

# All In: Faithfully Following Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 8th. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. I had somebody say to me this week, you know, you say that every Sunday and I don't say it just because I'm a parrot and I repeat words, right?

I do have it in my notes every week, but I sincerely mean that. And so this person said to me, and I won't call them out by name. This person said to me, you say every week that it's a joy for you to be our pastor, but it's a joy for us to have you as our pastor.

So sometimes God tells me things through other people and I really appreciate those things. So we're continuing in our sermon series called All In this morning.

It's grounded in the three directives we hear from Jesus in Matthew 16, 24. And I partially jokingly said last week, I want us to learn this passage.

And now here's the rubber meeting the road. I have blanks. I will pause and you will fill in the blanks. You ready? Let's say the passage together.

[ 1 : 05 ] Then Jesus said to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple must what? Louder. Deny yourself.

And. And follow me. Say it together one more time. You fill in the blanks as we read it. Then Jesus said to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Nice job. I don't have any gifts to give. I mean, I should probably have little bookmarks or something for everybody who remembers those days in Sunday school. So, so far in this series, we've considered what it means to deny yourself.

We talked about looking in the mirror. Maybe you remember that. We talked about being honest about wanting God to search us. Wanting him to reveal in us selfish or prideful motives so that we can then not stay exactly as we are, but learn to change through his grace.

And so we're also reminded of the importance of letting go. Maybe you remember that as well.

Letting go of the things in our lives that keep us from growing closer to God. And then, once we let go, we need to make sure we don't look back.

[ 2 : 33 ] Oh, come on. It was only two weeks ago. We don't look back, right? But follow God into the future because our God is a God of the future.

And then, last week, we considered what it means to take up your cross. Remember, I talked about you don't need to suddenly become a carpenter. Jesus didn't say, go find some wood, make a cross, start dragging it around.

That wasn't what he meant. But following Jesus, we recognize it can very likely bring pain. Not physical pain necessarily, but maybe emotional pain.

Pain, spiritual pain, loneliness, abandonment perhaps. But then also partnership with Jesus himself and with other Christians.

So you can find those two previous sermons on the website if you want to review or catch up or work on your Matthew 16 memorization for next week. Wink, wink. Well, we've actually reached kind of a climactic point in this series because now that we've explored those two first directives that Jesus gives us there in Matthew 16, 24, deny yourself and take up your cross, we reach actually the main focus of Jesus' call in that passage.

[ 3 : 55 ] And so our sermon this morning is titled, as you can see, Faithfully Following Jesus. So once we've taken time to deny ourselves, once we've been willing to take up our cross and carry it, then Jesus calls us to follow him.

So I have one main goal this morning. I want us to answer this question. What happens when we decide to follow Jesus? Wow.

It's a little windy outside. So most of you know that I'm a big hockey fan, right? The Oilers in particular. So I follow the team.

I often seek the related therapy and commiseration with others that that fandom requires. I always know how the team is doing.

Playing well, playing poorly. Now it's B. How they're doing in the standings. And I'm a fan of many of the players on the team as well.

[ 5 : 01 ] So I like to celebrate their individual achievements. When someone hits a career milestone, I think it's pretty cool. I like to celebrate that. I like to recognize their stats and things that they're doing.

But as much as I know about the players, I don't actually know them at all. I have a friend who is walking his dog in the Twilliger Dog Park.

Maybe some of you know where that park is. He was walking his dog. Another dog came up, started interacting with his dog. Didn't pay a lot of attention. And the owner comes over.

The owner is Ryan Nugent Hopkins. So he's talking to, I mean, big Oilers fan, this guy, this friend of mine. So he's a little starstruck talking to Ryan, right?

Interacting with the dogs. And then another dog comes over. And the dog interacts with the other dogs. And again, not really thinking about it because he's very Twitter-pated with talking to Ryan. So he's talking to Ryan.

[ 6 : 01 ] And, oh, guess who the other owner is? Darnell Nurse. Darnell Nurse. So for anybody who's listening or in the congregation right now who doesn't know these names, these are significant players on the Edmonton Oilers.

But, so there's an example, right? But again, he had a little interaction with them. But he doesn't know them. They don't know him. And I think that's something that maybe happens in our relationship with Jesus.

I think sometimes we know about him. But maybe we don't have a deep relationship with him. And that's actually why it's called a relationship for a reason.

Because we're meant to be as close to Jesus as possible. We're to seek to know not just about him. That's part of it, right?

We study scripture because we want to know about Jesus. About his ministry. What he was like.

How he interacted with people. What his priorities were. But we want to truly know him individually.

[ 7 : 07 ] One-to-one. And have a relationship with him. So how do we do that? Well, we get closer to Jesus, I believe, when we seek to align our hearts, our minds, and our motives with his.

