

1Yr13 – How To Be A True Follower Matthew 7:13-14

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message today, “How To Be A True Follower.” Our key verses are found in Matthew 7:13-14. We are in our thirteenth message of a fifty-two message series surveying the life of Jesus Christ. We are calling it “One Year With Jesus” and we are in essence following the summary format of the condensed Bible. We try not to call “The Story” (the book that you can get in the connection center;) we try not to call it the Bible, because it is a condensed Bible. It’s a little bit like a Reader’s Digest Bible. And before you get upset, relax. It’s all scripture, it just selected scripture put together to tell the story of the Bible in novel format. We are trying to kind of follow that format, but apparently we are diverging.

Last message I felt this need, this impression from the Lord to diverge when we looked at the woman at the well, and so we taught a second message on that text called “How To Be A True Worshiper.” And if you weren’t here get that free at wordbymail.com or at the wordbymail table in the back.

But for this message as I was reading over this text for today the crowds kept jumping out at me. The crowds this, the crowds that. Multitudes followed Jesus. And the more you look at the crowds, the more you ask yourself this question (please hear me): how can I be a true follower? Because when you really, really get to know the gospels you realize that there were a lot of followers and not that many true followers. There were large multitudes but not that many true disciples. There were large crowds, but not many there for the right reason.

And so I wrote this message, actually about three times to try to balance the truth. But I’ll confess there was maybe some fear, about “Wow Lord, can they handle it if I tell them how to be a true follower?” And he said, “Why does that matter?” So, here you go. I love you guys. I love you with my life. And my family’s life. We have laid our lives down for Jesus Christ and his glory for the followers in this community. Both the current followers and the would be followers, we love you.

Last message we looked at what it means to be a true worshiper. This message we want to look at what it means to be a true follower. Do you sense a little trepidation? Do you sense there might be a challenge coming?

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, we want to know. We don’t want to be deceived. We don’t want to be self-deceived. We don’t want to be lukewarm. We don’t want to be mediocre. We don’t want to be sitting on the fence. We don’t want to have one foot in the world and one foot in heaven. We want to be full fledged, card carrying citizens of heaven. We want to be true followers Lord. And so right now God we open ourselves to you. Lord you say that all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. And so Lord you know. And we pray that you would reveal to us what it will take for us to

become true followers. Do it now, please, by your Spirit and through your Word, in Jesus' name, amen.

If I strike a nerve in you today, if I say something that causes some type of reaction, (which honestly that's my job is to allow the Holy Spirit to cause a reaction in your life) but if I say something that causes you to want to look deeper into this, my recommendation is that radical guy named David Platt and his book called "Follow Me." Some of what is in this message comes directly out of David Platt's book "Follow Me."

We want to be true followers. *We want to be.* We want to be true followers. And so we want to relate to the true followers that are in scripture. That's who we want to connect with. We want to put ourselves in the shoes of the true followers of Jesus. As we continue studying the life of Christ for this year, we cannot see these incredible truths as "out there" or "back then." We can't see them only historically, though they are historical. We must see these incredible truths as "in here" (in our hearts) and "for now" because they are. These truths are in here and for now. These truths apply to us. Our watching, our viewing of Jesus separating the crowd from the true followers is not just for then, it's for today. It's the same Jesus; he's the same yesterday, today and forever. And he is doing the same thing for today; he is separating the crowd from the true followers. We must put ourselves there and we must allow the Word of God to do its job.

Heb 4:12 - *The Word of God is LIVING & ACTIVE – Pierces to the Division of Soul & Spirit & Discerns the thoughts & intents of the heart*

So we have to let it discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts. We have to let the Word of God speak directly to us. Will you do that?

Last message it was true worshipers. Today it's true followers. Here's what struck me. We are in the first part of Jesus' ministry. It's really the first half, you might be surprised to know, but Jesus didn't actually name the Apostles the Twelve until about halfway through his ministry, about a year and a half in.

