

Series: The Invitation
Message #1: Initial Invitation
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Text:

Introduction: This morning we are starting a new series titled "The Invitation." And over the next few weeks we are going to be looking at places in Scripture where individuals were given a specific invitation to either meet or follow Jesus and the difference it made in their lives. One of the reasons we are doing this is because we believe it is critically important for us as followers of Jesus to be individuals who are continually giving invitations to those around us.

It's really important that you and I, because of the days that we live in and because of the things that are going on in our world, that we have a sense of urgency in our hearts to engage people in such a way that we are pointing them to Jesus and giving them opportunities to come into relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

Did you know that the biggest deterrent to most people coming to Christ are those who call themselves Christians. Dan Kimball has a book titled, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, and while I don't agree with everything Kimball writes, I do agree that hypocritical behavior by those who call themselves Christians is a big deterrent to those outside the church. Author and Pastor Kyle Idleman would say that this is partly because the majority of the people in our churches today are fans and not followers.

FAN OR FOLLOWER

The sad news is I think there are many in our churches today that fall into that *A fan* is defined as "an enthusiastic admirer." And unfortunately, I think that describes a lot of people who call themselves Christians, who call themselves Christ followers, but are no more than an enthusiastic admirer. Churches are filled with fans...individuals who are enthusiastic admirers of Jesus, those who show up on the weekends to celebrate Jesus, but aren't truly followers of Jesus.

And Jesus makes two statements that confirm that there are more fans than followers...and his words should cause every man or woman here today to pause and evaluate their relationship with Christ this morning. Am I a fan or a follower of Jesus:

- a. Matthew 7:13-14 - ***"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.***
- b. Matthew 7:22-23 - ***"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23" And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'***

Those two statements should cause us to stop and to evaluate where we are in our relationship with Jesus. So, here is the question are you a fan or a follower? As you examine the life you are now living, is it what Jesus meant when he gave that initial invitation to His disciples when he said, ***"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*** (Matthew 4:19 NASB)

FOLLOWING JESUS

I want to take look this morning at what it means to truly be a follower of Jesus.

1. Following Jesus is an honor, not a burden.

- Prior to this invitation that Jesus gave to Peter and the others, he had been teaching throughout the countryside and had performed a few miracles and Jesus was already beginning to build a reputation as a great teacher...a rabbi.
- In this culture, you didn't just choose to be a follower of a rabbi and to have the opportunity to learn from this...they chose you! It was an honor that was only given to a select few...to those that the teacher saw as worthy.
- Do you view following Jesus as a burden or an honor.
- I was thinking about what an honor it is to follow and learn from Jesus this week, to be chosen by him. Scripture tells us that no one comes to the Father unless the Spirit draws him. He has chosen us to follow Him. What an honor!
- My son Landon is ten years old and he has really gotten into baseball this year. He is a catcher and he has been soaking up everything he can about the position. His favorite player is Yadier Molina, the St. Louis Cardinals all-star catcher. Landon will sit and watch videos of Yadi and try and learn how he sets up behind the plate, how he receives the ball, and of course how he guns down would-be base stealers. He tries to emulate him. And I got to thinking...could you imagine what an honor it would be if Yadier Molina somehow chose Landon and said, "Come follow me. I'm going to show you everything I know about catching." What an honor that would be.
- And yet Jesus, who is so much greater than a mere baseball player, has offered you and I this opportunity to follow Him, to learn from Him, and to be in relationship with Him. It's an honor to follow Jesus!

2. Although it's not a burden, it does require sacrifice.

- Even though following Jesus is not a burden; it's not some kind of chore that has to be done, it does require sacrifice.
- When those first disciples left their nets and everything else behind that day, they knew their lives would forever be different. And the reality is you cannot follow Jesus without sacrifice...it will cost you something.

- Luke 9:23-25 - ***And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?"***
- Following Jesus means that we must sacrifice "self." What that means is that each and every day you are going to be confronted with decisions about whether or not you are going to do what you want to do or what Jesus wants you to do.
- It's amazing how selfish we are when left to our own desires, but if we are going to follow Jesus it means that we surrender our will and our desires to the will of the Father.

3. Following = love & devotion

- When Jesus gave that initial invitation to come and follow Him it was an invitation to follow Him and Him alone. Do you understand that this morning? He wasn't going to be satisfied to be followed as one Rabbi among many Rabbis. Why? Because only He was the Son of God.
- Following Jesus means we are devoted to Him. Jesus was continually making some difficult challenges when it came to the area of devotion. You see, there were all kinds of people who were fans of Jesus; people who were enamored by his miracles. These fans would gather around and Jesus would make statements like this one that would challenge them to the core:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39 NASB)

- What Jesus is saying is that "Your devotion to me must be utmost. Your devotion to me must be higher than your devotion to your spouse." Hello! "Your devotion to me must be greater than your devotion to your children. If you are going to follow me, I am to be your utmost devotion."
- What is it in your life that you are tempted to be more devoted to than you are to Jesus?

4. Following means fishing!

- I'm amazed at how easily we leave this out of the equation when we are evaluating whether or not we are a follower of Jesus. And I can understand if you are simply a fan of Jesus this would be an easy one for you to leave out, but it was a significant part of Jesus' initial invitation to his first disciples to follow Him.
- What does he say in Matthew 4:19? ***"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."***
- The end result of our sacrifice...the end result of our love and devotion...the end result of our following Jesus is that we would become fishers of men.

- Matthew 28:18-19 – *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,..."*
- A natural part of our following Jesus is to point others into a saving relationship with Him. That is the core message of why Jesus came. Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost." If we are going to follow Jesus it would make sense that a natural part of that would be that we too would seek and save the lost.
- I read a recent article in Christianity today that pointed to how few of people who call themselves "Christians" actually share their faith. It's a ridiculously low number. It was referencing a study by Lifeway Research that found that 80 percent of those who attend church one or more times a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, but 61 percent have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months. Are we fans or followers?
- Let me explain it like this. I believe in the value of exercise. I really do. I truly believe it is something that I need to do, but the value of that is lost in the fact that I simply do not do nearly often enough.
- You can believe in the value of sharing your faith all you want, but the value of your faith is lost in the fact that you simply do not share it nearly enough...or at all for many of us.
- "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

Conclusion

So let me ask you a question this morning: Are you a fan or a follower? Are you someone that shows up on the weekends to celebrate and cheer for Jesus or are you someone who finds following Jesus an honor? Are you someone who to sacrifice and surrender all that you are for Him? Are you completely and totally devoted to Him? As you are following Him are you engaging in the core purpose of His initial invitation to His disciples which is to lead others into a relationship with Him...to be a fisher of men? Are you a fan or a follower?

I don't know about you, but I want to be a follower. And I think it is so easy in our Christian culture today to drift from follower to fan. Where are you today? Fan or follower?