

No One Like Jesus: Revealing The Heart
By Jason Huff
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2 Thessalonians 1:1-5; Psalm 119:49-52; Matthew 8:18-22

Friends, our final Scripture reading is from Matthew 8:18-22. Listen now to God's holy word. "When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

I'm a well-meaning person. So are you. There are cruel people in the world, but most folk are well-meaning. On a surface level, we want others to be happy. This is a human thing, not a Christian thing. We desire good things for others like we desire good things for ourselves. Most of us don't believe that my good must come at the expense of someone else's good.

So why is it that being "well-meaning" is always a defense and not a good thing? Nobody ever says, "That guy cured thousands of patients because he meant well. That gal started an orphanage and saved thousands of children because she meant well." No, we always use it as an excuse. The customer service agent wasted your entire morning because he was incompetent, but he meant well. When you're sick, your friend comes over and talks about nothing but her own problems – but she meant well.

Before it became clear just how bad things actually were with the water in Flint, some officials didn't want to create a public panic about what they were sure would be nothing. They meant well – panic in the streets in an already-stressed city is a bad thing for everyone. But their silence led to a crisis that will permanently affect Flint and its residents.

Being well-meaning or good-intentioned can be disastrous. While we have good thoughts and nice ideas, they mean nothing unless we do the right thing. That's true in day to day life, and it's true in our spiritual walk. In today's passage, Jesus pokes a huge hole in being spiritually well-meaning, thinking that we can somehow travel alongside Him without actually moving. It was literally true in His day, and it is true metaphorically for us now.

Jesus is on the move. He needs to continue the training of His disciples, His close circle of companions. He has healed countless people in this area and now there's a crowd, many who want to see what the commotion is about. It's time for Jesus to invest in His friends, to be in prayer with the Father, and to rest.

Sometimes the best thing to do is not the obvious thing to do. Jesus could have wooed this crowd and influenced them as a religious figure. And it's clear from the Sermon on the Mount that He did often times preach to the crowds. But now it is time to move forward with other things that the Father would have Him do.

The same is true for us. We can lose sight of the fact that following God has many different aspects. Worship on Sundays is one of those aspects. So are prayer and Scripture reading, Bible study, fellowship, outreach, serving, and evangelism. Each one has its own time and place. Doing one energizes us for the others, but doing one to the exclusion of the others quickly wipes us out. I'm rarely in a good place to serve others if I haven't been nurtured through prayer and worship. I'm rarely in a good place to worship on Sunday if I haven't been living out my faith during the week. Jesus models this for us. He lived a full, well-rounded life centered in His relationship with His Father. Jesus preaches, heals, and teaches, but He also models rest and time alone, things we need but we often downplay in our fast-paced society.

Before the boats head out, a teacher of the Law approaches Jesus. His official title in Greek is "scribe" – he is a learned man responsible for making copies of the scriptures and knowing Jewish law inside and out to teach it to others. Most of the laws he learned were interpretations given over the centuries before Jesus' birth. Scribes knew all of it by memorization. This guy could have put my knowledge of the Old Testament to shame.

Most scribes were hostile to Jesus because He paid no attention to how the scribes had interpreted Scripture over time – He never quoted authorities other than Himself and Scripture. He didn't show respect for the way the scribes did things. But this scribe is different. He's got the right idea; He knows Jesus is worth following. He doesn't have the highest degree of confidence in Jesus – he calls Jesus "teacher," not lord or master yet – but he's far ahead of the rest of the scribes. He claims serious loyalty, saying, "I will follow you wherever you go."

In my mind, this guy is pretty awesome. There's nothing wrong with what he says. It's a noble thought. And many times in the Psalms, the psalmist declares what he will do in response to God's goodness – I will sing, I will praise, I will rejoice, I will worship, I will give an appropriate sacrifice. So there's nothing sinful in this scribe saying he would follow Jesus. We do it in our own praise music. Just this morning, in our songs, we sang that we will declare the Lord to be blessed in good times and bad. We said that we will worship God, we will love God. These are all good responses to the love God has poured out on us.