And so that first year, Jesus was popular in the Galilee at least. He started off in Jerusalem with the whip, and so he wasn't that popular with the religious leaders. But in the Galilee, this guy was super popular, Jesus was maximum popular. (Did you know there are church growth book writers? And they are rich because almost every church buys all their books.) Here's what the church growth book writers would tell Jesus. "Hey Jesus, you've got to ride this wave pal. You've got to ride the wave of popularity. Look at all of these people following you. Look at this momentum that you are building; you've got to play off of this. You've got to work with this. If you are going to become something you've got to take this tide that is starting behind you and you've got to pump it up."

“Don’t run them off, Jesus, draw them in. Use the crowd’s love of you to draw more crowds in.”

The only problem with that is if you will actually read the Bible instead of the church growth books, you’ll find out that Jesus did the opposite. *Jesus did just the opposite.* Jesus did the opposite of all the church growth books. Every time there was a crowd gathered around Jesus, he said something sharp. He said something direct. He said something offensive. How about this: “***If you don’t eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part of me.***”

With that thought in mind, Francis Chan preached a sermon a couple of years ago called “If Jesus Was The Pastor of Your Church, You Probably Wouldn’t Go There.” The truth is Jesus didn’t make it easy to follow him. In fact the truth is Jesus made it hard to follow him. *Jesus made it hard to follow him.* There were multitudes following Jesus in the first part of his ministry but not all of them were true followers. You accept that, right? Why is it that we always think that we’re not that bad. Why is it that we always think, “Oh no, I certainly know Jesus wouldn’t feel that about me?”

Listen, it is okay. It’s good, it’s healthy to go to the doctor and say “Doctor, do I have anything on me you should be concerned about?”

Jesus is the Great Physician and we need to say, “Lord Jesus, is that me? Is it possible that I’m self deceived that I think I am a true follower, but I’m just part of the crowd?”

And maybe you didn’t even know that there was a difference between the crowd and the true followers. It’s there. It’s there in the gospels. All you have to do is look. And every time there is a crowd Jesus speaks sharply, he speaks directly, he shakes them up. Consider this. John Chapter 2:23-25 in the NLT. This is just after Jesus ran out all the corrupt religious leaders, money making system in the Temple courts with the whip and turning over the tables and everything. Just after that we read:

John 2:23–25 (NLT)

23 Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him.

24 But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew all about people.

25 No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart.

If you happen to be reading the ESV, it says ***But Jesus . . . did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.***

They were following him almost clamoring after him but he did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people. He didn’t give himself to them because he knew who were true followers and who were not. Seems a little harsh, right? Because we’ve been

raised in this church culture of bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger... And then we look at Jesus and he says smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller. There were times when Jesus said “You know what, twelve is too many. I can only handle these three knuckleheads. Peter, James and John. You guys come, that’s all I can handle.”

I want to put us in that place. I want to put us in that place where we recognize that just because we’re in church doesn’t mean we are true followers. That just because maybe we have repeated a set of words does that mean we are true followers? Just because we believe a certain set of facts, does that make us true followers? That’s the challenge today.

Why? Because I want us to know whether we are true followers or not. Jesus wants you to be true followers but if we don’t take the opportunity to let him reveal to us whether we are or not we may live an entire life self-deceived. Did the Pharisees think they were true followers? You bet you they did. How did Jesus feel about it? Not so great. Jesus doesn’t want us to be self-deceived thinking we are true followers if we’re not. And I’m not saying whether you are or you are not. I lay myself open on the altar and say Lord reveal the truth to me about me. It’s possible. It’s possible to be self-deceived and it is better to find out now than later.

