

August 19, 2012 - 11:00 a.m.

Pastor Jonathan Falwell

Following Christ: The Most Important Things Part 1

Scripture: Mark 1:16-18

Summary: Pastor Jonathan expounds on Mark 1:16-18, citing three ways to know you are a true Christ-follower: 1) a calling, 2) the guiding hand of God, and 3) a change of heart.

This week is back to school. It is the worst time of the year. After an incredible summer when you can sleep till 2 o'clock apparently (Jessica tells me), you can do whatever you want and the kids are enjoying themselves, then all of a sudden you're jolted back into reality and it's time to go back to school.

I thought this would be a good time as a church to also go back to school, to go back and rehearse some important truths about what it means to be a follower of Christ, because listen, I know this is true because I face it in my own life, we get to a point in life where we think that we've got it all figured out, we think we've got it all under control and we start going down our own path, and what began as a Christ-follower now becomes not a Christ believer but a self-follower. Anybody here understand what I'm talking about? We trust God, we love God, and He saved me and it's awesome what He did, but then we come over here and we come in and wave the flag on Sunday, but the rest of the week we go our own path.

Sometimes it's good to get back to basics, to get back to training camp, to that moment when you rehearse what it really means to be a follower of Christ, so I thought over the next couple of weeks we would begin to ask ourselves that question and look at what it means to truly, truly be a Christ-follower. I don't mean a self-proclaimed Christ-follower; I mean a Christ follower. And a church—not just this church but any church—is full of self-proclaimed Christ-followers. But I can tell you this: I don't want a church full of self-proclaimed Christ-followers. I want a church of authentic Christ-followers. And so every once in a while we have to go back and ask ourselves what that means.

Now you know if you've been here at Thomas Road for any length of time that our mission statement is to change our world by developing Christ-followers who love God and love people. Now we didn't sit around one day and try to figure out a cool little slogan that would be our mission statement. No. What we did is what all of us need to do. We went back to the very words of Christ. You've read them, probably, Matthew 28, Mark 16, when Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Go out into the world and make disciples of all the nations." So we looked at that passage, the passage when Jesus was asked what was the most important

commandment. You remember what He said? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

So what we did is we decided that our mission statement as a church ought to be the mission that Christ put us on 2,000 years ago in the passages of Scripture that He gave to us. When I looked up some different mission statements of different churches and different organizations, I was struck by lots of different statements. A lot of church mission statements are really good, and then there are some that are not so good. There are a lot of mission statements for churches out there that talk about works and what we do and the importance of being good neighbors and going out to our community. All of those are great things, but I'm going to tell you something: there has never been a good neighbor who has gotten to heaven by being a good neighbor. It is all about Christ, and what we do and the decisions we make and faith in Jesus Christ.

So when we talk about our mission statement as a church, to change our world, that's the Gospel. Because I'm going to tell you something: there is nothing that will change our world other than the Gospel. It's not going to come from the White House; it's not going to come from the capital; it's not going to come from the United Nations; it's not going to come from any body of government that is out there; it's not going to come from wars; it's not going to come from battles; it's not going to come from trees. The only way to change our world is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through His death, burial and resurrection. That's it.

And so we change our world, we want to change our world by developing Christ-followers, authentic followers of Christ who are passionate in their faith and who want to walk after Him and run after Him and make sure that we are not looking at ourselves or others as to what we should do, but rather we are looking to Him for guidance, looking to Him for the guidance that we need. And then to love Him with all of our hearts and then to love people as ourselves.

That is a great mission statement for a church, but listen, it's a greater mission statement for you as an individual. It's a greater mission statement for us as human beings. Can you imagine what would happen in our community here if everyone in this room and everyone that is worshiping right now in all the wonderful, great churches of our community, if all of us would simply live out that mission statement in our lives? It would change everything. It would transform our community. There wouldn't be any arguments and bickering about things that are stupid, cultural issues. It would be about the Church—not this church but *the* Church—standing up and praying with one another and for one another and going out into our community and letting people know who God is and loving them to Christ and letting them see Christ in us. It would change everything. It would change our world.

