

To follow Jesus is to share life

By Nick Sutton. Talk given on 8th May 2016 at Coventry Vineyard Church

Following Jesus is all about being his disciple: Being like him, doing the sort of things he would do if he were you. Jesus shared his life with others. To follow Jesus is to share life.

In the book of Mark (chapter 2) we read that

“Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.” (.13)

Jesus is in his adopted home town of Capernaum. It seems that Jesus regularly walked by the lake. Everyone would have heard of him. And people were intrigued to find out more. A crowd gathered.

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. (.14)

Jesus and the crowd pass the stall of a tax collector called Levi. Tax Collectors were despised. They were traitors and collaborators, serving the enemy, Rome and themselves. The irony is that Levi has an honourable name. Old Testament Levi was the third of Jacob's sons. His name meant 'attached' or 'joined in harmony'. This Levi would go on to be the father of the Levites: The holy ones of Israel. And here is another Levi, detached from his people, far from being holy. Stealing money from God's people and sending it to the enemy whilst pocketing a portion for himself.

His life was ruled by greed and selfishness. Dishonesty and extortion. To the other disciples Levi was someone to avoid and despise. To those who were fisherman, hard workers they would have to pay Levi their taxes. To another of Jesus' disciples. Simon the Zealot. Levi was someone to assassinate.

And Jesus sees him.

Charles Spurgeon comments that when he saw Levi. *“He saw a man named Matthew. Jesus saw who Levi would become. That Jesus saw more in Matthew than was really in Matthew. That His love looked goodness into Matthew, and then saw it! His love looked Grace into Matthew and then saw it.”* -Spurgeon

Jesus saw the man he would become a "gift of YAHWEH" Matthew would become a gift of God.

'Follow me,' Jesus told him, (.14)

"Follow Me. Come into My company. Walk behind Me. Become My servant. Be entrusted with My Gospel. I will make use of you."

A rabbi shared his life with his followers. Jesus wants to share his life with Levi. The disciples are going to be sharing their rabbi and their lives with Levi.

Jesus' call was a personal call. Disciples of Jesus don't follow a set of rules or just a particular lifestyle. We follow a person. He called his disciples to follow him. He didn't say "Come and follow my teaching." He said 'Follow Me'. They did follow his teaching but his call was, and still is, to follow him, to learn from him, to commit to him.

"Follow me." - It's that simple. Yet we make it so complicated

and Levi got up (left everything) and followed him. (.14)

There is a sense of Immediacy. He left everything. Levi sees something of the beauty of the life Jesus offers and is 'all in'.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. (.15)

Levi holds a party a banquet for Jesus and his friends. Levi was friends with tax collectors. These are the people he knew. The ones who would tolerate him.

The party is a foretaste of a great messianic banquet. Jesus loved feasting with others (Mt 9:11, 11:19). These meals and in particular the Last Supper were a foreshadowing, of the eschatological Messianic Banquet Isaiah prophesied in which "...the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines.... and swallow up death for ever... will wipe away the tears... (and) remove his people's disgrace from all the earth." Isaiah 25:6-8.

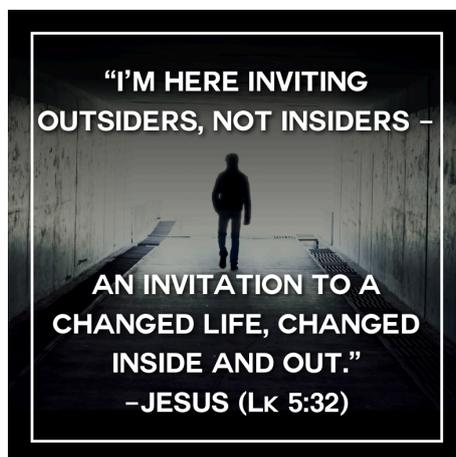
If you want to bring something of heaven on earth... Throw a party.

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' (.16)

Religious people don't understand the grace that Jesus gives 'sinners'. Their elitism leads to exclusion and exclusiveness. There was a fear that their sin would infect them or that they would become guilty by association. "Let not a man associate with sinners even to bring them near to the Torah" Mekilta Amalek 3 to Ex 18:1. Who do we avoid? Who do we despise? Who do we hate?

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' (.17)

In the Message version we read...



The sickness of sin has infected all of us. We are all infected. Jesus brings healing and transformation. Health and wholeness. Salvation. Doctors spend time with those who need healing, saviours spend time with those who need saving.

To be a disciple is to share life.

At Coventry Vineyard we want to create somewhere anyone can call home.

How do we create somewhere people can call home for those we don't know?

How do we create somewhere people can call home for those we don't like?

How do we create somewhere people can call home for those who are different?

How do we create somewhere people can call home for those who are difficult?

Jesus called his disciples to follow him. Later Jesus would turn to his disciples and tell them to go and make disciples. To share this life of following Jesus with others.

Who are you sharing your life with?

Who do you influence? Who is following you?

The author and scholar, *Scot McKnight* writes that:



Jesus called his disciples to literally follow him around, not just read the Torah and pray more. However we are not just discipled directly by Jesus. And we are not discipled remotely by authors or podcast speakers. We are discipled as we share life. As we do life together. Sharing life with other people is God's plan A to make you more like Jesus. Jesus discipled you through people. Jesus discipled your friends as you share your life with them. You cannot follow Jesus, if you refuse to share life.

How do we S.H.A.R.E. life with others?

Stories.

We share our stories. And we listen to the stories of others. We say 'hello' to people we don't know. We start conversations. We pay ridiculous attention to others. Ask great questions. Share stories.

Home.

Who do you invite into your home? Who are you sitting at table with? What if you ate with those outside of church? Shared your lunchtime. Invited neighbours over for food.

Activities

How are you going about your busyness? As you go about your day to day activities you are sharing these with? What if you made time to be interruptible? Are you so busy doing 'church' things that you disconnect from those who don't 'do' church? Take up a hobby you can share: Frisbee golf, Cycling, Dancing, Running, Knitting, Music lessons, Football, Rugby, Cricket, Music gigs. Be intentional: Have fun. Be yourself. Enjoy life

Resources

You have time, talent and treasure. How are you sharing these for the benefit of others? In terms of time, what are your priorities? You may think you have no time for others, yet, it's how you prioritise your time and other resources that matters. For example, could you serve other local charities? Could you serve the city perhaps once a month? Could you throw a party? Participate in a city wide event, such as Motofest or the Godiva Festival? Go to fundraisers, festivals, clean-ups, summer shows, and concerts.

Environment

Where do you find yourself? Where are you regular? A cafe. A petrol station. A restaurant. Who do you hang out with? Do you know your co-workers? What if you took breaks with them, rather than hiding from them. Find out about them. Pray for them. Like them. Love them. When possible walk, don't drive. Smile at those you see. Start conversations.

As Levi took up Jesus on a shared life with him, he shared his life with others. To follow Jesus is to share life.

"Believers don't do evangelism - winning others to their cause or winning others to their Christ - **believers share life.**

That life is only found in Christ whose life was given for all, the life that transforms our lives, and brings everything and everyone else alive around us."

-Alan Scott