So in that famous Sermon on the Mount, the Bible at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount makes it clear that Jesus is talking to disciples. He is talking to followers, to those who are actively learning from him and following him. And the Sermon on the Mount is incredible but let’s move to the wrap-up in Matthew 7 verse 21. These are the verses that David Platt calls some of the most frightening words in the entire Bible. Matthew 7:21, Jesus says at the end of his Sermon on the Mount to his disciples:

Matthew 7:21–23 (ESV)

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’

23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

I never knew you. The most frightening part of these verses is that Jesus is speaking them to his followers. He is speaking them in context clearly to his disciples in large, not the twelve, but in large – all those that considered themselves disciples or followers. Guys, we don’t want to go through a one year study of the life of Jesus much less and entire life and then show up face to face with the Judge of all Creation and have him say, “I never knew you.”

It's better now. I know it's a challenge. I don't apologize for the challenge; I am just delivering the message as gently as I can. It's like ripping off a Band-Aid really slowly. I promise you I'm not trying to scare you. I'm not trying to be hard on you. I'm not saying that I'm something and someone else isn't something. I'm saying we all need to put ourselves in the real context of the New Testament. We need to know that Jesus didn't say all those who followed him were true followers. In fact he made it clear over and over again that there were two separate classes spiritually, you might say. I want to know which one I'm in and how to get into the right one. "If I am being deceived thinking that I'm a true follower when I'm not, then God reveal it to me, and show me what I can do to change because your grace is unending and your mercy is new every morning and you'll transform my life as soon as I surrender it. So just show me Lord. Show me where I need to be surrendered, and I will be."

Because a day is coming, Hebrews 9:27 says that a time is appointed to every man to die, but then after that the judgment. I know that day is coming for everyone of us. And so we want to know which side we are going to be on when we get there.

The call is simple: Follow me. *Follow me*. That's it. That is the call, follow me. But what Jesus meant by that phrase follow me and what our church culturally has made it, might be two different things. Consider just the word "follow." Every time this word (or any of its variations) is used in the New Testament every single time it is a verb. It's a verb. A verb is an action word. Every time the word "follow" is used it implies action, it implies doing something, it implies movement. Action, doing something, movement. It is a verb. It's always a verb. To follow Jesus means to do something, to act, to move.

When we look at the very first disciples (which we did look at in John Chapter 1) Andrew and we assume John, the gospel writer John. In John 1:37 Andrew and John are disciples of John the Baptist, and then John the Baptist says "Behold the Lamb of God." And then in verse 37 it says these two disciples began to follow Jesus. They followed Jesus. As soon as John the Baptist said "Behold, set your eyes, set your gaze on the Lamb of God" these two guys (Andrew for sure and probably John) said "Okay, see ya!" and they physically began to follow Jesus. That is the wording.

John the Baptist says "There's the Lamb of God, set your gaze on him" and they just walked away from their teacher, John the Baptist. So as they are walking and there in the context it is Jesus is walking, so as they are walking Jesus turns to them and says basically, "What do you guys want?"

That's what he says, read it. He says "what do you guys want?" And they say to him, "Well, where are you staying?" And Jesus is walking, and he says "Come and see." And he just kept walking. And so these guys are like, "What do we do? What do we do?" And I'm sure John said something like, "Come on Andrew, let's follow him. Where he goes,

we'll go. He is the Lamb of God, he is the Messiah, he is the Anointed One, he is the Christ. Who cares where we are going, let's just follow him."

Those were the very first two disciples in John Chapter 1. That whole scene involves action, involves decisions, and it involves a life actively following Christ. And they quickly found out that it was a lifetime of following and ultimately they found out the cost and the reward of following Christ.

Is there any chance that at least on some occasions that maybe we have confused people into thinking that following Jesus is actually repeating a set of words? Is there a chance that we have confused people into thinking that following Jesus is actually believing, giving intellectual assent, to a certain set of facts? You know, the same set of facts that the demons believe; that Jesus is the Christ, that he is the Son of the Living God, that he is the Messiah. The demons all believe that stuff, that's no news to them. But maybe we have in an attempt to bring in everyone, in an attempt to get bigger and bigger and bigger, in attempt to genuinely, morally, respectfully, to get everyone to go to heaven we say "Okay, okay. Alright. All you've got to do is just say these words and you're good."

