⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7.**

In essence, Jesus was saying, when I leave, I'm not abandoning you. I'm going to send the Holy Spirit. Further the work, further the ministry, and the presence of the Holy Spirit is an absolute game changer in both of those. In the past the Holy Spirit has come and gone on certain people but now it will be poured out for all those who believe in me.

Why? Because through the Holy Spirit, we have God entering into our heart and changing us from within. That's why one of the main words the Bible uses for the Holy Spirit is Counsellor from the Greek *Paraclete* meaning "one who walks alongside". So, the Holy Spirit is with us always and has one big item on his agenda - to make us more like Jesus, to help shape us, to mold us and form us into someone who looks, thinks, and talks like Jesus more every day.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. Romans 8 :9.

This is a crucial idea, because it's at the heart of our hope and the power to change your life. We are changed by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit inside of us is the power of God unleashed in our lives to make us more like Jesus. His work is to form Christ in us. Only the Holy Spirit can penetrate into the hidden areas of our lives.

In and through the Holy Spirit there is power to control evil and cultivate good in us. In and through the Holy Spirit there is power to take whatever is dead and bring it to life or if need be, to put to death whatever is killing us or doing us spiritual and physical damage.

We have already learned that once you become a Christian the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your life. Then, however, the Bible gives this very direct challenge; **¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5: 17-20.**

Paul was writing this to the church in Ephesus to a group who were Christ followers. They already had the Holy Spirit and Paul was then telling them "Now be filled". Then the Bible gives us this very direct challenge.

So, how do you unleash the presence and power of the Holy Spirit into your life. Let's go back to Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. The original Greek phrase "to be filled" is not easily translated into English. To really get the idea of the original Greek language, we would need to read the verse as. "Be being filled" or "keep on being filled". Also, it's not "fill yourself up with the spirit" but "let yourself be filled" or "let the Holy Spirit fill you". That puts a slightly different emphasis on 'being filled with the Holy Spirit'.

Now we may think that this is connected with water. Filling up like you would fill up a cup, it is not. Being connected with the Holy Spirit is a relational issue. So, how do you experience “being filled with the spirit”. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we allow him to occupy, guide and control areas in our life. The more you follow the Holy Spirit the more you are filled. The more you are filled, the more you are led. It's a simple idea but a profound one.

The more you follow the Holy Spirit's lead the more you are filled again. You live in, by and through the spirit. Keeping in step with the spirit. Surrendering daily to his leadership and promptings. We will have some teaching on this and the gifts of the spirit. I know many of you have had lots of teaching in this area. Many of who have joined us over the last few years may not of had much teaching. So, I am asking for your patience and grace and encourage you to think about sharing about the Holy Spirit works in your life.