That's what being a Christ-follower is all about. Turn with me to Mark 1. We're going to start our time together, and then over the next 2 or 3 weeks looking over this passage and some other passages on what it truly means to be a follower of Christ. I decided that for us to understand what it means to follow Christ, we ought to go back and look at what Christ did when He called people to follow Him, when He called others to follow Him. So Mark chapter 1 we get a pretty clear picture, a great illustration and example of what it is to be called to follow after Christ, to literally running after Him, what makes a Christ-follower.

Mark 1, verse 16 through 18, I want to read this passage and then we'll go back and look at these important truths. It says, "As He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men,' and they immediately left their nets and followed Him."

Now I want to set the stage here for you. It's a pretty cool picture of thinking about what this passage is like. Literally one day Jesus is walking down the shoreline and He comes upon two guys who are getting ready to go and do what they do every single day of their lives. It says here they are fishermen; that's their career; that's how they made a living, and as they are about to go out and do what they do every single day, as Jesus walks by, He looks at them and utters two simple words: "Follow me." He went on to say, "I will make you become fishers of men." And I love what the next verse says, as they literally dropped their nets, they didn't have a committee meeting; they didn't go home and discuss it for a couple of weeks. "They immediately dropped their nets and followed Christ."

Now in this passage we get some important truths about what it really means to follow after Christ, to be a Christ-follower in our lives. It's a pretty important statement that I want to share with you what it means to be a follower of Christ, because we've got to be reminded of this, because a lot of times what happens is we get further and further away from that moment of conversion when God saves us and changes and transforms us and the emotion of it, the power of it, the excitement of it. We get further and further away and we begin to forget what has happened. We forget what it means what has taken place there.

I remember when I got saved, I was 6 years old, and I was at the old Thomas Road Baptist Church. Six years old, I was sitting over behind the deaf ministry section on that Sunday night, and Freddy Gage, an evangelist from Texas, was preaching that day and he was preaching a sermon that he became really famous for—he preached in a lot of different places—called "All My Friends Are Dead."

And he was talking about how as he was growing up, because of all the things that he had done, he was living a life totally away from God and in drugs and alcohol and all kinds of things, that literally all of the friends that he hung out with and did all of those things with were either physically dead because of what they'd done or spiritually dead because of the life they lived, and how God radically transformed him and brought him out of that lifestyle and changed him and did incredible things with him. A picture of literally Jesus walking by and seeing him where he was and saying, "Follow me" and immediately dropping the nets and running after Him.

When I heard that sermon that night, even as a 6-year-old, I was convicted. I got up from the seat that night at the invitation time and my dad was down on the floor and I came up to him and said, "Dad, I want to get saved," and he walked me down to our counseling room and led me to the Lord. It was an incredible moment. A lot of years ago. Almost 40 years ago that took place. But it's still an incredible thing to think about. But what happens as we move further along in life is that we really kind of forget sometimes what power was found in that moment.

And whether you have been a Christian for decades or you're a brand-new Christian, we have got to be reminded of what Christ has done for us, and so what it means to be a Christ-follower, and just a couple things I want to share with you from this passage. First, there always has to be a call from God. In this passage, as Jesus was walking by, He uttered those two words, "Follow me." It was a clear statement. It wasn't a statement like, "If you get a chance" or "Perhaps in the future, when you're done with this you might want to come with me." No, it was, "Follow me."

Jesus called them. And just as Jesus called them on the beach 2,000 years ago, He has called each and every one of us. He has done it maybe not in such a dramatic fashion as walking by as we're sitting on the beach getting ready to go out into the water, but He's called us just the same. And He did that when He stretched His arms out on the cross 2,000 years ago. That was an invitation. That was an invitation to every single one of us, every person that has ever lived, every person that will ever live. Jesus said, "Follow me," when He died on the cross for us.

The Bible tells us that He is not willing that any should perish, so to me that is a statement, a declaration, an invitation that is open to the world. That is an invitation that is wide open that He calls us. That word there, the word "follow" in the Greek is the word *deute*, and it doesn't just mean follow. When we think of the word "follow," we think of the word "follow," but when Jesus used it, the Greek word *deute* has a little bit deeper meaning because this mean literally means "right now, immediately, don't wait, don't hesitate, don't think about it, right now follow me." That's what Jesus said. He walked by and He looked at them and literally said, "Okay, look at me. Right now I want you to drop everything and immediately follow after me." That's a pretty powerful statement when someone walks up to you when you're getting ready to do what you do every single day, going about your job, going about your life, going about your business and to have someone say, "Drop it all right now. Don't think about it. Follow me."

