

Series: Jesus Changes Everything

Who are You Becoming?

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Luke 9:23-25

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, January 12, 2025

Charlotte: Good morning. A reading from Luke 9 verses 23-25: “Then Jesus said to them all, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me, for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very own self?’” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Thank you, Charlotte. All right, so do you guys just not like the Broncos or, last night, actually Saturday night was so full that we ran out of chairs because so many people were there, and I think it probably had something to do with the Broncos, not just Saturday night and kicking off. There go my notes, and not just kicking off, so I don’t know if you guys are hoping that by your church attendance that will maybe make God more comfortable with the Broncos winning today or something, but we will see how it goes. Yeah, excited for today. As we kick off though, I have a couple things I want to let you know. I would like for us to take a moment and just pray for what is going on in California, all of the people who have lost their homes, just the devastation in that area, so let’s take some time to pray for that. What may be adjacent to that as we actually have this week on Wednesday night, we are kicking off a care class, a grief share for people who are going through difficult seasons, so if that is you right now, if maybe you are in a season of grief, if you have experienced loss in your life, whether that is someone you love or maybe a marriage or whatever it might be, we would love to invite you to our care class. It is led by a couple of people in our church who have experience and background in how to help walk people through grief, and so that begins on Wednesday night. If you have questions about that and want more information, I just encourage you to reach out to Melanie Richards, who is right over there. She is going to raise her hand for you, and all her information is on the website, and we would love to have you join us for that on Wednesday night, but let’s pray as we dive in today.

Heavenly Father, God, as we just come before you, and we continue this series on how Jesus changes everything, God, I pray that you today by the power of your Spirit would open our hearts and our minds to receive your love and your truth. God, I pray if there are places in our lives where, following after you, being a disciple to you, where we feel a little stuck, I pray that today our time together could be a little bit of awakening us up to the reality of what you have called us to. Father, we want to take a moment and just pray for the devastating fires that have been taking place in California, so many lost homes, lost communities. Father, the images are overwhelming. It looks like a bomb has gone off in those areas, and so we pray specifically for the church in those areas to rise up to meet the needs of the community around them, to be a message of hope in the midst of a devastating season, and God, we pray that you would be the God that you are in that situation, that you would raise out of these ashes new life, bring new life to these communities, and that people would encounter you even in the midst of hardship, and they would experience your presence and come to know you, and it is in Christ’s name that we pray, amen.

All right, so to get started today, and I have to just make a last caveat, I am fighting the flu, and Steffy has had the flu all week. We just have been ravaged by it, but finally I do not have a fever anymore, but my brain is still not all there. Hopefully we will get through this all right today. I could not even think of what the word “fever” was, so that does not bode well for the next thirty minutes. All right, as we get started today, I have a question for you, and the question is this: Who are you becoming? I think this is a question that from time to time we all think of and we all contemplate, but if we are really honest with ourselves, it is often a question that I think we do not want to spend too much time contemplating or thinking about, just because of the busyness of life and the things that we are going through and the things that we are dealing with, but this is a really important question: Who are you becoming? When you think of the person that you imagine yourself being five years from now or maybe even twenty-five years from now, who is that person? I see from some of the looks in your eyes, you’re like, “Paul, I don’t even have twenty-five years left. I don’t care.” This is a really important question for us to contemplate, because the truth is, all of us are being shaped by the environment, the culture around us, and the person that we will be five years from now or twenty-five years from now is being impacted by the person that we are today.

The truth is that none of us are static, and we are always becoming someone new. Every decision we make, every habit we cultivate, every relationship that we nurture, every step we take, every move we make, and now I am just quoting The Police, some of you caught that, all of those things influence who we are becoming, and they have a lot to do with shaping us in one way or another. As we have been in this series, we started it last week, this idea that Jesus changes everything, He brings transformation to our lives. He changes our hearts, and He changes us from the inside out. He can change our lives. He wants to change our lives. He is willing to change our lives if we let Him. We began that conversation by asking the question, “Who are you?” and the journey to transformation, the journey to Jesus changing everything about our lives, begins with understanding who we are in Christ, but then the natural next question that comes up about that is, “Who are we becoming?” Not just our identity, but the kind of person we are developing ourselves into, that we are being formed into, and the hard truth about our moment in history is that without intentionally choosing to become more like Jesus, we will become like people who do not look like Jesus, because slowly, day by day, we are being formed. What we watch, what we read, and what we listen to is constantly forming us. The things that we interact with, our phones in our pockets, the places we live and work and play, all of those things are forming us, and they have a deep impact on the person that we are becoming.

