

Be with Jesus!

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Preacher: John Winter

- [0 : 0 0] So what does it mean then for us to be with Jesus? So as a church, we think that this is really important. Churches could unite over lots of things, and they have historically.
- So I'm going to use a big word and then tell you what it means, ecclesiology. So ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church. And for many, many years, churches in the Protestant tradition divided over ecclesiology.
- So the Anglican or Episcopal church is governed by the episkopos, and the Greek word episkopos means overseer, or as the Anglicans like to interpret, translate it rather, bishop.
- And then you've got the Presbyterians, and that's from a Greek word presbyteros, and presbyteros stands for elders. And so you've got a church governed by elders. So if you're from Holland, then it's a Dutch Reformed church.
- If you're from Northern Ireland, then it's the Irish Presbyterian church, etc., etc. Church of Scotland, okay? Church of England is Episcopal. Church of Scotland is Presbyterian, okay? Then you've got the Baptist churches, which are churches that are distinguished by their position on baptism.
- [1 : 1 2] So that's a little bit different. It's no longer now about church government, but it is about a particular way of baptizing, as distinct from the Anglicans and the Presbyterians who baptized infants, and the Baptists who only baptized believers on profession of faith.
- And we're a Baptist church in that sense. Then you have independent churches. Sometimes you'll see them referred to now as congregational.
- That was independent. This building was congregational, in that the government of the church was located in the church. And then Christian Fellowships, Evangelical Alliance, of which we're part, most of those will be independent churches as well.
- So what we told you is that churches historically have divided over issues of church government. And I just think that's frankly inexcusable, actually.
- If there's one thing that should distinguish us as a Christian believer, it should be that we are followers of Jesus. It's the least controversial thing to design a church around.
- [2 : 1 7] Let's be followers of Jesus. And so when we were putting together a purpose statement for the church, we thought, well, let's kind of emphasize what is most important to us as Christian believers and with Christian fellowship.
- And that is to unite around three cardinal truths. One, that as believers, as followers of Jesus, we want to be with Jesus. Secondly, as followers of Jesus, we want to become like Jesus.
- And thirdly, as followers of Jesus, we want to do what Jesus does. Now, I think that's fairly uncontroversial. And I'll show you why that's uncontroversial.
- Because it's the kind of minimum requirement that Jesus placed upon his disciples. Whenever he called people to himself, he called them to follow him.
- And so it's easier then. It's easier, too, than having endless arguments that have happened for 400 years to try to justify whether you take this position on church government or baptism or the other.

[3 : 18] And there's been no agreement and won't be for the next 500 years if the Lord tarries. But that we should follow Jesus seems to me to be the minimum requirement of every person who claims to be a Christian.

So, let's read Mark chapter 3 and see how Jesus did this in chapter 3, verse 13 to 19. Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

He appointed 12 designating them apostles, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

These are the 12 he appointed, Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter, James, son of Zebedee. I would just love to have a father called Zebedee.

Just reminds me of the magic roundabout. James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John. To them he gave the name Boanerges, which means sons of thunder.

[4 : 21] I was imagining them with, like, lightning strike on their chest. Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Altheus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Okay, so it's a very short reading. It actually tells you much more than just who the disciples were. But we'll come back to that in just a moment.

So, as I say, we want to think about what it means to be with Jesus. The first part of our purpose statement. So, to be with Jesus is, of course, according to the New Testament, an entire life pursuit.

It's not an event, just an event. Certainly not an event. It's a way of life in the community of Christians who gather around the teaching of Jesus. Jesus did not call us merely to join an institution or follow an ideology or to hold to a certain set of doctrines.

He called us to be with him, to learn from him, and to be empowered by him for mission. To be with him, to learn from him, and to be empowered for mission.

[5 : 41] And to live this way means that we will be transformed by his teaching, but also by his presence. See, when we take communion, we engage in a means of grace.

Again, technical language. But what we're not saying is that communion is just a kind of memorial thing, where we take bread, we drink wine, and we think, oh yeah, that reminds us of the body and blood of Jesus.