Is there a chance that we are doing damage? Is there a chance that we are implying that you don't have to actually follow Jesus? That you just give assent to this set of facts and say this set of words and then you can go on being Lord of your own life and doing what you want and living how you want? Because honestly guys, it's not in the Bible. Nowhere.

You know I've said to you a hundred times the Salvation Prayer is not in the Bible, yet I use the Salvation Prayer all the time. I stood right here last night with this room packed full of non-believers and I led them in a Salvation Prayer. Here's the deal. In and of themselves that set of words is not following Jesus. Just by themselves. If you string all those words together and say "If I repeat these words in this order I'm following Jesus," I would say "Nope, not, not, not. Not at all. How can you be following Jesus by just saying a set of words?"

But listen to me, listen please. That prayer can be the beginning of following Jesus. That prayer can be the beginning of following Jesus and that is why we use it. We don't use it as an end; we use it as a beginning. I know, and here's the thing you've got to know, salvation is by God's grace alone, and through our faith alone. Salvation is through our faith alone. There is no action that brings salvation into your life. However, if in fact you do surrender your life to Jesus Christ and do receive him as Lord, and he does come into your life, trust me, there are actions that will follow. How could there not be? "The Creator of the World just saved me and filled me with his life, I have the power of the trinity God and the Holy Spirit living inside of me and nothing has changed."

If we have the full power of the Godhead living inside of us, something is probably going to get adjusted a little bit. And so, the Salvation prayer can be the beginning of following Jesus. But, listen; it is only the beginning of following Jesus if you begin to follow Jesus. *The prayer is only the beginning of following Jesus if you begin to follow Jesus.* And so if you don't begin to follow Jesus, if you repeat the prayer and then you never begin to follow Jesus, is there a chance that nothing actually began? Yes. Yes there is a chance.

“Well, I repeated a prayer, but nothing has ever changed in my life.”

Then be afraid. Be very afraid, because when you begin to follow Jesus you begin to *follow Jesus*. And so if someone would say to me, well what about the thief on the cross? What about deathbed conversions? I'm telling you I love going to the hospital and talking to a person who is on their deathbed about Christ. Because if you're going to die, we need to talk about Jesus. Because you are about to meet him. And this is the real deal. If they do in all sincerity receive Christ, then it is real. Deathbed conversions are real if they are genuine. However, if you happen to not be on your deathbed, which is pretty much everyone in this room, then your prayer of salvation, if it is genuine, is a commitment to beginning a life of following Jesus. And if after you say the prayer there is no evidence in your life that you are now following Jesus, then you repeating the Salvation Prayer probably didn't begin anything.

I will tell you that if you receive the Lord, which you know that word receive is only John 1:12 and it doesn't mean what we think it means. Accept Jesus. You've heard that phrase “accept Jesus?” It's nowhere in the Bible. Nowhere. Not in any form. You don't accept Jesus. I am trying to help you see that our church culture has adjusted following Jesus to make it palatable. See, if I'm in charge, then I accept Jesus. If I'm the king of my own world I receive him into my throne room. If I'm a sinner I fall on my face before him begging for his mercy. Do you see the difference?

If you're following Jesus it will show. If it doesn't show then open yourself up to God and say “God show me. Why am I still the Lord of my own life? Why am I still chasing after the things of the world? Why am I so consumed with the things of this world? Why are there so many idols in my life? Why aren't I living for heaven?”

Well it's okay to say that. Say it and say it often so the Holy Spirit can reveal it to you.

Let's move to Luke. And I do really want you to see this because I want you to see this in a way of not how we use it like, in a salvation message. I want you to see how Jesus preached to the crowds. He didn't preach to the crowds like we preach to the crowds. Here's how Jesus preached. Luke 8:4-8.

Luke 8:4–8 (ESV)

4 And when a great crowd was gathering (there's the crowd) and people from town after town came to him (rushing to see him), he said in a parable, (a story that you have

to figure out the meaning of)

5 *“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.*

6 *And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.*

7 *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.*

8 *And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

And then he holds out the microphone, drops it and says “I’m out!” He walks away. That’s his whole sermon. In a parable! Everyone is going “Huh? Is he a farmer? What is he talking about?”