I remember a few years ago I was reading through this passage and shared it on a Sunday morning and I shared that Greek word, *deute*, about what it means, about immediately, right now, don't wait, and I remember my daughter Natalie, who was much younger at the time, was here listening to the service, which I'm glad she was listening and she caught what I had to say, because after the service was over I was down talking with some people and all of a sudden from backstage Natalie walked out to the middle of the stage and yelled at the top of her lungs for everyone who happened to be here, "Dad, *deute*! I'm hungry" So it was an encouraging thing that she listened to the sermon that day.

That's kind of what Jesus did on the beach that day. "Right now. Drop it. Quit talking. Quit doing. Quit going about your business and follow after me." That is a call that Christ has given to all of us, but it takes something more. It also takes the guiding hand of God in our lives, because what happens is a lot of people hear the call from God, they feel a call to do something greater, something bigger, something that goes beyond themselves, and they feel that call from God, but they don't listen to God and let Him lead them and guide them, and what they do is they begin doing it their own way. They begin going down their own path and trying to figure it out on their own, and that's how other denominations sometimes get off track. That is how our own denomination sometimes gets off track. That's how churches get off track is when we start thinking that we can do it better than God told us to do it.

And I'm just telling you right now, it doesn't matter how smart you are, how many degrees you have, how long you have been a Christ-follower, how long you have been a part of a church; if you think you can do it better than God tells us to do it, you are wrong and you will crash and burn. We need the guiding hand of God.

In verse 17 He says, "I will make you become." Jesus said, "Follow after me. Come do it right now, and I will make you become." Now He didn't say, "Follow after me and you are fishers of men." He said, "Follow after me and I will make you become fishers of men," indicating that it is a process, that it takes time, that it takes teaching.

In fact, He also used words to lend themselves to that thought. The word "make" there is the Greek word *poieo*, and the Greek word *poieo* literally has the idea of "to carry out or to produce or to make something happen." So Jesus didn't say, "Come with me and you will be fishers of men." He said, "Come with me and I am going to produce in you something that you can never imagine. I am going to do something in your life and in your heart that you can't even fathom. If you come with me, I will produce that in you."

But He's not done. He goes on to say in this word "become," it's the Greek word *ginomai*, and that is the idea literally of developing or maturing, the idea used in Scripture oftentimes to refer to a little baby. A baby must grow up. We all love children, we all love babies. I've had four kids of my own. Man, there is something special when you hold that little baby for the first time. But you know what is more fun even than that? When they grow up and mature, when they start walking and talking and doing things. It's incredible to watch their minds at work and to hear statements they make.

It's fun to watch them mature and do things and develop, and that's the idea that Christ gave on the beach that day. He said, "You're like little babies, little immature babies, but follow me and I am going to produce in you a mature believer, a follower, somebody who can do something that goes beyond who you are, beyond anything you can imagine, if you will just follow me."

And that's true in our lives, too. A lot of times people will come and get saved and radically transformed. They will walk down an aisle, or maybe it's outside the church and someone shares the Gospel with them and they get it and understand it and believe it and they call on God and ask Him to save them, and they do that and they go out and continue to do what they have been doing. They continue to walk down the same path, going the same direction, never maturing in their faith, never truly becoming all that God wants them to become.

Jesus said to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me and I will produce in you something you can't imagine." Jesus says that to us, too. It takes the guiding hand of God. And finally, if we are truly going to be the Christ-follower that God intended us to be, there must not only be a call from God, not only the guiding hand of God, but there has got to be a change of heart. Look at verse 18, "They immediately left their nets and followed Him."

I love to look at words that are simple, words that we oftentimes will gloss right over because they don't mean as much to us because we use them so often, and in this passage, in this verse the word "left" is one of those words. We all know what that word means, right? This morning

we all left our homes to come to church. Tomorrow morning we will leave our homes to go to work or school. But then what we'll also do is that we will go back home to our homes. We will go back home tomorrow from work or school and then the next day we'll leave and we'll come back. But here, this word is the Greek word *aphiemi*, and the Greek word *aphiemi* carries the idea of a complete forsaking. A complete turning your back on.