I think that's why Jesus' response to the scribe is mild. He doesn't rebuke the scribe – and when Peter, meaning well, tells Jesus that he'll never let him be killed by the religious authorities, Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" So Jesus didn't have a problem with rebuking His own closest friends sternly. Jesus doesn't condemn the scribe, call him a liar, or say he can't follow.

Jesus' response is more along the lines of, "Do you really know what you're saying?" He comments, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." This line says a lot. First and perhaps most important is the title Jesus gives Himself, the "Son of Man." When we hear, "Son of Man," we think, "Oh, well, Jesus is human and this proves it. He's relating to us." It's true that Jesus is fully human and relates to us. But this title actually speaks to Jesus' divinity and role.

The title “Son of Man” comes from the prophecy of Daniel 7, where one like a “Son of Man” approaches God, the Ancient of Days, is led into His presence, and given an eternal kingdom where all nations, tribes, and people serve Him. It’s specifically about the Messiah. Jesus applies it to Himself. So He’s not leaving any question with this term as to who He is.

So when Jesus says what He says, He’s saying, “I’m the Messiah, God’s holy One, His very Son. I’m one with the Father in purpose and thought; in my very nature I am God. Despite the fact that the universe was created through me and for me, the animals have homes, and I don’t. If you follow me, I can tell you that your best night’s sleep is behind you. There’s not going to be a Temperepedic Craftmatic Sleep Number adjustable bed where we’re headed.”

Jesus is gentle, but His words are to the point. Do we know what we are getting into when we become His followers? No one understands completely, right? But we are in for a rude awakening if we think following Jesus is going to give us a life of ease. Following Jesus faithfully gives us many things – assurance for eternity and hope for the future. As we follow and the Spirit moves in us and changes us, we begin to live in such a way that we can reach the end of our earthly lives and be at peace.

But earthly security has never been a part of the gospel. The Bible is extremely clear about the persecution and suffering of God’s people in all generations, and God’s salvation in the midst of it. Any preacher that promises you earthly riches as a sign of God’s favor in this life is lying. Does God show His favor on us? Absolutely – by bringing us into His Kingdom and giving us the joy of knowing Him and becoming more like Him.

But we are to count the cost of following Jesus. In Luke chapter 14, Jesus says, “Don’t be the guy who starts building a tower and runs out of money halfway through because he didn’t know how much it would cost. Everyone will make fun of him. Don’t become my follower and then fall away because you thought it would be easier than it will be.”

And really, in our hearts, we know this is right; it still applies. We laugh when someone should know what they’re getting into and they don’t. I laugh when someone says, “I went to an R-rated movie and I was offended because there bad language and violence!” We would laugh if someone entered a marathon and three miles in asked, “How long is a marathon, anyway?” If you’re allergic to dairy, don’t order pizza! It’s important to know what you’re getting into for so many different reasons.

If you’re going to stake your claim with Christ and follow Him, go in with eyes wide open. Know the cost and know the reward. That way, when things get tough, you will not abandon ship. You will stay the course with Christ and make it safely to His eternal shore.

His conversation ends with the scribe, but before He can get a seat on the boat, another follower says, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” This seems like a compassionate request. We’re not sure this man’s father is dead yet – he may just want to care for his aging father before following Jesus. Maybe he’s just received word that his father has died. Jewish custom demanded that a son provide a proper burial and mourning period for his father. And we know the commandment to honor one’s father and mother.

But Jesus is blunt. “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” Sounds rude, doesn’t it? Jesus is making a pun, though. He’s telling his disciple, “Let those who are spiritual dead – those who don’t care about God’s Kingdom, those who are outside, those who follow custom rather than the living God – let them bury the dead. You’ve got other work to do.”

Is Jesus telling the man to break the fifth commandment? Not at all. What Jesus is saying is that nothing is more important than following Him into the Kingdom of God – *right now*. Care for your family, do your job well, do what’s right by others – but don’t let *anything* stop you from following Jesus. Because Jesus knew the man’s heart, and He knew that Jewish custom would have required a month of mourning. Then other things would come up, as they always do. Jesus said, “Don’t put off following me.”