He spoke in code to the crowds; he spoke in a parable to the crowds. How critical is this message? We know it is so critical that only one-fourth of these people represented by the soils actually become true followers. And in fact, two-thirds, two out of three who begin to follow Jesus, will not be true followers. They will fall away. One fourth of these people will be true followers.

But he doesn’t explain that. He just says it and backs out.

It gets worse. Look down at Luke 8 verse 10. The disciples are like, “Hey Jesus, that was cool and all, how you dropped the mic and left them hanging. But what was that? What did it mean?”

He says in Luke 8:10

Luke 8:10 (ESV)

10 *he (Jesus) said, “To you (true followers) it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’*

Whaaaaat? Did Jesus just say he had a Harvest Crusade and he spoke in a way so no one could understand him? Yeah, that’s what he said. I know it sounds like I’m bashing on people, I’m not. I love the Harvest Crusades, a bunch of people I know have been saved through the Harvest Crusades, you know we go all the time, I love them. But when Jesus spoke, he spoke in parables. And when his disciples asked him he said “It’s so they don’t understand.”

Whoa! What was that? There are some people with what we believe is an incorrect theology that have a reason for this. Here’s the more balanced theology. Jesus is saying, “Listen, I’m thinning out the crowd, because I already know. I already know every heart of every person in the crowd. I already know the end from the beginning. I already know

if they will ever come to me or not. I already know. I know. I know whether the Father is drawing them to me or not. I'm thinning the crowd out."

That's what Jesus was doing over and over and over again. Jesus could have told a much more compelling story and then asked everybody in the crowd to repeat a prayer when he was done. He could have, but he didn't. Instead he spoke in code to thin the crowd out. It's hard, right? It's hard to accept.

Just before the "I never knew you" scripture that we read in Matthew 7, Jesus is describing two ways of life. Here are our key verses. Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus says:

Matthew 7:13-14 (NLT)

13 "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way.

14 But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

Whoa! Do you see Jesus separating the crowd from the true followers? There's a broad road, there's a narrow road the gateway to life, and it's difficult. It's hard – the same word is used for tribulation, for trials. It's difficult and only a few ever find it. Jesus what are you saying? He is saying just what he said.

I want to tell you the truth this morning. Following Jesus is hard. It's a narrow road. And apparently, not my words – Jesus' words – all those who think they are on it are not. The challenge is to decide where we stand personally. Are we in the masses playing around? Half-in, half-out, lukewarm, melancholy, punching my ticket so I can get to heaven so I don't miss that or are we true followers of Jesus? Because the spiritual classes, if you will, are set pretty firm in the New Testament.

Can I just tell you, it is so worth it! It is so worth it to say "Jesus I want to be on the narrow path. I want to be a true follower, no matter how difficult, no matter how long, no matter how uncertain, no matter what the cost, I want to be there."

The narrow road of following Jesus is the only place where we truly experience the indescribable joy and the peace that passes understanding that the Bible promises us. Have you ever wondered when you look around a Christian church why don't Christians experience the things that the Bible says they should experience? And then you find someone who does. And you say, "Oh, I guess that's what it looks like."

Joy that comes from Christ in us. Peace that comes from Christ in us. Peace that passes understanding. A joy that is not tied to our circumstances, not tied to this world, but a joy that is tied to a relationship with Christ. Guys, that comes only on the narrow road. The narrow road is the only place to truly experience peace in the midst of any storm. The narrow road is the only place to truly have your life radically transformed. Only the

narrow road! No casual acknowledgement of Christ will transform your life. It won't. *It won't*. It won't. Only all in living sacrifice. Romans 1 and 2 type life brings transformation. Nothing else works. And guys, the narrow road of truly following Jesus is the only road that brings true eternal life. And it makes every day, every breath worth it. It gives you purpose that is eternal, it gives you a plan that is not yours but it's God's. It gives you fruit that comes from the life of Christ through you and it is the only life to live, yet it is hard. It's difficult.