And so when you think of that word "left," we think of Andrew and Simon, that they left their nets, and in our minds, if we read it in our vernacular, they took their nets and dropped them and walked away, but they could have just as easily 15 minutes gone back to get them again. But no, here it says the immediately left, *aphiemi*, they forsook them, they turned their back on them. They walked away from them for good.

There has to be a change of heart, and this is where so many churches miss it, so many preachers miss it in the setting where they get up and share about God and how wonderful God is and God is love and God is peace and all this stuff and God is great and God is good and thank Him for our food and all this stuff, and they never preach the message of the Gospel: If you don't have a change of heart and allow the death, burial and resurrection to transform you from the inside out, then you will not be a follower of Christ. And that is something that is missed so often. There has to be a change of heart.

When Simon and Andrew heard Jesus say, "Follow me and I will produce in you something that is amazing. I'll make you become fishers of men. It will be bigger than anything you can fish for out in the sea, bigger than anything you can imagine right now. That is what I will do in you." They immediately forsook everything of the past and ran to Christ. They ran after Him.

So the question is this: How does what we talked about today relate to you? How does what we've talked about today play out in your life? Because my guess is that in this room today we probably have several different groups of people. We probably have some people who felt that call from God, they've clung to God, they're running after God, they are listening to what God has to say, they are in their Bibles, praying, their lives have been changed and transformed and they are letting God lead them every day. They are walking that path that God has for them. They have had a complete change of heart and turned their back on the world and everything of the past and they are running to God, and they are doing it the right way like Simon and Andrew did.

And there is a second group of people here that have heard the call of God, maybe even have in some ways at some time in their life have been listening to the guiding hand of God, and maybe occasionally they get some direction from God. Maybe you're here today just waving the Christian flag to get that direction for today, because you think, "I need to punch my card. I'm going to show up."

And then there's the third group that God is dealing with and you don't know Christ as your personal savior. I'll be honest with you: It doesn't matter which group you're in. It doesn't matter where you fall in those three different groups of people, because the answer is the exact same for any of those groups. The answer is this: Have you run to God through faith in Jesus Christ? Because that's the answer. When life is tough, we run to God. When life is good, we run

to God. When we're facing a situation when we don't know what to do and we don't know how to get there, are we following after Him, forsaking all the old, turning our back on everything that Satan would love for us to get back into, turning our back on everything that Satan would love to use to hold us down and to keep us there and to stop us dead in our tracks? Which he wants to do and sometimes he does it by using the church. Sometimes he does it by allowing us to come in and punch our cards and feel like we're doing the right thing but in reality we are not.

Jesus walked by the beach that day and He said, "Follow me now and I will produce in you, I will make you into something that goes beyond anything that you can imagine—not because of who you are, but because of who I am, because I am God, and I want to do that for you." And they immediately dropped it all and ran.

What about you? Where are you today? Are you an authentic follower of Christ or are you just punching the card, waving the flag? Today, the call is clear. The call that started on the beach 2,000 years ago is still the call today. Jesus, with outstretched arms, is looking you right in the eye, speaking to you right now and He's saying, "Follow me. Follow me. Follow me, and I will do it for you."

Whatever category you're in, listen to that still, small voice, because I promise you what Jesus did in Simon and Andrew He can do in you, and in fact He can do even greater things if you will just listen, if you'll let Him lead, and if you will change the heart. That's what God wants us all to do.

Father, we stand here today humbled that you actually care about us, humbled that you call us, that you want us. We don't deserve it. We have nothing to offer you, God, but yet you call us still, and you want to do in our lives what we can't even imagine. God, we are humbled by that and we thank you for that. I pray for those who don't know you as personal savior. They have never come to the point of knowing and trusting that Jesus is the only way. They have never believed with their heart, confessed with their lips that He was raised from the dead. I pray, God, that you will speak to their hearts and call out to them just as you did for Simon and Andrew, "Follow me," and I pray that they will follow.

I pray for others that might be Christians but have been going down the wrong path. They may have run after you in the moment but have turned around and gone back. I pray that you will change them, transform them again, do in their lives what only you can do, but continue to mature them, help them to surrender today.

(Singing: "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus")

God bless you, and have a great day.

Keywords: discipleship, gospel, calling, lordship, guidance, change, transformation, repentance, salvation, mission statement