

**WHAT DID  
JESUS REALLY  
MEAN WHEN  
HE SAID  
FOLLOW ME?**



**DAVID  
PLATT**





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D A V I D  
P L A T T



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*What Did Jesus Really Mean When He Said Follow Me?*

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# INTRODUCTION



**WHEN JESUS WALKED** along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he called to four fishermen, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Peter, Andrew, James, and John dropped their nets and followed him. Their lives—and indeed, the whole world—were never the same.

But Jesus’ call to follow him was not for them alone. His call has also come to each of us: Will you follow him?

This call to follow Jesus is not one we can

easily ignore. It can be tempting in the midst of our busy lives to set it aside, to shrug off the claims that Jesus made, and to go about with business as usual. It can be equally tempting to look at what we see as the failures of those who have claimed Jesus' name or at our past experiences and assume that we've already evaluated all there is to know about Jesus. Been there, done that.

But the nature of Jesus' claims and his invitation to follow him demand our full attention. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to [God] the Father except through me." Peter, one of the four fishermen Jesus called, later said of Jesus, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Jesus did not claim to be one dish on the buffet

line of spirituality from which we can pick and choose the elements that best suit our taste. And if his claims are true, then his call demands everything, and we have no other choice—like those fishermen before us—but to drop everything and follow him.

In this booklet, I aim to set before you what it means to follow Jesus. What is his call? What does it cost? And what does a life of following Jesus entail? These questions deserve careful consideration.

Ultimately the call to follow Jesus is a call to die—to die to ourselves and to die to the things of this world. But at the same time, it is a call to live—to experience unbridled joy as we follow Jesus wherever he leads in this world. The four fishermen knew this, and they gave their lives to follow him.

Have you answered the call?



## CHAPTER 1

# THE GREAT INVITATION



### **“FOLLOW ME. . . .”**

Jesus' call to the fishermen seems obvious in that context: they dropped their nets and followed him. They physically walked around with him wherever he went. And after Jesus' death and resurrection, they followed him by imitating his way of life and spreading the good news about what he had accomplished in his time on earth. But what does it mean for us to follow Jesus today?

First, it means dealing with our most

fundamental problem before God. Our problem as people is not simply that we have made some bad decisions in our lives. Our problem is not just that we've messed up in this world. Our problem is that we are all—at the very core of our being—rebels against God. This rebellion is what the Bible calls sin, and it keeps us from God.

A perusal through the pages of Scripture shows severe punishment toward sin and sinners alike. Lot's wife disobeys God by looking back as Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed and loses her life. God commands the Israelites to do no work on the Sabbath, and a man is put to death for gathering firewood on that holy day. Achan and his family are put to death for keeping plunder that the Lord said should be destroyed. And there are many more examples.

Many people read stories like these in Scripture and walk away confused. After all, as the Bible says elsewhere, isn't God a God of love? Aren't these punishments for sin a bit severe? Annihilated for looking backward? Stoned for picking up sticks?

Such questions, though honest, reveal a fundamental problem with our perspective. We naturally view sin through man-centered eyes. We cannot imagine responding this way if the offenses were against us. When people do something we have asked them not to do, we don't conclude that they should die.

Yet the penalty for sin is not determined by our measure of it. Instead, the penalty for sin is determined by the magnitude of the one sinned against. If you sin against a log, you are not very guilty. On the other hand,

if you sin against a man or a woman, then you are absolutely guilty. And ultimately, if you sin against an infinitely holy and eternal God, you are infinitely guilty and worthy of eternal punishment.

Azeem, an Arab follower of Jesus and a friend of mine, was talking recently with a taxi driver in his country. The driver believed that he would pay for his sin for a little while in hell, but then he would surely go to heaven after that. After all, he hadn't done too many bad things.

So Azeem said to him, "If I slapped you in the face, what would you do to me?"

The driver replied, "I would throw you out of my taxi."

"If I went up to a random guy on the street and slapped him in the face, what would he do to me?"