Caesarea Philippi, one of my favorite places in Israel, I love this area for a number of reasons. So Jesus takes his twelve up to Caesarea Philippi and in Matthew 16 Peter is the one who makes that great confession when Jesus says "Who do you say that I am?" Peter says "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus says, "Simon Barjona this has been revealed to you not by man but by my Father in heaven."

It's a fabulous thing. And then after that Peter proves he is still human and still dense and Jesus immediately begins to explain that he must suffer. That his road is hard. It includes suffering and unjust suffering and pain and death, but that he would be raised again on the third day. Peter says, "No Lord, let's not do that" and Jesus calls him Satan and helps him realign his thoughts. And then in Matthew 16:24-26.

Matthew 16:24-26 (NLT)

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.

25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

Number one, turn from your selfish ways. Number two, take up your cross. The only people who carried crosses were dead people. People on their way to being executed. Okay? Dead man walking. That was a man or woman carrying a cross. Number three, follow me. It means to come after me. It's an action word.

I can't go all in with Jesus, because I really like my porn. I can't go all in with Jesus because I really like my money. I can't go all in with Jesus because I really like my stuff. I can't go all in with Jesus because I really like my "something."

What do you benefit if you gain all of that and lose your soul? Is that worth losing your soul? We've got to do the math. Soul forever. This life a vapor. Vapor or forever. *Vapor or forever*. That's a tough choice.

Following Jesus means losing your life. Following Jesus means losing your life and taking up his life instead. That's what following Jesus means. Following Jesus means there's a death. A death of self. Self must die, because it is a one seat throne. Self will not

share it with Jesus and Jesus will not share it with self. In his grace God lets you choose. But it is one or the other. Jesus must die in your life, or self must die in your life. There is a death in following Jesus, it's death to self.

You know Galatians 2:20, if not, write it down, memorize it later. Paul says in the NLT:

Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Guys, when we truly choose to have the old life crucified with Christ and allow the life of Jesus Christ to truly live in us, things change. And they change for the better. They change for the better.

Here's how David Platt lists it in his book "Follow Me"

#1) Our MINDS change – we begin to realize, to understand who God is and what Jesus Christ has done for us, and how we think towards God changes.

#2) Our DESIRES change – what things we did desire in the world now we reject and now we desire the things of God.

#3) Our WILLS change – Jesus says you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength and will, your choices. *Your choices*. No longer my will, but thy will.

#4) Our RELATIONSHIPS change – we begin to lay our lives down because we are not king of the world anymore, we are not the center of the universe anymore, we are now a servant. And so we serve, we serve others.

Ultimately our reason for living changes.

#1) We have an eternal purpose

#2) We have an eternal perspective

#3) We have an eternal reason to wake up every morning.

Our life is now Christ, it belongs to Christ and we serve him every day. And what we see is heaven and where we are going is heaven and what we are working for is heaven. And heaven drives us.

So the call to follow Jesus is not simply an invitation to say a prayer. Although I will continue to ask you to say the prayer. Just know that saying the prayer doesn't mean you are a true follower. The call to follow Jesus means that we lose our lives and replace them with his life. *We lose our lives and we replace them with the life of Jesus Christ*. And if we will do that then we will have the greatest peace, we will have the greatest power, we will have the greatest joy, we will have the greatest purpose that we could ever imagine. And if so many of us, me included, when we say "Yeah but Lord I don't have those things, I don't have those things" is it possibly because we are trying to live our own life

again? Is it possibly because we're trying to have our own will accomplished? Is it possible that we're trying to serve our "self" again?