As if it's merely an intellectual exercise. It is more than that. It is a communion with our Lord around his table. This do, he says, in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread, you drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The communion that you share, Paul says, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

The cup that you drink, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? Now, we're not literally eating the body and blood of Jesus. But as we take the elements by faith, we actually commune with Jesus in that moment.

[6 : 49] And therefore, the sacrament of communion, that special meal that we have together, becomes a way of strengthening and enhancing our faith.

The same is true of the Bible. The Bible is written on paper. It contains lots of words. But it is more than just a book. Man does not live by bread alone, says Jesus, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

This is literally soul-inspiring food. And the Bible is like food to us. For the babe in Christ, like pure spiritual milk.

For the mature in Christ, it is meat to sustain and strengthen the believer in their faith. These are means of grace by which we become more like Jesus.

And we become more like Jesus as we practice them at home. We become more like Jesus as we practice them together in community. Did you know that the first New Testament word to describe the body of Christians, the community, is the word way?

[8 : 03] The Christian church was called the way. Now just think about that for a moment. Why is that important? It's important because it emphasizes the fact that this is a manner of living, a way of living, that everybody could be identified by.

So if you're outside of the church, and it was the outside of the church that called it the way, if you're outside of the church, people would kind of look at these believers who were followers of Jesus, who were preaching on their street corners, who were gathering together in the temple community, who were changing people's lives practically by feeding the poor and the hungry and so on.

And yet they belong to the way, the way of Jesus. We know that because of the way they live, the lifestyle they adopted. And remember when the apostles in Acts were called before the Sanhedrin, and they bravely said that it's better to obey God rather than men, it was said of the people in the Sanhedrin that they took note that they had been with Jesus.

There was something very distinctive about their lifestyle that had, if you like, the smell, the feel, the touch, the look of Jesus. Their lives were transformed because they were with Jesus.

They belonged to the way. And belonging to the way means that they behave in certain ways. And that reminds us, and Mike will bring this out next week, that it is impossible to be with Jesus and not take on his lifestyle, to really be with him.

[9 : 45] He makes that kind of demand upon us. He's not interested in getting support as like, yeah, Jesus, I love Jesus, way to go, Jesus, and all of that, if you're not willing to follow his lifestyle.

If any man would come to me, he must take up his cross and follow me. You can't have the life of Jesus without adopting the lifestyle.

And too many people have been in church for centuries who want to have the life of Jesus but all wanted to adopt his lifestyle. Jesus says, you can't do that. He's not interested in people who just wear a badge.

He wants to see the people's lives are transformed by his teaching. So discipleship was important to Jesus. And in the Jewish tradition, it's really worth noting this, there were three levels of discipleship that Jesus was familiar with.

So Judaism had a tradition of people who followed their rabbis. And Jesus was a rabbi. He was a teacher that people followed. And there are the three levels there, Bet or Bet Sefer, Bet Midrash, and Bet Talmud.

[10 : 58] Now let me just quickly explain each one, each category. The Bet Sefer were for boys from aged, sorry, the Bet Sefer were for children, boys and girls, aged from six to about 12, who were all educated in the Torah.

So the Torah is the Old Testament law, the five books of Moses. They were educated in the laws of Israel. They attended synagogue every week, and they were taught by the local rabbi.

When the children were brought to the synagogue, I love this, the synagogue leader would have a slate, and he would write something of the Torah onto the slate, and then he would just rub some honey onto it.

And at that point, the child had to taste the honey from the slate. To be reminded that the law of the Lord is sweet to the taste, like honey to the soul, or taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed is the man who takes trust in Him. So all children, boys and girls, went through that first level of discipleship, Bet Sefer.

[12 : 17] Bet Midrash is the second one, and Bet Midrash is for boys, only for boys, sorry girls, only for boys from age 13 to 15. So after the Bar Mitzvah, after they had been made into a man, in Jewish thinking, then they went to this next level of education, where they learned the Talmud.

Now the Talmud contains all of the Old Testament law, but it also contains the teaching of various rabbis. And this was the point where you got weeded out and sorted out.

If you were bright and intelligent, it was like going to grammar school. If you weren't so bright and intelligent, you went to the local secondary, modern one that I went to, and you did woodwork and metal work and prepared for life outside of an educational sector.

