

## **What is keeping you from answering the call “Follow Me?”**

**Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins - April 22, 2018**

**There are many people who have heard the gospel message, have been brought up by godly parents who taught them the word of God, yet have chosen to go in their own way and refuse to give diligence to heeding the call of Jesus that says “Follow me!”**

**God has placed in man a free will to choose the path that he will take in this life and that choice will lead to an eternal destination at the end of his earthly life. Whether it ends with death or whether Jesus returns before that day, we will all give account to God for the choices we make in this life whether to serve God or to be a slave to sin. There are only two choices and we are going to be held responsible for the decision we make.**

**In the Bible we are given examples of the various ways in which people responded to the call of Jesus “Follow me.”**

**In Luke 9:57, Jesus tested some of the people who seemed oblivious to the wonderful opportunity that Jesus gave them when he said, “Follow me.” In verse 57, a man approached Jesus and told him that he would follow him wherever he went. Jesus knew the heart of this man and he replied, Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no place to lay his head.” We hear no further comment from this man. Jesus’ words didn’t appeal to him, perhaps considering forsaking the comforts that he now enjoyed to follow Jesus.**

**He said to another person, “Follow me” and this man told him that he would do that after the death and burial of his father. He wanted to take care of his obligations at home before following the Lord. Jesus told him to “let the dead bury their dead; you go and preach the kingdom of God.” We don’t read where the man ever heeded the call to follow Jesus.**

**There was another person that Jesus called to follow him and this one said, “Lord, I will follow you; but let me first go bid those in my house farewell.” Jesus replied to him these words, “No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.” If you read the call of the disciples, they immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. Levi immediately left his collection of taxes and followed Jesus.**

**Have you heard to voice of God and determined in your heart to follow Jesus regardless of the price you may have to pay to partner with him? Or are you like these that had other priorities that you must take care of first and then perhaps you will consider the call to “follow me.”**

**There are those who refuse to even consider answering this call. They have more important things to think about and they are not even concerned that they are closing the door on eternal life with God, their creator.**

**Look at Luke 14:16. There was a man who had a great supper and he invited many guests. At the precise time, he sent servants to announce to those who had been invited that everything was ready so now was the time to come. One by one, they made excuses.**

**The first one said, “I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it. I pray thee, have me excused.”**

**Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I have to prove them: I pray thee, have me excused.” And another one said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” The master of the house, upon hearing these words told the servant to go quickly and bring into the banquet room those who were poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. The servant did as he was asked and then told the master that there was still room. He told the servant to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that his house would be filled. Verse 24 says this: None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”**

**Jesus went on to say that those who do not respect his offer and joyfully do his bidding; they will not have the privilege of being part of his banquet when the time comes for people to gather for the marriage of the Lamb in heavenly places. Jesus paid the price with his blood that sinners would have the opportunity to enter into God’s kingdom. He isn’t willing that any should perish but that all should have eternal life. John 3:16. There are conditions to this invitation. We must love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds and love our neighbor as ourselves. Matthew 22:37.**

**We must place him above everything and everyone else in our lives and we must take up our cross and follow him or we cannot be his disciple. Luke 14:27 Matthew 19:21 tells of the rich man that asked Jesus what he needed to do to gain eternal life. After Jesus talked to him about the 10 Commandments, the man said he had kept them from his youth up. Jesus then told him that if he was to be perfect that he needed to sell all that he had and to come follow him. The man walked away sorrowing because he was very rich.**

**I recently read the book written by Nabeel Qureshi entitled “Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus. Nabeel came from a very devout Muslim family and from birth he was taught the ways of the Muslim faith. His parents taught him to memorize the Koran and to be a faithful follower of Mohammed and the whole family said the required prayers five times daily. They were a loving, peaceful family and Nabeel took great pride in his spiritual heritage, his close knit family and all the festivities associated with his religion. He and his sister were never allowed to spend the night away from home during his childhood and he was reminded daily how he should live to honor Allah and to be a blessing to his family. When he entered college, he became friends with a Christian young man who began to witness to him about Jesus Christ. The friendship grew and they both brought their teachings to the table and pondered over the differences for several years. Nabeel continually asked God for guidance and to reveal truth to him. God did miraculous things for Nabeel through visions and dreams as well as bringing truth to his heart through reading the Scriptures. Finally his doubts were cleared and his heart was drawn to the love of Jesus Christ. The test came when he had to tell his parents that he was forsaking the Muslim religion and had accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He was very broken when he thought**

