

# You Must Follow Me!

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Preacher: Rev Michael MacDonald

[ 0 : 00 ] I've been a minister now for almost 20 years and before that I was a late preacher for probably the same number of years.

! Probably once a year would speak on this passage on and around Easter time. I've sometimes split off the passage, in other words, the current appearance of Jesus with a miraculous scratch of fish and then on the following Sunday I will speak about how Peter being reinstated.

But I've never made much of that closing statement of Jesus to Peter which is almost a new loop but is definitely a command where he says, You must follow me. And so I'll then thank you to consider that statement of Jesus, that command of Jesus through three headings.

A very traditional Church of Scotland service where there are three points to date. And I'm very glad it came to me as you will find. First of all we ask the question, why did Jesus make this command?

And then for a little while, but more than half of the time I have left, we're going to look and see how Peter fulfills that command. In fact we're going to ask ourselves, does Peter fulfill that command?

[ 1 : 20 ] And finally we're going to ask ourselves how this command relates to us. I'm sure that most folks here will know that when we speak about the disciple whom Jesus loved, that disciple is John, the author of this Gospel.

And I'm sure that most of us here as well will know that Peter, John and his brother James, as well as usually written down as Peter, James and John, that's why I put it that way down.

James and John are brothers and the three disciples, the three disciples were brought to fishermen. At certain points in Jesus' earthly ministry they are invited into certain specific situations where not the disciples are invited to come.

There is the healing of Jesus' daughter. There is Christ's transfiguration on the mountain. And there is the argument in the garden where we are in Matthew's Gospel that when all the disciples go to the garden, Jesus invites Peter, James and John to come that little bit closer, that they may keep guard and watch.

And of course we know that they are not able to do the policy. And so in that sense you might ask yourselves, well is Jesus suggesting that Peter has some kind of rivalry with John?

[ 2 : 42 ] And that's why Peter is asking the question, what about him? What's his ministry going to be? Where are you going to send him? Etc, etc, etc.

I leave you to answer that question. My own view is that there is no real rivalry, although of course on the day of Jesus' resurrection when the ladies who went to the tomb come to tell the disciples that Jesus has been raised from the dead, that the tomb is empty, they run.

And John does record that he gets there first. So perhaps there was a little bit of rivalry. And I would suggest you is not serious. So why then does Jesus say so firmly to Peter, you must follow me?

I know I'm leaving behind the rest of that verse where Jesus talks about if I want him to remain until I return. And the passage read on and that being good to the thought that actually John would still be alive at Christ's return, which was a misconception.

But nevertheless, there is still this firm message. You must follow me. And I'm going to suggest to you two reasons. The first is specifically applicable to Peter.

[ 4 : 03 ] And the second, we'll go through the sermon or the message as we consider it today as applicable to all of us. The first is that Jesus has just said to Peter, follow me.

And we explain to Peter what's going to happen to him in his older life. And we know from historical records that Peter was crucified in no much church tradition.

We know that, or the church tradition is that he thought it would be law himself to be crucified in the same manner of Christ until therefore he was crucified upside down.

What an awful thought. An awful thought. An awful thought. But, but, but, I've been saying all these things to Peter, Jesus says, follow me.

says follow me. I don't know how many steps they had taken, whether they had walked off the end of this guy and said I don't know. As they got further than that, Peter looks back and sees John following. And immediately I would suggest to you that Peter becomes distracted. Instead of having his eyes fixed on Jesus, it is now fixed on John. In such a short period of time, that command that Jesus has given to him has fallen off the back of his consciousness. And he is looking elsewhere. He is not looking at Christ. And that is why Jesus says so forcefully to him, you must follow me. There is a second reason that I would suggest you it applies to us all. And we find it in words of another old town. And there is no other way, what's the next line? To be happy and to trust and obey. No other way but to trust and not be. And so if we are not focused on Jesus, if we are not following Jesus, actually the most unhappy place for a Christian to be is not having a rise with Jesus. The most unhappy place.

[ 6 : 18 ] we move then to the second point. How did Jesus or brother Peter fulfill this command? And it has been quite interesting to me, you will probably see it is not interesting to you, but it has been quite interesting to me to how we look again at the life of Peter. Because when we look at the book of Acts which records the life of the early church, we very quickly become preoccupied, if that is the right word, with the Apostle Paul, who has his case. There is no doubt about that. And the work that Peter actually does almost becomes overshadowed by what Paul does. And then when we look at the rest of the New Testament, how many letters are written by Paul and how many letters are written by Peter? And you think to yourself, did Peter play any role at all in the early church? And of course he did. And there is that role in the early church that demonstrates to us that he did keep his eyes upon Jesus. He does do what Jesus instructs him to do, follow him, follow Jesus.

It begins immediately after Christ's ascension to heaven. It begins in that upper room where the apostles were who were 12 who were now become 11 because of Judas Iscaliot. And Peter, looking around, having had the time of prayer with the rest of the disciples, are gathered there. Not just the apostles that are there, the other fellow believers were told that they counted about 100, 120, something in that region, gathered there in that upper room.

Still afraid, still frightened, still wondering what was going to happen to him. And Peter remembers scripture. And he remembers two psalms. He remembers verse 25 of Psalm 69, which talks about Judas Iscaliot, about him having no continuing place. And then he remembers verse 8 of Psalm 109 about him being replaced. I'm paraphrasing here.

And you will find them in the middle. And so because of that, Peter stands up and says it is now time that we have another apostle.

And as you know from the story of Acts, there are two names to put forward, and Matthias and Matthias is a successful advocate. On the day of Pentecost, who is it that leads the disciples or the apostles out of the upper room to explain to the crowd what is taking place?

[ 9 : 02 ] Who is it that speaks so freely and forcibly and kindly about who this Jesus is, about how he rose from the dead? And we are told on the day of Pentecost, that thousands, thousands, turn to people because of Peter following Jesus.

He challenges falsehood. Challenges falsehood. And one of the commentators that I was using as I was making preparation for here, mind you, I don't want you thinking that I was opening books.

I was using the internet. But I was making sure that the internet part I was using, that the teaching was sound. And instead of using my eyes these days to read things, I'm listening to what people are seeing.

My guys will tell you I never listen to that sentence. Anyway. Again, do you know the story of Matthias and Sapphira in chapter 5 of Acts?

At a time when those who are part of the new family, the new company, they are selling their possessions and giving the entire amount to the congregation, to the community.

[ 10 : 22 ] So those who have not or have, they are not holding anything back. They are freely giving. It's a particularly unique time in the time of the church.

But a man called Ananias, with full knowledge of his wife Sapphira, come and say to Peter, I've sold the field and this is what I got for him.

But they are being hypocritical. And there would be nothing wrong with them holding something back if they are turning around to Peter and saying, this is half of what I got.

Or this is two-thirds of what I got. Or whatever the percentage was. But there was that they were being hypocritical and they were just not pleasing to God.

And it's not Peter that strikes him out. But it's God when Peter challenges him. So Peter follows Jesus by challenging culture.

[ 11 : 28 ] I'm not going to use any example I have here that I too want a cup of tea at the end of the service. So I'm not going through all the labels here.

I'll choose two more. I'll be familiar with the story of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Cornelius is a God-feeler.

He lives outside Jerusalem in a small place. And he wants to know more about God. And in the same community Peter is living as he's making his way towards Antio.

And God says to Cornelius, I'm going to send them on Peter to go and get him. So Cornelius dispatches two servants to go and ask Peter to come and see him.

That's one side of the coin. We have to remember that this is the situation where the Roman Empire occupies Israel. We have to remember that for a fisherman who had to pay taxes for his catch, these are not Peter's friends.

[ 12 : 44 ] And I hadn't realised until again I was using this source. Now there is a suggestion here that if the fisherman came home empty handed, it wasn't just a case that you didn't pay to the family, it's a case that the Romans were suggesting that you were withholding tax.

And you could be punished by bringing nothing home. That's just a thought. It's not in scripture. It is just a thought. And Peter was after the traditional time to pray to the flat roof of his house.

And here he has this vision of all these animals that have been brought down, clean and empty. And you'll know in the Old Testament there are no animals that it's okay to eat and those that there was not for the people of Israel.

And three times Peter says to God, but he hasn't touched any of these things. And you will not let anything unclean into his lips.

And each time God says to him, not to call anything unclean, but God is called clean. And as Peter starts to realize the interpretation of the vision, these two Gentiles, these servants of Peter's oppressors, come knocking at the door and invite Peter to come to speak with her leaders.

[ 14 : 10 ] Courage, conviction, willingness to keep himself in harm's way to proclaim the gospel.

Peter, following Jesus. There are two other examples of that, where the violence becomes more obvious.

He's well received by Cornelius, of course. And when he's there and he's sharing the gospel, the Holy Spirit falls upon these Gentiles. And we have what is called the Gentile Pentecost.

And they come to speak in other tongues. And they come to know the living Christ and Saviour. And let's move on.

That's the trouble with the real practice. We don't know how much material is at the end. I could talk about the council in Jerusalem.

[ 15 : 13 ] I missed out the opportunity of talking about silver and gold, have I now remember just a few days after the Pentecost. And we went up into the temple to pray and to get arrested for preaching the good news of Jesus.

How many people were told that? How many people were told that? How many people were told that? How many people were told that? How many people were told that?

How many people were told that? How many people were told that? How many people were told that? How many people were told that? How does this command affect you and I? It's one or two thoughts as we come to a close today.

Remember what I said, I suggested to you those words about him, that there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and to pay.

And how easy it is to lose focus, I'm sure that most of us around here are actually car drivers, or motorway drivers or cyclists.

[ 16 : 16 ] If we're not keeping our attention on the road about where we're going, then things happen. And we can get hurt or other people can get hurt.

I was quite taken by the imagery of our last hymn where I have decided to follow Jesus and there's one picture there of a man walking along and he's got this lovely, I think it's a fox red Labrador, falling along behind and I can't persuade my own to do that.

But that's the imagery we want to have in our mind as we're walking with Jesus, that Jesus is just there and we are walking with him. So I leave you with three thoughts today.

As we share fellowship over a cup of tea or share goodbyes at the door, there's no doubt that you and I will have different, as I recall, different salvation histories.

I was raised in a Christian home when I was made. I came to faith because my sister, my twin sister, went to Scripture Union at the age of 16.

[ 17 : 24 ] That's how I came to know Jesus at my savings. Through heaven and friends. When we moved to Kildareby, Mary started going to church, the whole center church in the age, under the ministry of a man called Willie Black, Edward Willie Black.

Mary came to faith and I was a steward for faith because I had started to walk every year. But we have different salvation histories. Some of you have been brought up within Christian homes and had a wonderful advantage or perhaps maybe you thought this about it when you were growing up.

I'm knowing all these stories of Jesus and I have a different expectation that your friends could do certain things and you couldn't. But you see the value of him. Different salvation histories of the same Savior to follow.

Different opportunities to witness. Not many of you will have the opportunity to stand in front of a congregation and continue to talk and talk and talk and talk and talk.

And I have been doing today. And I remember as an early Christian, an early Christian, when I was teaching in those days, the opportunities that God gave to me, not just among those who I had professional contact with, but also with my colleagues who would come to stay with us.

[ 18 : 44 ] They would work with me because it was a one-man station and they would come for an eight-hour shift and we would feed them. And not because I started the conversation, but because they started the conversation.

Different opportunities for the same Savior to follow. Different roles in life. Interesting to go out of the room and ask you what you live for a living, that's the expression I think, or why did you become that?

I became a policeman because my mother spoke to the training inspector and said, Michael doesn't know what he wants to do. He said, well, I'm coming down to talk to you. And that's what I did and I found myself sitting on an exam.

Not that I was expecting to sit on an exam. And therefore I became a policeman first before everything was in this time. One time I thought, friends, returning to the Word of God, I'm sure you're all aware of the parable of the vine where Jesus says, I am the true vine.

And also where it says in that very same process that we can bear no fruit if you're not attached to the vine, if you're not following Jesus.

[ 20 : 04 ] Something that we need to be fresh every day as we make our journey with Christ. Before we come to our closing, please, let's have a short word on prayer today.

Father, we give thanks, Lord, for the life of Peter, this rough diamond, Father, who you shaped into a mountain of gold.

His testimony is far different from ours, his situation is far different from ours. Yet, Lord, we come to follow the same Savior who paid the same price, who was also called us by me.

So we pray your blessing, Lord, upon that calling. And Father, as we rise from this place and go to a fellowship and friendship as we go in a different ways.

And you would lead us on, Father, and we would know the one that we are following holds us safely by the hand. In Jesus' name. Amen.