Guys, repentance is not a onetime event at the end of an emotional sermon. Repentance is a daily turning from the things that you are naturally attracted to and turning to Jesus. It's turning from serving self and from all those things that we think matter, it's turning from those things and turning towards Jesus. Your following Jesus begins with repentance because you are following something today. And whatever it is you're following that is not Jesus, you must turn from it. That is repentance. You turn from it, you lose it, you cast it away and you turn to Jesus and you begin to actively (meaning with your choices and your actions and your decisions) you begin to follow Jesus. And as you do self dies and Christ rises up in you. And as he does you experience the promises of the Bible and you're living in an eternal life and for an eternal reason with an eternal perspective. And everything changes. *Everything changes.*

We see it happen in this room, we see it happen in this group. I could point out half a dozen people right now that in the last year your lives have been transformed! These lives have been radically changed. All of you have turned from something in order to follow Jesus. You left something behind, and you leave it behind every day. Every day you wake up and say, "No!" to the addiction. "No!" to the desires of the flesh. "No!" to the sin. "No!" to the world. Every day you live crucified to that and alive to Christ. Repentance. Repentance is the beginning.

What does it mean to truly follow Jesus? It means everything. It means you give up everything in order to gain everything. It means you turn away from what you think is everything, which is what Paul calls "dung." You turn away from all that stuff you think is so important that the Holy Spirit through Paul calls "dung" and you turn towards true life in Christ. It means giving up everything to gain everything. If you try to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for Christ's sake you will find it.

Following Jesus means truly making Jesus the Lord of your life. And if you understand Lordship, the words "No, Lord" cannot be used together. It's either "Yes Lord" or "No you're not my Lord." Following Jesus means Jesus is your Lord.

Following Jesus means living in a genuine relationship with him. Following Jesus means applying his Word to your life. Following Jesus means abiding in him, remaining in him, resting in him, no matter what. Clinging to him when you know – John 10 says that Jesus says that "I hold on to you." – but you allow him to just keep you in his hands. You abide in him.

I believe the church in our culture is ready for a radical change. I believe there's a radical change coming. I believe part of what God is going to use to bring a radical change in the church in our culture is very real persecution. *Very, very real persecution.* My wife had to sit on our back patio the other day while the elementary school close to our house had a

full on all out just blow the roof off celebration of the high holy Satanic and pagan day known as Halloween. I mean there was a full on religious celebration at the extreme level. And if you don't think that Halloween is a religious holiday, read some books, because it is. Halloween spiritually is to Satanists and pagans what Christmas is to Christians. Christmas is, on the surface about Santa Claus, but we see the Christmas story and bring the Christmas story to it. Well the Satanists and the pagans see the same thing at Halloween. They see something deeper in it. And so our school district phenomenal level of religious celebration of Halloween. But you say the word "Jesus" as a teacher, you're going to get up for some discipline and maybe get fired. Christmas, not going to happen. The word is not going to cross anyone's lips.

Guys, our culture is set up for genuine persecution of Christians. You know what that does? It separates the true followers from the crowd. I believe it is coming. The church has been watered down long enough. The church has been lukewarm long enough.

It's time to become true followers. All in, sold out, radical followers of Jesus Christ.

I want to give you a chance to be that and to do that.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus you reign in this place. You are the only Holy One, the only one worthy of our praise, and the only one in whom there is life.*

And if you would just take a minute and say "Lord, where am I? Where do I think I am? And am I deceiving myself? Is my "self" deceiving myself? Am I a true follower? Have I crucified my own life and taken up your life? Am I actively following you with my choices and my decisions and my lifestyle?"

And if you would want to change that right now, pray something like this:

Lord, I repent, I repent. I repent. I turn from my wicked ways even thinking I was a true follower, Lord, as you convict my heart I turn from the ways of my flesh, my "self" and this world, and I turn to you. And I say Lord; I don't have it in me to follow you. I can't do it on my own; I can't do it in my strength. I need to die. And so Lord, I crucify myself to make room for your life. Jesus, live inside me. Be my life. Be my strength. Be my joy. Be my salvation. And be my power to be a true follower from this day forward. In your name and for your glory, amen.