Here is a question for you that I want you to think about. What do you think is more formative in your life that is shaping you more, the algorithms you encounter on your phone four to five hours a day, or the one and a half hours we may spend in church on a weekend? Which has a more impact on who we are becoming? We are constantly receiving inputs and things that are messaging us about who we are becoming and what it means to experience the good life, what it means to experience transformation in our lives. If we want to become like Jesus, if we are a people that believe becoming like Jesus is the key to experiencing this reality that Jesus changes everything, then we have to put things in place that will help us counter-form ourselves, the counter-formation ways of experiencing a life that is different to the message that we receive from the culture around us, because here is the reality, there are no sudden saints.

None of us just wakes up one morning and suddenly is like, “Oh yeah, that greed that I have had in my heart for my entire life is just gone. I do not have it anymore.” No, we do not just wake up one morning and suddenly become more generous people or less angry people. That takes intentionality, and so the question for us is if we want to go about finding the change we are looking for in life, if we want to become like Jesus and live for others, if we want to experience this reality that Jesus can change everything in our lives, the question is, how do we experience that? How do we go about experiencing that in our own life?

The way that Jesus talks about experiencing this change in our life is through something that He calls discipleship. Discipleship is something that is thrown around in the church all the time, something that we talk about, that we name, but sometimes we do not actually take the time to think about what it really means to be a disciple. One of my favorite scholars, his name was Robert Mulholland. He was a professor of the Bible, and he says this: “Discipleship is the process of being formed into the image of Christ for the sake of others.” It sounds a lot like our mission to become like Jesus and live for others. Now let’s break those two statements down. Being formed into the image of Jesus, that is how we define life with Jesus, becoming more like Him, discipleship to Him, and the question is, “Why do we think becoming like Jesus is so central to who we want to be as a community?”

I would put it to you like this. I think about who Jesus was. He was the most compassionate, humble, generous, kind, strong person who has ever lived. We believe Jesus is the most impressive person to ever live, because He uniquely embodied both divinity and humanity. He lived a perfect life of love and humility and sacrifice, and He absolutely transformed history through his teachings, through his miracles, and through his unparalleled compassion. He often offered hope and redemption to all people, and then we believe that his resurrection defeated sin and death, proving his identity as the Son of God, and changed the course of human history. That is what we believe about who Jesus is, and so if you are maybe skeptical about this premise of becoming like Jesus, or you are like, “Yeah, I don’t know,” I would just ask you this: Could you find anyone in history who could fit that description? Is there anyone in history who is more worthy of becoming like than Jesus? Can you think of a better person to model our lives after?

So, we believe this idea of becoming more like Jesus, but it is not just for the sake of improving ourselves. Discipleship is always an inward journey of discovering what is within us and who God is, but it always, always, always leads to an outward expression of love with those who are outside of us. It is never about focusing just on ourselves, but it is moving from the private, therapeutic, self-help spirituality that we see in our world to an expression of transformation and love for those who are around us. That is the premise, and I realize I am throwing a lot of attitude that you may have probably heard before, but the question is, “How do we do this? How do we become like Jesus and become disciples of Jesus? What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, so we can experience this life that He has offered us?” Jesus defines that in the passage that Charlotte just read, in 9:23 from the book of Luke, and He said this: “Jesus said to them all, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’” So, Jesus begins the call to discipleship with this idea of denying ourselves. Self-denial is one of the inherent premises of what it means to follow Jesus.

Now it has to be said that this call to self-denial is radically countercultural to our day. It is absolutely different from how the world would define finding self-fulfillment. We live in an age where

your happiness, your dreams, chasing the things that you want in life, prioritizing your own happiness, that comes above all other things in your life. We think that the key to happiness is not through self-denial, but through simple self-fulfillment, go after whatever you want, but Jesus calls his followers to a radically countercultural way of living. It is a way of self-denying, and what He is meaning with this idea of self-denial is not simply like denying your personality or suppressing your God-given urges. It is this idea that we give over the throne of our life to Jesus. It is not about self-fulfillment. It is about self-surrender and not this idea of self-fulfillment and wanting what we want, when we want it.