Because we are well-meaning, we have great intentions to do things, but we often wind up sitting at home watching TV because it’s easier. We are kings and queens of excuses. There’s always something that seems more important to be done, something more thrilling or exciting, something more in the moment, than following Jesus, than reading Scripture or going to church or sharing your faith. There are always bills to pay.

Just like this man, there are things we think we must do, that only we can accomplish. Except it’s not true. Billions of people have lived and died on planet Earth over the last several thousand years, and the world keeps turning. So he doesn’t bury his father? Someone else will. Will your life be ruined if you don’t watch that sporting event on Sunday afternoon? No. Will I be spiritually incomplete if I don’t see the newest film I think looks great? Nope.

I’ll have to tell on my mom, a good story. She’s been in the hospital and rehab for just over a month now. She’s had tons of visitors and an entire drawer full of cards from well-wishers. She told Catha that it put her to shame – she’s a retiree with a lot of time on her hands, but she doesn’t visit folks in the hospital or send cards. She didn’t think about it. She was busy.

But now that she’s there herself and she’s seen what it has meant to her to have so many people show her love, she’s knitting a prayer shawl for her church, one that will be given to someone else when they’re sick and in the hospital or rehab. She’s taken that step of doing something now. It’s hard because her painkillers make her lose her focus every few minutes; there are times she’ll forget precisely where she was or what she was doing. But she can go right back to that prayer shawl. Because even under meds, even in pain, even in less than perfect conditions, she’s learned that lesson – start now. You wait until things are easy to start, you wait until things are perfect to begin, and you never will.

Let the dead bury their own dead. Harsh. But Jesus is blunt – this world is not our home. The comforts of this world are nice, but they are just passing and temporary. A person who makes excuses their whole life for not following Jesus are going to be left with nothing but excuses when they find themselves on the wrong side of the heavenly gates come eternity. Let the spiritually dead do what they have to do – you follow Jesus.

For us at CrossWay, this is significant, because now is our make or break time. Now is when we decide if we are going to fully embrace following Jesus or not. Because we are diving headfirst into letting the community know we are here. This week, we sent out invitations to folks who were once a part of us but couldn't come on Saturday nights. We're looking to invest in flag banners to place outside that will fly right alongside flags Bethel is purchasing. We have been given money to advertise in the community. We're looking for ways to meet more people in the community to invite them to know Jesus.

When people hit our door, we have the opportunity to show them what it means to be a genuine, sold-out, no-holds-barred follower of Jesus Christ. Not by overwhelming them or making them stand up and say their names or making them uncomfortable – if you do that, we're going to have a chat. No, I mean that we can genuinely show them compassion and concern. We can show them true welcome, no matter who they are. We can invest in them. We can talk to them and show interest in their lives. And we can live in ways that show that Christ is working in us, that we are serious about becoming Christ-like, not just going through the motions but embracing being the people of God. People passionate about serving, passionate about loving, passionate about Jesus, not just in words but actions.

If we do that, if we follow Christ and let the Holy Spirit lead us, then we will grow. People will hear about these strange men and women who love Jesus more than their politics, more than their freedom to do what they want, more than life itself. And they will want to know *this* Jesus because the Jesus who lived and died and rose again to save us from sin and to transform us into the people of God is worth knowing.

But to do that, we must be committed to following when it is uncomfortable. You know, God has gifted me to preach and teach in front of people. It's not my passion to mingle with folks I don't know. It makes me uncomfortable. I don't love mingling at Meal and a Movie. But I attempt to do it because I love Jesus more than I love my comfort zone. You might feel nervous about sharing your faith at work because you think it might get you ostracized or in trouble. But if you love Jesus more than you love your job, you can do it.

Our friends at Living Hope have offered to send some of our members to the 315 Project, where you will learn how to share your faith and your testimony in a simple manner. The 315 Project will put your testimony on video so that you can share it with those you might not see in person. The cost is already covered. The only question is, are you willing to try? Are you willing to take the challenge and step out in faith to tell your story? If you are, talk to me this week. Let your willingness to follow take you into this new territory.

For all of us this week, our challenge is this: follow Jesus with eyes wide open. Don't expect to find anything on the journey but Him. Don't look back. And you will find Jesus is all you need for a meaningful life and an eternity of joy.