When you value a relationship with someone and you're aligned with them, you get to build more of a closeness. So then what happens when we decide to follow Jesus completely?

Well, you've probably heard someone say, or someone that you know say, someone takes after someone else. You've probably heard that phrase, right?

Whether we recognize it or not, I think we all take after or are influenced by someone or something in our lives. So maybe that's a parent or a sibling or another relative, right?

I've been told many times over the years, I take after so-and-so in our family lineage. Poor Connor gets from people that he takes after his father. Eventually he'll replace his father, and that's just sad.

[ 8 : 17 ] But anyway, it is the way of things, yeah. It's the circle of life. So maybe you've been told that in your own life. Or maybe, like we've talked a bit about athletes, maybe you aspire to be like an athlete.

Maybe if you're an athlete yourself, a particular athlete. Or if you're a musician or musically inclined, maybe there's a singer or a musician that you also admire and you want to model some of your life after.

So anyone we see value in may be someone in whom we want to emulate in our lives. So this is, in fact, partly how we come to develop an identity, as we would understand it.

So sure, many of our traits or our qualities or characteristics can be and are genetic. But there are also limitless other factors that shape who people will become.

So how does Jesus shape us? Well, first, Jesus gives us a new identity. So as you think about this idea of identity, who are the people in your life or the things, maybe, that you identify with in your life right now?

[ 9 : 30 ] Who are the people or things that are important to you? Are there people who have impacted you that you may seek to model your life after?

Well, my mom and dad were always people I looked up to. And even as I got older and saw some of their humanity showing, right?

Saw some of their challenges, maybe some of their less than perfect qualities, that really ultimately just endeared them to me more. Because I came to recognize as I got older and cynical and difficult teen, my parents were human.

They needed Jesus just as much as me or anyone else. And in both my parents, I saw sincere hearts for people. I've talked to many people over the years who interacted with my mom or dad. And they would say to me that I came away from any, I have cousins and people in my life that I know, but people have said to me, I always came away with an interaction with your dad or your mom, feeling like I was special or unique or somehow significant.

[10:42] And I've said to people in response, that's because you were. My parents weren't able to be insincere. And so in both of them, I saw those sincere hearts for people.

And now more than ever, I think more than other people, it's the things of this world that we see seem to have the greatest potential to influence and shape our identity.

Anybody have a smartphone? Anybody know what doom scrolling is? I should go to bed. I just got to read this meme and whatever.

Aye, aye, aye. Also guilty, by the way. So the things that we spend and invest our time in and focus our attention on will shape our lives.

Maybe you don't recognize it, but it's happening. So while most of the things that we do aren't inherently bad, most of them, when they become our identity or a primary focus of our lives, they can really become more dangerous.

[11:55] There's a story in the Bible of Jesus giving someone a new identity. And you may be thinking, well, duh, obviously. That happens to everyone, even today, when they decide to follow Jesus sincerely and personally.

And you're right. When someone accepts Jesus and surrenders their life to him, the Holy Spirit enters them. And then that change starts to happen.

Their priorities and their perspectives on life start to be shaped into what God wants. Shaped on the whole for the better. But in the gospel accounts, we read about Jesus calling an initial 12 people to follow him.

Maybe you know them. There's a brief interaction which includes Jesus and Peter. And we hear this story in Matthew 4, 18 to 20. So feel free to turn.

Matthew 4, 18 to 20. And I will read it for us. As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew.

[13:04] They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to fish for people.

At once they left their nets and followed him. So I could preach an entire sermon on just these few verses. I'm sure, 100% sure, that hundreds, if not thousands, probably thousands or more, tens of thousands of preachers have preached just that on these verses.

But what I really want to do this morning is recognize two things in particular, because this is only part of what I want us to be thinking about. First, the Bible tells us what Peter and his brother Andrew were doing.

They were fishing. It's what they did. It's what they did for a living. It was their calling at the time. It was their livelihood. And this is where they were when Jesus found them.

And then the second phrase, Jesus simply says this, come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people. Maybe when you think of that concept, you're thinking, I need a bigger net.

[14:18] I need a bigger boat. People are heavy. But in our study of the book of Acts last year, we learned about all the amazing things that Peter did eventually for God's kingdom, right?

Peter preaches and calls people to salvation through Christ. Peter prays and people are healed. So this is the same man that we meet here that eventually Jesus would declare his church, his entire church would grow from.

So Peter was given a new identity and purpose by Jesus. And as we just touched on a moment ago, the same is true for anyone who's given their life over to Jesus.

The same is true for you and for me when we give our lives over to him. But the reality is that even with this newfound identity, we still blow it sometimes.

That was almost amen worthy. I was going to say, oh, amen. I blow it all the time, pastor. But I believe there's maybe a misconception about when Jesus died on the cross for our sin.