I do not know if there is a better illustration for that way of life than young children, because when you look at young children, they want what they want when they want it, and what happens when they do not get what they want, when they want it? Tantrums, anger, throwing a fit, crying in the grocery store. We have experienced that. We have seen the person in the grocery store that the kid wants a toy, and the parent is like, “No, sorry we’re not getting the toy today,” and they fall down on the ground, and they start kicking and screaming. You are like, “Oh, all right. I am just going to pretend I didn’t see that right now.” We have experienced that before, but here is the truth. This is why we can look at little kids and be like, “Yeah, it is cute. They really need to spank that kid,” or something. I don’t know. We never really grow past that, do we? Even as adults, we can get caught up in this idea that the fulfillment that we long for in life is just about getting what we want when we want it, and Jesus says, this is so counterintuitive, that finding the life we are looking for, that the key to experiencing the change and transformation He wants to offer in our lives, it is not about getting whatever we want whenever we want it. It is about denying ourselves, and that that is the beginning of finding the change that we are looking for.

Not only did Jesus say we need to deny ourselves, but also did He say that discipleship to Him looks like taking up our cross. He goes on and says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” Now in our day and age, this idea of the cross, it is like we have romanticized it a little bit. I mean we hang it on our walls and in churches. We maybe wear it in jewelry. We have tattoos that have the cross in it, but that would be so antithetical to what the people in the first century understood the cross to be. The cross was a symbol of immense shame and evil and the ultimate cost of submission to authority. The cross was not a symbol of, “Oh yeah, this is like happy and joyful.” It was this intense illustration that symbolized death, and so when Jesus is going around the countryside talking to people and saying, “If you really want to follow me,” and keep in mind, this is before Jesus was killed on a cross, and He tells people, “You need to take up your cross daily to follow me,” they would have had no idea what He was talking about. “Take up our cross daily?” because that is not just talking about dealing with your minor inconveniences in life. I mean, it is a call to die to our desires, our ambitions, our comforts, and even our rights for the sake of a willingness to follow after Jesus. Taking up our cross daily is this decision to say, “Not my will for my life, but your will.”

Think of the way that Jesus described his call to discipleship. He told a couple of parables here and there about the cost of discipleship, and He compared it to someone who was going to build a tower, and He said before someone goes to build a tower, they have to count the cost, to make sure they have enough resources, make sure they have what it takes to complete the project that they are beginning. We do not often think of discipleship that way. We do not think of discipleship as counting the cost, of taking into consideration if we have what it takes to really follow after Jesus.

What Jesus is saying is that following Him requires careful consideration and full commitment. Following Jesus does not really work as a side hobby where we are like, “I do that on the weeks that it works for me.” He is saying that following Him is like an all-in endeavor. We are holding nothing back. We prioritize Him above everything else, our possessions, our relationships, our personal ambitions in order to follow Him, and this is not just like a one-time commitment we make, either. Jesus says that we are to do this daily.

Sometimes when we think of following Jesus or becoming a Christian, we have this idea that “I will just raise my hand at the end of a sermon,” or “I will say a prayer, and I will ask Jesus into my heart, and then once I have done that, then I am good, and that is all that is required, and then I have my ticket into heaven, and Jesus will start to make my life better,” and then when that does not work, we have questions about, well, why not? Because the call to follow Jesus is not just simply a one-time commitment. It is daily choosing to follow Him, to give our life to Christ, to ask Him into our heart. To give ourselves to Him is not just a one-time thing. It is something that we commit to do over and over and over again, and then Jesus, He goes on to say that this call to take up our cross, to deny ourselves daily, the final step of discipleship is follow Him. He calls us to follow Him. Now there is a lot packed into this statement, because it is not just simply agreeing with the words of Jesus. It is a call to action. It is a call to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and align ourselves with his values and his purposes.