“He would probably call his friends and beat you up.”

“What if I went up to a policeman and slapped him in the face? What would he do to me?”

“You would be beat up for sure, and then thrown into jail.”

“And what if I went to the king of this country and slapped him in the face? What would happen to me then?”

The driver looked at Azeem and awkwardly laughed. He told Azeem, “You would die.”

The driver got Azeem’s point and realized that he had been severely underestimating the seriousness of his sin against God.

## **DEAD IN OUR SIN**

Our sin problem is not isolated to one or two instances; it goes to the very core of who

we are and makes us utterly unable to turn to God on our own. This is what the Bible means when it says we are dead in sin. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians and said, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live,” he meant that they were *completely* dead. Not partially dead. Not almost dead. Not halfway dead. Not kind of dead. *Completely* dead.

So if sin is our problem and we are completely dead because of it, what does that mean? How can we help ourselves or even *ask* for help? How can people who are dead ask someone else to give them life? When a man’s heart is flatlined, does he invite people to resuscitate him? No. These things are impossible for those who are dead. In your death, you need someone else, completely outside of you, to call you to life and enable you to live.

And that's exactly what Jesus has done.

Jesus came to live the life we could not live (that is, a life without sin) and to die the death that we, as sinners, deserve to die. We have already seen that even one sin before an infinitely holy and eternal God warrants infinite and eternal punishment. And this is why Jesus came: to endure the holy wrath of God due us as sinners.

My book *Radical* attracted publicity in a variety of different places. In one news article, a local reporter made the following comment about the book: "While it's a common pulpit truism that 'God hates sin but loves the sinner,' Platt argues that God hates sinners." Indeed, it was a direct quote from the book, but the article included no context. Concerned church members started asking me, "Pastor, do you believe that God hates sinners?"

This is one of those places where I found myself in a bit of trouble for quoting the Bible. Does God hate sinners? Listen closely to Psalm 5:5-6: “The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.”

And this is not an isolated statement in the Bible. Fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone we read of God’s hatred toward the sinner, his wrath toward the liar, and so on. In John 3—that chapter where we have one of the most famous verses about God’s love (John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”)—we also have one of the most neglected verses about God’s wrath (John 3:36): “Whoever rejects the Son will

not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

So all of this raises the question, Is it really true that God hates the sin but loves the sinner? Well, yes, of course, in one sense, but not completely.

Our sin is not something that exists outside of us. Sin is ingrained into the core of our being. We don't just sin; we exist as sinners. So when Jesus went to the cross to die, he was not just taking the payment of sin, as if it were separate from us. He was not just dying for our lusting or our lying or our cheating or our other sins. Instead, he was paying the price that was due us as sinners. He was dying for us, in our place, as our substitute. In the words of Isaiah 53, "He was pierced for *our* transgressions, he was crushed for *our* iniquities . . . and the LORD

has laid on him the iniquity of *us* all.” When Jesus was pulverized under the weight of God’s wrath on the cross, he was experiencing what you and I deserve to experience. He was enduring the full punishment due you and me as sinners.

The startling reality of Scripture is clear: we are sinners. In the words of Isaiah, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray.” Paul says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Meanwhile, God is holy, possessing righteous wrath toward sin and sinners alike. Yet God is also merciful, possessing holy love toward sinners. So how can God show both righteous wrath and holy love toward sinners at the same time?

This is the climactic question of the Bible, and the answer is the cross of Christ. At the cross of Christ, God shows the full

expression of both his wrath and his love as Jesus is stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, crushed, and chastised for the sake of sinners.

Does God hate sinners? Absolutely. Look at the cross. Jesus is enduring the punishment we are due.

But does God love sinners? Absolutely. Look at the cross. Jesus is saving us from the punishment we are due.