[15:31] I was thinking about this this week. Somehow that he took away the presence of sin in the world. You ever felt like that? Have you ever had that kind of impression of things?

That is not what happened. Instead, what actually happened is that Jesus paid the penalty for sin in your life and in mine.

So what that means then is that whoever comes to follow Jesus wouldn't have to spend eternity separated from God. So now anyone who follows Jesus will spend eternity with him one day in heaven.

While also, this is an extra added bonus, which is amazing, also having their lives changed here on earth. Their lives molded into the image of Christ every day here on earth when we submit to his will.

So yes, we sometimes mess up here on earth. Believe it or not, that was a feature of Peter's story as well. You know it. The good news is that when we follow Jesus, he makes all our wrongs right again in God's eyes.

[16:52] That's amen. Come on, more amens. Are you feeling it? Is it changing you? What else does Jesus do when we follow him?

Well, Jesus makes our wrongs right. When Jesus is getting close to the end of his earthly ministry and his death, there's a hugely powerful interaction between Jesus and Peter.

Peter makes a bold claim around the events of the Last Supper with Jesus and the apostles. So Peter's all, yeah, I'm all in, Lord. I got it. Yep. So let's hear that in John 13, 37.

Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I want to do it right now. I'll do it right now. Just say the word and I'll do it. Peter says, I will lay down my life for you.

We know about Peter from scripture. He doesn't mess around. What he says, he means. Peter said, I will die for you, Lord.

[17:57] Right there. And Jesus responds to Peter with a really prophetic message that we hear in John 13. The next verse, John 13, 38.

Jesus doesn't say, thanks, Pete. Let's do this. He says, then Jesus answered, will you really lay down your life for me?

Very truly, I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. Can you imagine that scene?

Peter is feeling pretty confident, right? This is what I'll do. I'm all in, Lord. I am fully committed. And he was probably stunned by Jesus' response because Jesus replies right away.

There's no delay. When the rooster crows, this was nighttime, the last supper. Before the rooster crows, you'll deny me three times. Jesus is saying, you just said you'd die for me.

[18:59] Something else is going to happen within the next few hours, Peter. Peter. Probably hurt Peter. But we know from Scripture that it wasn't long before this prophecy of Jesus played out exactly as he said it would.

That Peter's actions, Jesus' words of prophecy foretold Peter's actions of reality.

Peter denied that he had ever even met Jesus three different times. Peter was likely genuinely concerned, maybe, in the time that he would come to meet the same fate that Jesus was going to meet, right?

Jesus was under a lot of scrutiny and a lot of pressure. Peter begins to worry, I think, that if he was identified as even having associated with Jesus, he would be in trouble and maybe even be killed. But as we just talked about, this is just a few hours ago. Hadn't Peter just said he would be willing to give up his life for Jesus? Maybe when he really thought about it, he thought, ooh, I'm just going to backpedal that a little.

[20:20] Maybe he felt like the price really wasn't worth the risk. So praise God that today, the moments that we may fall short like Peter did aren't the full story for us.

And our unfortunate lapses or failures, maybe you have them, I know I do, they don't have to be the way our story ends. We come to see that it doesn't end at denial for Peter.

So there's hope in this little interaction. So let's hear the words of John 21, verses 15 to 17. So if you want to hear that. John 21, 15 to 17.

After Jesus had been raised from the dead. When they had finished eating, scripture says, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

[ 21 : 31 ] He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, take care of my sheep. The third time, he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus had asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my sheep. Have you ever noticed the rule of threes in that whole interaction between Peter and Jesus?

Peter had denied even knowing Jesus three times. You likely notice in the passage we just heard, Jesus reverses and writes the wrong three times.

He asks Peter if he loves him three times. And each time, Jesus prompts Peter. Peter declares his love for Jesus, but Jesus also makes his calling on Peter's life clear going forward.

[ 22 : 44 ] Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs. Care for my people, Peter. So in some ways, to me, I was thinking about this more this week.

It feels like Peter's life and his new identity in Christ are reclaimed and rededicated there in that interaction. I shared with a couple people.

We had the men's breakfast here yesterday, and I said, well, you're going to hear my extremely vanilla faith story tomorrow. So my own story of following Jesus is pretty vanilla to some extent.

Colin said to me, his story is more rocky road than vanilla, which I thought was awesome. So I was raised in a Christian home. Some of you know that. Where loving and serving Jesus was modeled often.

And modeled with conviction and consistency. And you also know me well enough that I'm a pretty logical fella, right? So my faith has never really wavered much.

[ 23 : 50 ] It's always made sense to me. I didn't run away to the circus. I didn't join the Hell's Angels. I didn't do anything very rebellious or nasty, really.

And I've experienced hurt and loss and tragedy just like so many other people have. But I've never blamed God. Never doubted his care for me, his love for me, his faithfulness.

But, I'll tell you, when I was about 18, there's a shock, right? I remember having a serious conversation with myself that went something like this.

Either this Christian faith stuff and all that it represents is something that was meaningful to my parents and I love my parents, but it's ultimately not for me. Or, I believe it myself and it is a foundational part of my identity.

Flag planted. Maybe you can guess what I chose. From that day, I decided that I would put all, lay all of my future choices at the feet of Christ.

[ 25 : 02 ] I would marry according to his will. I would raise children according to his will. I would try to submit my career choices to his will.

And I would seek to live out a life that is both pleasing to Jesus and also one that ideally, hopefully, points people to him. My friends, this is what I believe with all my heart to be true.

The God of the universe is not sitting in heaven stubbornly waiting with his arms crossed for people to turn to him. I believe our God is waiting like an excited gift giver on Christmas morning.

Joyfully waiting for people to unwrap the free gift of salvation. the greatest gift that has ever been given or received.

What's the third thing that happens when we follow Jesus? He makes us whole. Do you ever stop and ask yourself, where would I be without Jesus?

[ 26 : 16 ] I don't know about you, but personally, I don't want to know the answer to that question. You may have heard it said that there is a God-shaped hole in every human heart.

It's a philosophical concept. It doesn't always mean that people are seeking God. But that God-shaped hole, we often try to fill it with things that aren't, for Christians, aren't God.

And anything less than God, I think we can all probably relate in our own stories, anything less than God, is ultimately the unsatisfying things of this world, the things that we do to self-medicate.

While some of these things may give temporary pleasure, certainly will bring distraction, none of them will satisfy us for eternity, full stop.

That's why following Jesus Christ is the only thing that truly can make us whole. soul. Here's what Paul has to say about this in 1 Thessalonians 5, 23.

[ 27 : 27 ] May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says there, and it's said throughout Scripture, that God wants to sanctify us. He wants to purify us and make us holy in every possible way.

And so in practical terms, that means when we decide to follow Jesus, God will penetrate every area of our lives to make us whole, to purify us.

And that's the only way we can really live a life that is fulfilling here on earth. God will shine a light into every dark area of our lives and illuminate it for the sake of healing rather than shame.

He'll identify every hidden thing and bring it to the surface. Jesus will go all in for us when we go all in for him.

[ 28 : 40 ] Friends, he wants all of us. not just some of us. Not just part of our lives, not just your Sunday mornings, not just the pieces of your heart that you feel comfortable giving away.

He wants it all. That's why we call it going all in for Jesus in this series because we really have to let go of everything.

If we hold on to any part of our lives and keep it from Jesus, our priorities will be divided. And our understanding of lordship, I think, also becomes divided.

We must be people who are completely surrendered to Christ, willing to follow him no matter what, through every trial and circumstance that comes our way.

As we identify with Christ and we recognize that we've been truly forgiven, we're able, I think, to give ourselves to him more fully. The more we allow ourselves to experience that freedom, the more we lean into it, the more free we become.

[ 29 : 51 ] What a great kind of equation. Over time, we learn to trust him more and more, we see him at work in our lives more and more, and I believe our faith will also grow.

Eventually, we should come to see faith in all areas of our lives. God's faithfulness to us, and that should inspire us to follow him again even more closely.

See that wonderful progression that becomes possible when we truly deny ourselves, when we truly take up our cross and seek to faithfully follow Jesus.

Hallelujah, what a savior we sang this morning. What a savior, what a teacher, what a friend. If you're here this morning or are listening later, and I've made you uncomfortable, if you've never fully committed your life to Christ, you may be going, what?

Wait a minute, that's never happened to me. Or maybe you've never fully committed all of your life to Christ. I'm going to lead us in a prayer that I want you to pray with me silently.

[ 31 : 08 ] If you feel God calling you to recommit again, it's never the wrong time to do that either. And the best part about these words is they're all inclusive.

Let's pray. Father, I know I sin and I cannot save myself. Thank you for loving me enough to send Jesus who never sinned to take my place on the cross so that I can be forgiven and spend eternity in heaven with you.

I believe in Jesus, his words and his advice as recorded in the Bible. I give you my day, Lord. I commit to following you today and every day until I see your face in heaven.

And Jesus, if I committed my life to you in the past, I recommit to you again today. Show me the areas of my life, my plans, or my will that I have not submitted to you in the past due to selfish ambition, fear, or for some other reason.

I surrender and commit those things to you today as well. Father, shine a light into the dark places of my life and free me from any sin that is lurking there.

[ 32 : 34 ] I am yours and I want your will to be done in my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.