In Jesus’ day there was this saying, and you have probably heard this before. We have talked about this at Waterstone before, this call to follow a rabbi. They would say this catchphrase, “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.” The idea behind it was that people who were disciples to a rabbi, a teacher, someone that they wanted to emulate and become like, they were supposed to follow that person so closely that as they walked from town to town, they would begin to emulate the things that they did and the things that they said and what they taught. They would think like them. They would act like them. They would speak like them, and they would follow them so closely that as they walked on these dirt roads, they would be covered in the dust of their rabbi. Disciples were so committed to becoming like their rabbis in manners and speech, action, and thought, that they would share the same dust as the rabbi they were following, so Jesus says that following Him, becoming more and more like Jesus in this journey of faith, it is centered on this idea of self-denial and the cross and crucifixion. It is not a movement of self-fulfillment, but one of self-sacrifice, and that when we step into it, that is the transformation and change that we are looking for in our lives.

Now, if there is a part of you that reacts to that a little bit and thinks like, “Yeah, but that makes sense,” it is because it goes against everything that our culture tells us. I love the way that John Mark Comer puts it in this interaction we have around discipleship. He says, “There are no accidental saints.” He says, “You can’t just slip your hand up at the end of a sermon. It is a high bar to entry.” Has anyone ever heard of “discipleship has a high bar to entry,” before? He says, “It will require you to reorder your entire life around following Jesus as your undisputed top priority, over your job, your money, your reputation, over everything, and yet all of these things will find their rightful place once integrated into a life of apprenticeship,” which is his word for discipleship. I mean, do you hear how counterintuitive this is to the wisdom of our age? I mean, this sounds like absolute rebellion to all of the things that you will read in self-help books or that you will see on blog posts about how to achieve your best life now.

The majority of our culture will tell you that in order to find fulfillment, you need to do whatever you want, and our culture promotes the idea that satisfaction is found in doing whatever you want, that self-fulfillment is the ultimate goal in life, so follow your heart, and live your truth. You deserve to be happy. That is a much better message, to be honest with you, than “you need to die to yourself.” One sounds like, “Oh yeah, no. I want to be happy. That sounds really great. I would love to have everything my heart desires,” but the call to deny yourself, to die to yourself, and to take up your cross, let’s be honest, that is a much harder thing to sell to people. It is a harder thing to commit to. Everyone in our culture is trying this idea of self-improvement and the way to find happiness, and most of the time it is somehow, “How do I move myself from this area of my life that is rough or hard or bad to something that is good? How do I move my life from where I feel like I am getting it right, and I am good, but I want to become better?” We see it all the time at this time of year, the new year. It is the people that are starting a gym membership or starting a new meal plan or giving up certain things. It is all of the ways that we go about trying to improve ourselves, trying to make ourselves better, and we think that it will lead to the life that we are longing for. The counterintuitive piece of Jesus is that He says you can do all of that, but it will not produce the change and transformation in your life that you are looking for. It just will not work, and in fact, instead of leading to life, it will lead to your life eventually falling apart.

Jesus offers something radically different. Jesus did not come to make bad people good or good people better. Jesus came to bring dead people back to life, and that is an entirely different paradigm that He wants to bring, not just self-improvement, but new life to you, that He wants to transform your life, and the places within you that feel dead and broken, He wants to heal and bring new life to, but the way He says that happens is so counterintuitive. He says that it is not through self-fulfillment, but through self-denial. It is not through self-improvement, but self-surrender, that is the beginning place of change.

That is why Jesus goes on in this verse, and He says, “for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever wants to lose their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose and forfeit their very self?” I mean, do you see the teaching that He is bringing? He is saying, “You can chase after all those things. You are going to find things. You are going to receive messages from the world that say, ‘if you pursue this, you will experience the life that you are always looking for,’ but it will not work. It is actually in the things that you try to do to save your own life that end up causing you to lose it. It is only in me and the new life that I have available to you that you will find the change and transformation you are looking for.”

So, then it leads us to another question: “How do we learn to live the way of Jesus, the way of self-denial, in an age of self-fulfillment? What does it look like for us to become the kind of people who look to Jesus’ version of life instead of our culture’s messages about what it means to become the people we want to be? How do we become who we want to become?” You think about that person you are becoming, the person that you are thinking about five years from now or twenty-five years from now. How do you become that kind of person?