This is exactly what Jesus came to do. The Bible announces his coming, saying that “he will save his people from their sins.” When John the Baptist first sees Jesus, John shouts, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Imagery of God washing away his people’s sin fills Scripture. “Though your sins are like scarlet,” God says, “they shall be as white as snow.” David prays, “Wash away all my

iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” These Bible pictures from the Old Testament provide a foretaste of the forgiveness that ultimately comes through Christ in the New Testament. Speaking to people who used to be characterized by sin-saturated lives, Paul says, “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Such cleansing is a gift from God not based at all upon our merit but altogether upon God’s mercy. In the words of Paul, “When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth.” The clear message of the Bible is that there is nothing we can do to make our hearts clean before a holy God.

We can work constantly, pray fervently, give extravagantly, and love sacrificially, but our hearts will still be stained by sin.

This is why the Bible teaches that faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to salvation from sin. Faith is the *anti-work*. It's the realization that there is nothing you can do but trust in what has been done for you in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Faith is the realization that God's pleasure in you will never be based upon your performance for him. Instead, God's pleasure in you will always be based upon Christ's performance for you.

### **REPENT AND BE SAVED**

So how does a person become a follower of Jesus? How does this salvation become a reality in someone's life?

The very first word out of Jesus' mouth in his ministry is clear: repent. It's the same word that John the Baptist proclaims in preparation for Jesus' coming. This word is also the foundation for the first Christian sermon in the book of Acts. After Peter proclaims the good news of Christ's death for sin, the crowds ask him, "What shall we do?" Peter looks them right in their eyes and says, "Repent."

*Repentance* is a rich biblical term that signifies an elemental transformation in someone's mind, heart, and life. When people repent, they turn from walking in one direction to running in the opposite direction. From that point forward, they think differently, believe differently, feel differently, love differently, and live differently.

When Jesus said, "Repent," he was speak-

ing to people who were rebelling against God in their sin and relying on themselves for their salvation. Jesus' predominantly Jewish audience believed that their family heritage, social status, knowledge of specific rules, and obedience to certain regulations were sufficient to make them right before God. Jesus' call to repentance, then, was a summons for them to renounce sin and all dependence on self for salvation. Only by turning from their sin and themselves and toward Jesus could they be saved.

Similarly, when Peter said, "Repent," he was speaking to crowds who not long before had executed Jesus on the cross. In their sin, they had killed the Son of God and were now standing under the judgment of God. Peter's call to repentance was a cry for the crowds to confess their wickedness, turn

from their ways, and trust in Jesus as Lord and Christ.

Fundamentally, then, repentance involves renouncing a former way of life in favor of a new way of life. So often we assume that the essence of the Christian life is merely being forgiven of our sin (although, again, that is important). Many professing Christians are stuck here, believing that Jesus has cleansed them from their sins, yet lacking true, authentic, real, radical change in their lives.

But this is not the way it's supposed to be, for there is much more involved in becoming a follower of Jesus. When you come to Jesus, he not only forgives you of your sin, but he also fills you with his Spirit. God has promised his people, "I will give you a new heart and put a new *spirit* in you. . . . I will put my *Spirit* in you and move you

to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” The meaning behind these words is mind-blowing. When you come to Jesus, he puts the source of his life in the center of your life.

And this is the heart of Jesus’ call to follow him. When you become a Christian, when you follow Jesus, you die to everything you were before—including the sin that was keeping you from God—and Jesus becomes your life. To paraphrase Paul, “You have died with Christ, and you’re not even alive anymore. Instead, Christ is alive in you, and the only way you live is by faith in him.” Paul later writes, “If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised

Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

This is the stunning message of Christianity: Jesus died for you so that he might live in you. Jesus doesn't merely improve your old nature; he imparts to you an entirely new nature—one that is completely united with his. Everything that belongs to him becomes yours. His righteousness replaces your unrighteousness. His Spirit fills your spirit. His love becomes your love. His joy becomes your joy. His mind becomes your mind. His desires become your desires. His will becomes your will. His purpose becomes your purpose. His power becomes your power. The Christian life thus becomes nothing less than the outliving of the indwelling Christ. This is the

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essence of what it means to be a Christian—  
a follower of Christ.