That's what it was like. So you got a chance to go on to the higher levels of education, but if you failed at this point, then you didn't continue. Very few were selected to go on to the third level, the Bet Talmud.

Jesus went on to the third level. Now there's a little hint of that in Matthew chapter 13 and 55. It said, Is this not the carpenter's son? Which suggests that he was known to have a background with somebody who was a manual laborer.

[13 : 39] But we know he went on to the next level because he was referred to as a rabbi by his disciples. Jesus was well-schooled both in the Old Testament law and also in rabbinic teachings.

He kept saying, You have heard that it was said. You have heard that it was said. He knew what the various rabbis said about marriage and divorce and all of those things. He was aware of that. He was well-schooled.

Now when Jesus calls us into discipleship, he calls us into the third level, what is referred to in Jewish tradition as the Talmudim.

The Talmudim are people who are in the Bet Talmud. They are well-schooled in the teaching of the Word of God. They are well-schooled in the various traditions and they become followers of their rabbi.

Now if you turn to John chapter 1, you get a very interesting dialogue going on. It's worth just looking at very quickly. In John chapter 1, you find disciples who were followers of John the Baptist who then became followers of Jesus.

[14 : 51] And in verse 35, it says, The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. That's John the Baptist. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, the Lamb of God.

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, What do you want? They said, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying?

Come, he replied, and you will see me. Where are you staying? How often have you read that and thought, that's an odd question that they want to know his postal address, they want to know where to turn up for a party later on?

Why do they need to know that? They need to know that because once you become a Talmudim, once you follow a rabbi, you go and live with the rabbi. You follow in his footsteps.

You eat at his table. You spend all your time with him. You learn his instruction. And most importantly, you mimic his lifestyle. You become a mirror reflection of who he is.

[15 : 55] So we as followers of Jesus are called to that level of following. A willingness to live with, stay with, die with, our rabbi, if necessary.

Jesus doesn't call us to be spectators. He doesn't call us to dabble occasionally in the Word of God. He calls us to know it so intimately because it's a way of knowing him so intimately that we might become like him.

Being with Jesus is demanding work. Very demanding work. And of course, the New Testament knows all about Christians who it calls carnal.

People who don't grow and should have moved on from their baby milk to their spiritual food. But the New Testament never commends that lifestyle. It tells us to grow up and become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus wants us to be with him. Let's look at the next slide. Jesus wants us to be with him together. You notice he called his disciples to be with him.

[17 : 06] And they lived with him. He lived with them. Actually, he was really good like that, wasn't he? Remember when he called Zacchaeus? He said, we're going to live in your house and you're going to feed me and everybody else.

I love that. It's cheeky, isn't it? We wouldn't do it. British people wouldn't do that. You know, we'd wait to be invited. None of them waiting to be invited there. You know, I'm coming to your house. We're going to live together.

It's not really that surprising that the New Testament early church met in houses and particularly in rich people's houses like Lydia because they could afford to look after the church, feed them, take them in, care for them.

But still, the demand to be together is there. Jesus invariably calls people to community. Come, follow me or the twelve.

And that passage in Mark is really interesting, isn't it? It tells us about the imperfect nature of that community. Look again at it, Mark chapter 3. These are the twelve he appointed, Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter.

[18 : 14] Now, who is Simon? We know him because Simon is a rash, impetuous, bald individual who was called into the same group of followers as Thomas who was cautious and careful and questioning and doubting.

I bet you at times they had a little bit of irritation with one another. Then you have Simon the Zealot. That's great. You've got Simon the Zealot.

Who's he? Well, he's the kind of guy who carried a dagger around with him and if he saw a Roman, at least in his past life, would happily plunge that knife into the chest of a Roman. He was a terrorist, to use a modern word, who was called by Jesus to follow him and Jesus put him in the same company of people as Matthew who was, guess what?

A tax collector and a hated collaborator with the Romans. Now, you might be able to say at this point, Jesus didn't kind of appear to know what he's doing except he does.

He understands that the best way to form people into his likeness is to put them into a group where they rub up against each other the wrong way and that's the great thing about the Christian church.

[19 : 28] We're all very different people. We wouldn't naturally, some of us, be friends. There might be things about one another that annoy us but it's interesting, isn't it? It's the same thing happens at home in families, doesn't it?

We love our families most of the time but not all of the time. We analyze our children and think, well, she's alright like that and he's alright like that but that really annoys me.

But guess who grows by that annoyance? Not the child but you. As you learn patience, as you learn tolerance, as you learn to care in spite of the unusual nature of their behaviors, as you continue to love unconditionally, you grow.

You see how Jesus has real wisdom in bringing us into community. He brings us into community because in community we are sanctified by identifying not only the strengths and the love of our fellow Christians but bearing with and living with one another in their weakness and failings and when we need to forgive just as we have been forgiven.

He calls us into community and it's an imperfect community, always an imperfect community but as the next slide says about the church, I think it will say the church is a hospital, a place where sick, broken, wounded, floored people are made new by Jesus.

[20 : 58] That's John Mark Comer, Hope Has a Name. It's a great book if you want to read a book. That's a great book I've thoroughly recommended. Hope Has a Name. The church is a hospital for sick and broken people.

Now some people say, oh well, you know, I like Jesus but I don't like the community. Well Jesus would say, okay, that's fine. They might not like you either but stick with it.

We're never encouraged to walk out on community because the community let us down. They will always let us down. We are not a perfect church here if you're visiting and you won't find one anywhere but you will find believers here who love Jesus, who mess up and who forgive one another and who help each other to live in community.

What we won't do as a community is kick you out because you don't measure up because Jesus doesn't kick you out and neither will we. We might have to rebuke people because of their sin.

We might have to remind people of their need to follow Jesus in a more personal and a more intimate way. We might need to tell them what Jesus tells them to do but they will always, you will always be welcome among us because Jesus welcomes us.

[22 : 22] And when Jesus says to the Ephesian church this is what you should do rather than kind of fall out with each other he says be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other.

Why? Because God in Christ forgive you. And if you said well I'm not going to forgive that, well why should you expect to be forgiven? Yeah?

Forgive as the Lord forgives. That's what we're called to do. And this is an imperfect community but it is a community that seeks to be with Jesus. And so the things that we do as community coming together on Sunday worship having our life groups where we want people to do life together in the midweek and be together and study the word and come to the prayer meeting where we seek to connect with God and we seek to connect with one another through prayer.

And when we engage in alpha groups and when we engage in Sunday school groups or our WCF kids etc. etc. When we call people to discipleship when we call people to be baptized when we invite people to our cafe when we invite people to our warm room when we open our church door we are saying this is an imperfect community of Jesus that we would really like you to belong to.

We welcome you because Jesus welcomes you. And then the next thing Jesus calls us to Jesus wants us to be with him in every aspect of our life on earth.

[23 : 58] Dallas Willard who's a guy who I really really like and again would really encourage you to read on discipleship. This is what he says about discipleship. Discipleship he says a disciple is a learner a student an apprentice a practitioner.

Disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the kingdom of the heavens to every aspect of their life on earth.

Every aspect of their life on earth. You see in one sense the only life that you see my life the only life of my life that you see most of you is the public life I choose to share.

It is perfectly possible as one person once put it memorably in my mind it's perfectly possible for John Winter to go home from church hang up his halo and be nasty to his wife and children.

It is perfectly possible for that same John Winter to be crooked in his financial dealings immoral in his personal lifestyle and horrible as a neighbor.

[25 : 11] Perfectly possible. Some of you are smiling thank you because I hope you know that's not me that wasn't a testimony but it is perfectly possible and there are Christians who claim to be Christians who do behave like that and that's wrong.

Jesus calls us to discipleship in every aspect of our lives. He calls us to be concerned about being Christ-like not just when we're in the public sphere but when we're on our own in private in our closet.

He calls us to be as loving as Christians not only to the community of which we belong but to our family community that see us at our best and our worst.

And if you want to know what I'm really like you can ask my daughter and wife. They will tell you I'm not perfect but I'm being sanctified I'm sure. They might not use that language. So Jesus teaches us a lot about this but I want to do just three scriptures that I think we need to know of.