When you think of change, I think in the West particularly, there is a formula that we have devised about what it means to change and transform our lives, and it usually looks something like this graph. When we want to experience or encounter change, we usually think it starts with something about gaining knowledge. You need to learn certain things. You need to get more information into your mind, and then

once you have that information in your life, then you will begin to change who you are and who you are in the world, and once that begins to change, then that will impact what you do in the world. So, we have this linear progression of how we think we experience change in our lives, and to be honest, the church has just adopted this way of thinking, hook, line, and sinker. We think that in order to bring transformation into people's lives, we need to get them into things like Awana, where they are memorizing Bible verses. We need to sign them up for classes where they can get more information, and so much of transformation is about learn, learn, learn, learn, learn. I am not saying there's anything wrong with those things. I love to teach classes. I love Awana. I was a big participant in Awana. Did anyone ever do Bible sword drills and that stuff? A few of you, yeah, we are the real church nerds, all right? That is a whole different level, but it is all built on this premise that we just need to know things, and once we know the right information, then it will begin to change who we are, and then once who we are begins to change, then we will begin to do the things that we think we need to be doing. The problem is that does not actually work. Knowledge alone is not enough for transformation in our lives. It is built on a false premise, and I can prove that to you very easily, all right?

How many of you have ever eaten at Taco Bell? You do not even want to raise your hands right now. That is how ashamed you are of that question. All right, now, enough of you were honest about you having the Taco Bell food before. The rest of you were liars, okay, so we will talk about that on another Sunday, but here is the idea. I know that Taco Bell is not good for me. I have that information. As much as a cheesy gordita crunch sounds delicious, I know, I have the information that what they call meat in that little taco is not meat. I know that. I have read the articles. People have told me the information. I have that available to me, and I also know that when I eat Taco Bell, I feel terrible. I do not feel good afterwards, so I know that this food is not good for me. I have all of that information, and if someone came to me and said, "What you really need to go on is a diet of pure Taco Bell. That will improve your health," I would know that they are just trying to sell me a lie, because that is not true. I have all of that information, and you do too. Does that stop me from going through the drive-through, and you always have to go through the drive-through, because you do not want people to see that you are actually getting out of your car to go to Taco Bell. Does that stop you from eating the things that are not good for you? No, no. Thank you. There is one honest person in the entire church other than I. We know that information, but it does not change how we live. It does not always change what we do, and it does not always change who we are. There is this disconnect, and sometimes what we think is that if we could just get the right information transferred into people's minds, then that will produce the transformation we are looking for, but it is a false premise. Knowledge transfer does not equal transformation and us becoming something different.

I have this theory, this idea that in too much of Christian formation and discipleship, we have taught people what to learn, but we have not taught people how to live. What I mean by that, and you have probably experienced this before, is that you can encounter someone who knows an awful lot about the Bible, and they are an absolute jerk. Let's just be honest. It is possible for even people who are atheists, who do not even believe in Jesus, sometimes they know more about Jesus than people who claim to follow Him, but it does not change who they are. It does not change what they do in the world. We can have all of the right information, but it does not necessarily produce the change that we are looking for.

Just because I know that the Bible says, “do not be greedy,” does not mean that I will suddenly become a more generous person and a less-greedy person. There is something much deeper going on within each and every one of us, and so as we go through this series over the next several weeks, and we talk about what it means to experience Jesus and the change that He has for us, I want you to think about change through a little bit of a different paradigm. So, you can see here that it is maybe not a progression of moving from knowledge to who we are and to what we do, but it is more of a Venn diagram of the ways that things integrate together in our lives to produce the change that we are looking for, and knowledge is absolutely a part of this process. We have to know things. Knowledge is essential, knowing who we are, who God is, and what God has called us to do. If we just float freely and do not have any attachment to truth, that does not actually produce the change that we are looking for either. Then we are just untethered and choosing whichever way we want to go, and that will not produce the change and transformation we are looking for, so knowledge alone is not enough, and to be honest, the church is really good at this one. We will give you the knowledge. We have the content, we have the sermons, we have the e-mails, we have all of the things that can produce the change, but if that is detached from experience, then it will not work.

