

2013-11-10 am trevor-hudson uit-die-hart becoming-a-christ-follower

Good morning, friends, it's always good to be with you. Last week we looked at Mark 1:14-15, and today we are going to be looking at verses 16 to 20 from the same chapter. So I'm going to read, and I'm reading from the NIV. Listen now to God's word as it comes to us. As Jesus walked besides the Sea of Galilee He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Come, follow Me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men, fishers of women.

At once they left their nets and they followed Him. When He had gone a little further He saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John, in a boat preparing their nets. And without delay He called them, and they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men, and they followed Him. And so we thank God so much for this gospel story, and we pray that through this gospel story that God will speak to us a living word today.

Just the other day I was talking to a friend and he had bought his tickets for Bruce Springsteen, as you know, who's coming to country next February. For those of you under 40, Bruce Springsteen is a rock legend. And my friend was just so excited about Bruce's coming to the country, and he had bought tickets that meant that he was going to be in the gold circle.

In other words, he wasn't going to be sitting in the stands where you have to use your binoculars just to catch a glimpse of the person on stage. He was going to be within a few metres of the actual stage. And I can still remember his excitement when he said, Trevor, I can't wait to experience Bruce Springsteen live. That sentence has stayed with me. I can't wait to experience Bruce Springsteen live.

And I have a hunch that as we come together in this auditorium today, as we come out of our lives this week with all their ups and downs, joys and struggles, I have a hunch that there are a lot of people here today, if they were to be honest, who would say, Trevor, you know, I just can't wait to experience God live; I long to experience God live. I don't want to experience God in a second-hand kind of way. I don't want to sit in the stands with my binoculars watching other people have an experience of God. I want to be part of the action myself. And I think there are many people like that today, and maybe you are one of those people.

Last week we looked at the good news that Jesus brings. Jesus brought the incredible good news, do you remember, that the Kingdom of God is at hand. God is available and accessible now to every human being, here and now. And God's availability and God's accessibility is not based on anything we have done. It is based entirely on the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus the Kingdom has become available to every human being, here and now.

However, it's one thing to sing about the Kingdom. It's one thing to read about the Kingdom. It's one thing to talk about the Kingdom. It's another thing to experience the Kingdom live, here and now. And so I want to invite you to come with me to our reading for today. It's a very moving reading. First of all, Jesus proclaims the Kingdom, verses 14 and 15 in Mark chapter one. He says to people, the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Remember what this means: God is available to you right now, no matter who you are, or where you're from, or what your background is, or whatever mess you've made. God's living presence is available. God is accessible to you. That's the message of verses 14 and 15. Then, in verses 16 to 20, what does Jesus do? He begins to call people to follow Him. And those two things we need to hold together. On the one hand the Kingdom of God is available. On the other hand Jesus says, come and follow Me. And it's when we begin to follow Him that we begin to experience God live, right here, right now.

Hold these two things together. On the one hand the availability of the Kingdom of God to every human being, on the other hand the invitation to follow Christ. Hold those two together. It's when I begin to follow Jesus that He leads me into the Kingdom live. And so, if you are sitting here today and you are saying to me, Trevor, I long, I long to experience God live, I want to say to you, follow Christ. Follow Christ. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to take that one sentence that Jesus speaks, it's going to go up on the screen, I want you to look at it, where He extends the invitation, and then I'm going to look very carefully at the sentence, and I'm going to share with you three markers of what it really means to follow Him.

There is the sentence. As Jesus walked besides the Sea of Galilee He said, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men," and I'm sure that if Jesus was talking today he would say fishers of women as well. Come with Me and I will make you fishers of men, fishers of women.

Here is the first marker. A Christ follower is someone who has made a conscious decision to go on a journey with Jesus. You don't drift into discipleship. You don't become a disciple of Jesus by osmosis. A Christ follower is someone who has made a conscious decision to go on a journey with Jesus. You get a very beautiful picture there, don't you, of what a disciple is. Here are these disciples. They are at work. Jesus comes to them and says, Come and follow Me.

And they leave their family and they leave their work and later they return to their family and their work, but in this moment they leave their family and they leave their work, and they begin to go on a journey with Jesus. That is a Christ follower. That is a disciple of Jesus. Let me speak carefully now. A disciple is someone who has consciously decided to be with Jesus, in order to learn how to do what He taught and what He said. That is a disciple, and it's a lifelong journey of learning- a decision to be with Jesus in order to learn how to do the things that He taught and the things that He did.

Now, some of you may say to me, “Trevor, yes, I hear you, I hear you, but it was easy for those guys. They could see Jesus. He was there in flesh and blood. We can't see Him. How do we follow Him today?” Now, that is a great question, and it's a question I've wrestled with for over 40 years. Can I make a simple suggestion? We follow Jesus when we take His words, what He said, and we begin to learn how to put those words into practice in our daily life, and as we do that we find ourselves stepping into the Kingdom of God live.

So for example Jesus said something like this: “Bless those who curse you.” That's what Jesus said, one of the things that He said. Do you have a boss who curses you? Bless him. Learn how to do it. And you will fail, and I will fail. It's not about being perfect. It's about being a learner, about following, and as I seek to follow Jesus He comes and He helps me. And He helps me with His spirit and His grace and His presence, and God becomes live in my experience as I seek to follow him by putting his words into practice.

And when you've learned how to bless those who curse you you go on to another sentence, and that may take a year or two. It's a lifelong journey of discipleship. But remember, I'm learning to be with Jesus in order to learn how to do what He taught and what He said. That is what it means to be a follower of Christ: practical obedience to Jesus in my everyday life.

Secondly, a Christ follower is someone who is open to a deep inner change in their life. Jesus says, do you remember, go back to that sentence, “Come with Me and I will make you...” I will make you. I will reshape you. I will recreate you. I will make you into a new man, a new woman. You will become new. And it's not a self improvement job. I will do it for you, in you, with you.

In effect Jesus says to us: “As you follow Me, I will become active in your experience. You'll experience God live and you will begin to change. And you will begin to reflect my character. And it will take a few months, a few years. It will take a lifetime. But it's a journey. It's a journey you go on with Me.” And you may say to me, “Trevor, isn't there anything I need to do?” Yes, our part is to bring the truth of our life to Jesus. And when the truth of my life meets the reality of Christ I begin to change.

It's hard to face the truth of our life, isn't it? We always want to duck and dive around the truth of our life. I'll never forget a few years ago I borrowed a book from a colleague in another city in South Africa. I won't mention the city just in case you try work out who my colleague is. And I borrowed this book and I said to him I'll give it back to you as soon as I've finished reading it. I read the book. It was a great book, and I didn't return it.

And I got an email from him. “Dear Trevor, I want to remind you that you borrowed a book from me. You say you're a Christ follower and you write books about spirituality but you haven't returned that book to me yet.” And his last line of his email, quite a tough colleague, hey, his last line of the email was, “There is a name for people who borrow books and don't return them.” How's that, hey?

And I wanted to say to him, “Hey man, I'm not a thief.” But his email was an invitation for me to face my tendency to say things and not do it. There's a name for that, and I had to bring that truth to Christ so He could begin to work on my character. There is a name. There is a name for those of us who are unfaithful to our partners. There is a name for those of us who participate in financial deals that are corrupt. There is a name for us.

There is a name for those of us who call people of other races by certain names. There's a name. There's a name for us. There's a name for those of us who speak behind other people's backs. There's a name for us. Let's face the truth of who we are, and let's bring that truth into the grace of Christ, and Christ begins to work on us until our character begins to reflect something of His truth and His reality and we begin to experience God live. As we change, we begin to experience God live.

But there's one more marker: A Christ follower is someone who begins to have God's heart for people. Go back to that passage. Do you remember what Jesus said? Come with Me and I will make you, I will reshape you, I will recreate you. I will make you. I will make you into what? I will make you to be fishers of men and women. And that doesn't mean we've got to run around catching people. It doesn't mean that.

I remember when I first understood this verse. About 25 years ago I met a guy by the name of Mark. Mark was a fisherman, and Mark knew that I had never been fishing. I never had a father who took me fishing, so Mark said to me, “Trevor, I want to teach you how to catch fish.” I said to him “I'm up for it. I would love to learn how to catch fish.” And so we decided to do it on a Monday. I can still remember he was going to take a day off, Monday is my day off, and we were going to go to the Vaal Dam.

Than Sunday night he had me up in his garage until about 11 o'clock cleaning gut and getting the bait ready, and I'm thinking to myself, “This guy is serious.” Four o'clock the next morning, I don't get up at four to pray even, Mark is at the window. This is a fisherman. Quarter past five in the pitch dark we are sitting on the Vaal Dam in his boat, and I'm thinking to myself, “This guy has got a passion for fishes.”

Jesus called fishermen. They had a passion for fishes, and Jesus is saying, “Come with Me. I'm going to give you a new passion. I'm going to make you fishers of men and women. I'm going to give you a passion for people. You're going to begin to have My heart for people. And that's what happens as we follow Christ. That's what happens. We slowly begin to develop a heart, a passion for people, for men, for women, for their lives.

Let me end. Let me just bring this to a close. I hope that Mark 1:14-20 will always stay with you. It's what the gospel is all about. On the one hand the proclamation of the availability of the Kingdom of God to every man and to every woman. God is available. God is accessible. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter what your background is, God is available to you, God's presence, God's grace, God's power, God's joy. It's available. It's available live.

In order to experience God live Jesus says to us, "Come, follow Me. Stick with Me. Put your trust in Me. Be confident in Me. Come and be with Me and learn how to... learn how to do the things I taught and did, and I'll be with you. I'll help you. Come with Me and let Me change you. Let me change you. As you face the truth of your life I'll change you. I'll make you into a new man, a new woman. I will do it. I will do it, and I'll give you a new heart, and it will be a heart for people."

Can I ask you today whether you are a Christ follower? Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? I'm not asking you if you're a believer. The devil believes in God. I'm asking whether you're a follower, a disciple, someone who is going on a journey with Jesus as Lord, as Saviour, as Master and as Friend. Let's pray together.

Dear God, here on a Sunday we go beneath the surface. We begin to talk about things that are very, very deep. Lord, we long to know You. We long to experience You live in our own experience. We long to experience you live. And we thank You, Jesus, for the way that, not only do You bring the availability of God to us, but You invite us to follow You into that Kingdom. And so, Jesus, we want to learn to be with You, and with You, and in our friendship with You we want to learn how to do what You said and what You did.

We want You to begin to change us. We want to face the truth of who we are, and we want to bring who we are to You. Thank you that You accept us as we are but You don't leave us as we are. And we want, Lord, we want Your heart for people. We ask that You would do a deep work in our life today, but we want to become Your followers. We want to learn how to follow You. And we offer You this prayer with all the love and with all the longing of our hearts, in Your name and for Your sake, and we say together as God's people, amen.

May the joy of Jesus be with you, amen. God bless.