This is the first one. Matthew 28 17 to 20 The eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him they worshipped him but some doubted.

[26 : 25] So communities gather at the commandment of Jesus and worship Jesus. That's what communities do. Communities to disciples. Then Jesus came to them and said all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

What do the disciples of Jesus do together? Well they go into the world they preach the gospel they learn everything Jesus taught they baptize people so that they may become disciples as well and then they teach them to follow Jesus just as they do.

Disciples imitate and mimic the gospel to other disciples. disciples they say you want to know what it is to follow Jesus follow me even as I follow Christ and that's the language of Paul isn't it?

Follow me even as I follow Christ if you want to know how to pray I'll show you if you want to know how to read the Bible I'll teach you if you want to know doctrine I'll teach you it is the job of the disciple not just the minister the job of the disciple to teach other disciples what you've learnt and it's a never ending process of which I need to learn more in order that I might teach more next scripture please okay you can go on from there Luke chapter 9 verse 23 then he said to them all whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up the cross and follow me oh I missed a word out take up the cross daily daily now what is the cross?

the cross is the emblem of death the cross is an indication of our willingness to die to self today in order to follow Jesus what does die to self today mean?

[28 : 35] it might mean when I get up and I feel grumpy and I want to take it out on somebody I say take up your cross what would Jesus do? it might mean if I want to withhold finance from Jesus because I want that extra holiday or that nicer car or whatever it might mean that I have to say no I have to die to self it might mean if I want to look at and forgive me if I want to look at pornography today I have to deny myself in order to be holy because Jesus is looking over my shoulder it might mean if I don't want to read the word today or I can't be bothered to pray or I'd rather watch EastEnders is it still on?

I have no idea I may need to say no in order to be with Jesus and his community it's serious stuff isn't it?

dying every day being with Jesus every day and you know let's be honest we all fall here we all fail to do it it's not the point though is it? the point is you just keep doing it see yesterday I went out on my bike I thought I'll ride 7.5 kilometers I know that because I do it pretty much every day I don't do it every day I do give myself a couple of days rest in the week couldn't be bothered yesterday when I got over the bridge the wind was blowing up my face there was people bungee jumping off the side of the room and I just you know I was tired and I couldn't be bothered and I thought keep going keep going why?

because I'm nearly 60 and I need to look after my health imagine if I wanted to become a great piano player what would I have to do? practice how often?

every day see I couldn't become a great piano player if I wasn't willing to put in the time and the commitment to become that great concert pianist it's exactly the same with Jesus you want to become a great follower of Jesus you take up your cross every day Jesus speaking to the church at Laodicea said your problem your problem as a church is this it's not that you're not rich you've got loads in the bank it's not that you don't have a great reputation you've got a great reputation it's you've lost your first love you're lukewarm I'd rather you were called actually frankly than pretend to be hot and there's the challenge for us believers isn't it?

[31 : 17] you know we might gain the whole world but when we get to the day of judgment will we hear well done my good and faithful servant or will we be those who get in on the skin of our teeth or even worse don't get in at all because we never follow Jesus time to wake up if you're going to be with Jesus you can't be lukewarm you have to follow every day daily and then the next and last you can move on if there's a quote Josh whoever serves me must follow me notice the word must whoever serves me must follow me and where I am my servant also will be my father will honor the one who serves me I love that where I am my servant also will be you see we can look around and see each other but forget that where two or three are gathered together in my name what happens next there I am in the midst of them guess who's sitting next to you guess who's here where I am my servant will be when I'm walking my dog

Jesus is there when I'm sitting at my desk Jesus is there when I'm eating my meal Jesus is there when I'm watching television Jesus is there he wants to be with us he wants our hearts see being with Jesus straight forward just open your heart and say Jesus as imperfect as I am I hear you knocking at my door every day I want to open the door for you okay we're going to stop now I'm going to go to the last couple of slides as the worship group come back together I'm just going to lead you in some prayer there was more I could say but we've said enough that's tough isn't it it's not easy it's not easy to follow Jesus you know it's just like it's not easy to become a concert pianist or a great athlete but if something's worth having isn't it worth doing and if we feel convicted today because we've become lukewarm let's take the opportunity get right