Think about the times you have grown the most in your life. My guess is that sometimes the most growth occurred in your life when you were going through some of the hardest moments of your life, absolutely when suddenly what you know to be true does not match with your experience and the wrestling you have to do to make those things become cohesive again. That is where transformation takes place, where your experience reshapes what you thought you knew about God or the world, and it reforms you, so experience is very important.

I want you to just think about it. I could say to you, “Forgiveness is a really good thing.” You can say, “Yeah, I know that is true,” but when you have let someone down, when you have betrayed someone, when you have hurt someone, and they offer you forgiveness, and you experience that forgiveness, it is a completely different thing than just having the knowledge of it in your mind. So many times, in our journey of transformation, we can have empirical knowledge. We can look at the resurrection and say, “Yeah, I believe that idea, all of the eyewitness testimonies I have heard people talk about. I believe empirically in the resurrection of Jesus.” It is another thing entirely to experience the resurrection of Jesus in your own life, to not just say, “Yeah, I think that He rose from the dead,” but to actually experience Him moving, working in your life, where you are like, “Yeah, there is no way that I could deny that Jesus is alive and working today,” it is a completely different reality, and all of that is impacted by this idea of community.

Transformation does not take place on our own, in a vacuum. We need to be around other people who challenge us where we are struggling, who encourage us in the places that we are falling short, who help us keep aligned with God’s will for us. Transformation does not just happen on a solitary journey. We need to encounter each other, and we are shaped by relationships with one another as we pursue Jesus together, and as I said, this is not just like a trajectory, or one thing leads to another. They are all interacting with each other. Sometimes we start with knowledge. Other times we start with experience. Other times we are sitting in a small group at community. Somebody says something that we did not think of before, and suddenly that is the beginning of change and transformation. Iron sharpens iron, but this whole picture, and this is where Christianity offers something completely different than the rest of the world when we talk about what it means to be transformed and changed, is made real by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The idea is that none of this matters unless it is infused with the power of the Holy Spirit, and what we believe is that as we are looking for transformation and change in our lives, as we are looking for God to transform our lives, that we do not have to just white-knuckle it and figure out how to do all of this on our own, that God has actually empowered us through the Holy Spirit to experience the life of change and transformation that He has available to us. He is not simply saying, “You build a tower yourself to figure out how to get to me.” He is saying that He Himself will come and dwell in our lives, to convict us of the places we need to be convicted of, to encourage us in the places we need to be encouraged, to bring about the transformation that is available to us and the change that is available to us. It is this beautiful way that all of these things integrate together into allowing us to become the people that Jesus has called us to be. Jesus does not just say, become like Him, and then figure it out. Jesus says, “Become like me, and I will send my Spirit, my very presence, to allow you to experience the life that I have available to you,” so I want you to think back to this idea of who you are becoming. Ultimately for a believer, that question is about discipleship. How is your discipleship to Jesus? Where are you on that scale of learning to deny yourself? How are you at taking up your cross daily to follow Jesus? What does transformation look like in your life?

As I was thinking about this idea, a couple of weeks ago I was telling my daughter Camden the story of where Peter walks on the water with Jesus, and I love telling Camden bedtime Bible stories, and usually I have to add a little flair to enliven it for a five-year-old, and I am not embellishing the story, but when you begin to expand some of the details and wrestle with what would that have been like, to help it come alive for a five-year-old’s imagination, it got me thinking about the story in a different light, because Jesus sent the disciples away, to go across the Sea of Galilee on a boat. Then He goes to spend time with the Father, which is something Jesus did all the time in his life, and once He has finished praying and spending time with the Father, He decides that He is going to go catch up to them, and I guess there were no boats available, because He decides He is just going to go stroll across the water to catch up to them, which is just insane, if you actually stop to think about it. We know it is insane, because when that happens, the disciples who are in this boat see someone walking across the water. They do not recognize Jesus at first, like, “Oh my gosh, is that a ghost? Is that another ship? What is happening?” and it tells us that they were terrified. They were terrified, because it did not make sense. People do not walk on water. That is not what happens in our everyday life, and many of these people were fishermen. They had grown up spending most of their time on the water. They know that people are not supposed to walk on water, so it terrifies them, and they thought it was a ghost. It just got me thinking, when Jesus calls out to them, and He says, “No, it is I,” what would their reaction have been in that moment? Would it have just been like dumbfounded awe, of just like, “What?” Would have would have been relief, like, “At least it is not a ghost like coming to get us.” What would their reaction have been in that moment?