about the tears and sorrow that overwhelmed his parents when he told them that he had become a Christian. He cried out to God and asked why God had not just taken his life after he accepted him so he would not put his parents through this shame and agony of facing the Muslims in his family, mosque and community. He begged God to help him deal with the pain that he was suffering due to his testimony. His parents asked him why he had betrayed them when they had always done everything they could to promote him and to raise him to be an example of goodness as a Muslim. The sparkle in his parent's eyes went out that day and their relationship has forever changed. As Nabeel continued to ask God "why" he got his answer. The words came to his heart "Because this is not about you!" When that answer came, the crying, sobbing, shaking, everything stopped. It felt like he had been grounded with electricity to the earth and he couldn't move. When the experience passed, he no longer felt sorrow. The prayers of anguish and self-pity subsided and it was put behind him. It was if blinders had been removed from his eyes and he saw everything in a new light. See 2 Corinthians 5:17. It reads like this: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things become new." Nabeel left his apartment and watched as a man walked across the campus heading for the door to enter. He was a man who taught that he was an outcome of blind evolution, he valued himself as a byproduct of random chance, with no purpose, no hope, no meaning except what pleasure he could extract out of the day. Chasing those pleasures often resulted in guilt and shame, pain and sorrow, which only caused him to chase more pleasures that would lead to more guilt and pain. Burying it all just beneath the surface, he went about his day with no clue how to break the cycle, how to find real hope. Then Nabeel understood why God had not allowed him to die as soon as he had found truth. It was up to him now to share the truth of God's word so that others could also have the same opportunity of eternal security that he now embraced and enjoyed!

What a blessing it was to him to know that he is a child of God and is a precious jewel in God's sight. He can be assured of salvation and he has an opportunity to share the good news with those who walk in darkness. With a new sense of purpose, Nabeel realized that God didn't call him to keep this revelation all to himself. It was not about him!! He had been called to be a laborer in the harvest field of Christ. Following God meant walking boldly by his Spirit of grace and love, in the firm confidence of everlasting life given through the Son, with the eternal purpose of proclaiming and glorifying the Father.

Nabeel suffered greatly due to the heartbreak that his decision caused his family and friends. His mother cried every time she saw him for over two years. His parents made it clear that they would always love him but that they felt betrayed and their harsh words weighed heavily on his heart. Yet there were blessings that God sent his way. He married a Christian girl with only one uncle and five cousins attending his wedding from his family. He graduated from medical school, but decided to go into full time ministry instead of practicing medicine. This caused his parents to cut off all communications with

him and he heard nothing from them for about a year. Even after that, their disapproval has been very disheartening. Making the decision to follow Jesus was the most difficult one that Nabeel ever had to make. The first year was the worst, but looking back over the few years that he has followed Jesus; it was also the most powerful one in his life. It shaped him, molded him, and changed him into a disciple of Jesus. The Holy Spirit comforted him and his Word sustained him. He would not go back to his old life for anything in this world. He has a wonderful relationship with his loving wife and they work together to build up the kingdom of God. Life is far more wondrous than he ever could have imagined following Jesus Christ. All suffering is worth it to follow the call of Jesus because he is amazing! In Romans 8:18, Paul wrote these words; “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” He goes on to say that we, the people who have the Spirit of God, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons and the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved. But hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for that that he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit. We may not always know what we should pray for and when we cannot express our thoughts, the Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with God’s will.”

We serve a wonderful, marvelous, merciful, gracious God who loves us and will keep that which we have committed to him against that day.

2 Timothy 2:11 says this: This is a faithful saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful for he cannot disown himself.”

2 Timothy 1:12 speaks about the fact that Paul is suffering because he preaches the gospel in truth. He is not ashamed because he knows in whom he has believed and is persuaded that God is able to keep that which he has committed to him for that day of Christ’s return.

Yes there will be trials, persecutions, and tribulations to Christians. We are commanded to take up our crosses and follow Jesus Christ. Those of us who have chosen to follow him know the blessings and rewards that come to us because of God’s great love for us. He will never leave us nor forsake us and one day we will be rewarded for the work that we have invested in harvesting the wheat for the sake of Christ. I pray that you will catch the vision and determine to turn away from the world and follow Jesus. You will be blessed!