I wonder if they just were like, “What are you doing? Why?” just confusion about why Jesus chose this way, but then the story changes the perspective, and it shifts to Peter, because he sees Jesus walking on the water, and Peter is one who just can’t sit still, and so he calls out to Jesus after he finds out it is He, and he says, “Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Now remember what I said about discipleship. Discipleship is following your rabbi wherever they go, being covered in their dust, taking their manner of doing everything they do, so Peter in this moment is like, “If you can do that, and I am

your disciple, then I want to do that too, so call me out onto the water.” So, as I was telling Camden this story, it got me thinking, what would have been like for Peter? So, he says, “Jesus, if it is you, call me out onto the water. I want to follow you,” and Jesus says, “Come follow me,” and then what was Peter’s reaction after that? I wonder, did he just run and jump and full send into the sea? He was like, Yep, I’m going to make it. It is going to be fine,” or was it like he said, “Let me just dip my toe out, and I am just going to try it. Can I actually do this?” and then once he actually got out of the boat, was he just hanging on to the boat for a while and, “Okay, what? Am I crazy right now? What am I doing?” I just wonder how, and is he looking at Jesus like, “Are you sure? Really?” and Jesus was like, “Yeah, you are already halfway out.” How long did it take Peter to let go of the boat and start walking to Jesus, and what was his reaction there?

I think there is something deep within this story about this idea of following Jesus and being his disciple and doing what Jesus did, because you remember what happens after Peter gets out of the boat. He has the courage to do it, and so all the props to him. I do not know that I would step out of a boat to try to walk on water. Do you remember what happened? Peter begins to look at the chaos around him, the sea and the waves, and he takes his eyes off of Jesus, and he begins to sink. He takes the eyes off of his savior in front of him, and he looks at the chaos around him, and he begins to sink. I think there’s a deep truth in the story about who we are becoming and the kind of disciples that we want to be, so the question as we wrap up is, who are you becoming when it comes to following Jesus? I want you to think about this idea through the lens of Peter. I wonder if some of us, in this call to follow Jesus, we are still clinging to the boat. Jesus has called us to follow Him, to be his disciples, to become more like Him, but we just can’t let go of the safety of things that we have around us. We are still holding on to backup plans or comfort zones or what-ifs, because the risk of stepping out to fully follow Him, to fully commit to following Him feels like too much, but here is the thing. Following Jesus, becoming more like Him requires the faith to step out of the boat. You cannot experience the miracle of transformation and change in your life if you are half committed to following Jesus. That is not how it works.

I wonder if for others of you, maybe you have gotten out of the boat, but you have begun to lose sight of Jesus. The chaos around you, the circumstances of your life, the storms of life have distracted you from the call Jesus placed on your life. You believe in Jesus, but you are not sure if He is going to show up when you need Him. I think some of us, we are in this place of doubt or of lingering questioning of, is Jesus really worthwhile? Is it really worth it to give ourselves to Him?

So where do you find yourself, still in the boat, afraid to step out, or maybe stepping out onto the water but struggling to keep your focus on Jesus, or maybe half in and half out, or somewhere in between? My prayer for you, Waterstone, is that this year you would have the courage to fully step out into what Jesus has called you to do, to let go of the safety measures, the things that you are holding onto, to step into this idea of not self-fulfillment, but self-denial, to experience life with Jesus. Here is the beauty of Jesus. Wherever you find yourself in the story, his hand is extended to Peter, and his hand is always extended towards you, whether you are clinging to the boat, or you are stepping out for the first time, or you feel like you are sensing his hand is always extended towards you, calling you to follow Him. The question is, how will you respond to that calling on your life? Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, as we close our time together today, and as we now respond in worship to you, as we sing this song about coming back to you, I pray for everyone in this room who has maybe forgotten the call of discipleship on their life, who has become really good and gifted at going through the motions of what it means to follow you, yet struggles to daily take up their cross, who struggles to follow after you wherever you might be calling. Father, I pray in Jesus' name that this church, this community, as we long for the change you have available to us, that you would give us the courage to step out of the boat and to follow you where you lead, and it is in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

43:20 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #821