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Jason Henderson
Market Street Fellowship

Following Him

Happy Easter...for those of you who celebrate Easter. I thought I might say a few things about Easter before I get into what I want to share about this week. Easter is a day when most of the church celebrates the historical and literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Just about every preacher on the radio this morning is talking about that event, and how it is the cornerstone of our faith, etc. I'd just like to say something about Easter and really about all holidays. From a natural perspective, I don't really mind what you do on Easter to celebrate the resurrection, or what you don't do. Some people get together with family, some people make sure to go to church, some people hunt for eggs in the yards with their kids. Honestly, from a natural point of view, I don't really care what you do. I honestly don't. Do whatever you like.

But from a spiritual point of view, if you are truly going to appreciate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, then there is only one way to do that. If you really want to honor the one who died on Good Friday and rose Easter morning, there is really only one thing that demonstrates that you care about it...and its not a dinner, an egg hunt, a long prayer, a nice suit, or a church service. If you truly care about the resurrection, then you will turn your heart to live in it, to live by it, and to become a witness of it every day, and in every place. I don't mean that you witness about it, or that you witness your belief in it. I mean you become the actual witnessing of that resurrection-life working in your soul.

The resurrection of Jesus wasn't just an event that happened two thousand years ago that we believe in. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is Christianity. Christianity isn't a religion. It isn't a belief system. It is a life. It is, as a matter of fact, the resurrection Himself living in you. It is the one who said "I am the resurrection and the life" being formed in you unto your bearing of His image. You can't truly appreciate or commemorate or celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ without coming to know Him as your resurrection, your exodus, out from among the dead.

To us who were born dead in trespass and sin, to us who are "by nature children of wrath", to us who will bear His death, He offers Himself as the resurrection and the life. He obviously didn't give that life so that once a year we would go to church, have some turkey, and try to remember it? Do you think he bore that judgment and offered new life that we would have an egg hunt? Now listen, I'm not against egg hunts. I'm scheduled to do one with the in-laws at 5:00 pm tonight. I'm not preaching against anything. I'm simply saying that the resurrection is the life of Christ now in you, being formed in you, unto conformity to His image. Its not just a day in history that we need to try to remember.

And if you are going to honor Christ at Easter time, it wont be in remembering something that He once did, it will be abiding in something that He now is. HE is the resurrection and the life. If you are going to celebrate the resurrection, then

apprehend it through conformity to His death, through the revealing of Christ your life.

But what I want to share about this morning actually has something to do with the resurrection. We're going to take a brief deviation from our study of Ephesians this morning and talk a bit about following Christ. We'll pick up with Ephesians after JW comes next weekend.

But its been on my heart to speak about following Christ. Now that is such a cliché Christian phrase that it probably means something different to just about everybody that hears it. For some it means following His teachings. For some it means following his guidance. For some it means following where he leads you around the world. For some it simply means being a Christian. I'd like to suggest to you that genuinely following Christ is actually something much different than all of that.

First of all, Jesus didn't give a bunch of teachings for you to follow. Hopefully, we all know that by now. Jesus never came and presented people with teachings on life, He said "I am the Life". He did share a lot of teachings that described righteousness, goodness, and truth...but what He **gave** was His very life which, when formed in us, manifests the righteousness, goodness, and truth described by His teachings. The teachings were the description of what God can do in a man, not what man can do for God. In other words, YOU cannot keep the teachings. You can, however, become a partaker and expression of the One who does by nature. Or as Romans 8 says "the righteous requirements of the Law are fulfilled IN us who no longer walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Furthermore, Jesus isn't attempting to make you follow Him from this situation to that situation, from this circumstance to that circumstance, from this place to that place. I'm not saying that the Lord won't lead you in various circumstances. He can and does. But I am saying that when He spoke to people about following Him, that is not what He was referring to. It wasn't a bus tour of Israel. It wasn't a walk with the Messiah. Its not a map or an instruction manual.

Well then, what is it? Following Jesus has to do with you and I following Him through the reality and experience of His death, and into the reality and experience of His resurrection. Following Jesus has to do with leaving behind all that He left behind and being found in Him where He is. Following Jesus has to do with leaving behind what the cross has put away, and laying hold of, apprehending, comprehending, what is now true in Christ. In other words, following Christ is the reality where we follow Him out of one realm, one kind, and into Another. We go with Him from where He was to where He is. You have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God. There's the fact of it. Following Christ is the journey the Spirit takes you on into experience His death, burial, and resurrection working in you.

At one point in John chapter 8 Jesus looks at the Pharisees and says to them "you know neither where I am from or where I am going". Then He says

Joh 8:21 "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come."

Jesus wasn't talking about a natural place. He wasn't telling them they couldn't follow Him to Galilee. He was saying that they couldn't come with Him back into the Father.

However, Jesus looks to His disciples and says

Joh 14:2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, you may be also. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. 7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

Now, I know this Scripture is used all of the time to try to describe a future geographic location that Jesus is building with a heavenly bulldozer, and one day He'll have finished the construction and then come and get you. But that is simply not the case. He is looking at those in front of Him and telling them that He is bringing them where He is going. He is making a way for them to follow. He is, in fact preparing that way by becoming that way. He says that Himself.

I know we've looked at this Scripture before at some length, and I'll move on in a moment, but what He is telling them is taken right out of the Old Covenant. Right out of the Exodus and Leviticus. The High Priest makes a way for Israel to enter into the tabernacle in his bosom – all their names in his breastplate. The High Priest makes a way for Israel to stand in the presence of God. How does He make that way? Through death. He makes a way through death, not through constructing a spiritual Disney Land. And then He takes them, in himself, into the Father's house.

Jesus is telling this disciples, the ones standing right in front of Him, that for a little while, THREE DAYS he will go away to prepare a place. For three days He will open a door, become a door, become the way. So that what? So that then He could fly up to heaven and get started on their mansion? Friends, He's not telling them "well, you all are going to die in 30 to 50 years and then you'll come to heaven". He's not saying "when I told that **you** I would come and receive **you** to Myself that where I am **you** may be also, I wasn't really talking to **you**. I know it sounded like that, but I was really talking to a specific and unique people that will be alive 2000 years from now."

For goodness sake, He was telling them that through His death, burial, and resurrection, they could die with Him, be buried with Him, and rise with Him to dwell in Him, with Him, in the Father. He says that! Thomas says "I don't know where you are going, and I don't know the way" He says...don't worry Thomas I am both where you are going and I am the way. I will be in the Father, you will be in me, and I will be in you. That is what I need to go prepare in my death. And that is what you will know in the day of resurrection. "In that day you will know that I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you."

Well, fine. We've mentioned that before. But here's my point. He says to the Pharisees "you will seek me, but you will die in your sin, where I go you cannot follow". "You will seek me"...In other words, you'll keep looking for a Messiah. You'll keep searching for a savior of your own imagination. You'll keep hoping and looking for a deliverer from Rome, or a natural kingdom, or a rebuilt Jerusalem. You'll keep looking for me the "coming one", and yet here I am standing in front of you. You'll

keep chasing after Jesus, and yet I'm right here offering you the way. You'd rather hold on to your imaginary Messiah, than follow me through my death into my resurrection. You will die in your sin, because where I am going you will not come.

And, here's the contrast to that. Here's the invitation. To us, who will come by that way, we go with Him into the Father and experience a salvation of the Father's design. A salvation that has nothing to do with Roman conquest in their day or Middle East nuclear bombs today. A salvation that is, in fact, defined by Christ as "I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you".

Brothers and sisters, that is not a future reality that awaits the death of your body. That is a present reality that awaits only the conformity to His death unto the attaining of the resurrection. Paul was not speaking in future tense when He defined this salvation with these words "you **have** died, and your life **is** hidden with Christ in God". Isn't that exactly what Jesus said they would see? Isn't that exactly what Jesus said He was preparing? Isn't that exactly the way and the place that He brought them into in His resurrection.

What's my point? Well, my point on this Easter morning is to tell you without apology that this is what we are about. I am aware, as are many of you, that you don't have to look very far to find another Messiah presented that offers you something other than the Way that Christ established in His death, burial, and resurrection. Oh there are plenty who are still looking for Him according to the vain imaginations and expectations of the natural mind. As though He has not finished His work and brought us with Himself into the presence of God. (Hebrews 9:24) Sure, you can keep looking for a Jesus that has some other tricks up His sleeve that are more appealing, more entertaining, more easily understood, more Adam-friendly, more showy, more along the lines of what you expected, what you hoped for, what you would like to see Him do for you.

You say "no, that's what the first century Jews did". I say "no, that's what we do". I say that in so many ways, we make Him into a the improvement of our way, and refuse to know Him, to follow His way...where He went – out of one realm, out of one kind, out of one creation, becoming dead to all of it. We would much rather seek Him, in some way, as a means to our end rather than lose ourselves and be found in Him.

To this very day we can still seek for Him in such ways, and I still think he would say to us "where I go, you cannot follow". I'm not really talking about being saved here. I'm not questioning who is born again and who is not. I'm talking about following Him out of all that He left behind, and being found in Him, where He is now, in the Father. I'm not talking about the theology of that. I'm talking about that becoming the very reality of your soul. I'm talking about the reality of being in Christ becoming more real to you than the nose on your face and the person sitting next to you.

I don't have time to explain all that I mean by leaving behind the old man, the old creation, and the old covenant. We have free CD's and books in our bookstore that can explain that in some detail. But let this just do as a summary. Christ doesn't offer you a better version of yourself. Christ doesn't offer you a better life. The cross isn't a way out of the things you don't like. The cross is the way out of you. Christ offers you new life at the cost of the old. And if you are going to follow Him, you're going to follow Him carrying your cross.

Yes, carrying your cross. That doesn't mean trying to endure natural pain, cranky spouses, bad jobs, mean people, and a case of the gout. No, carrying those things generally will make us grumpy or self-righteous. I'm talking about bearing in yourself the death that He died. 2nd Corinthians 4 "bearing in your body the dying of Jesus". Philippians 3 "being made conformable to His death". I'm not talking about following Him out of circumstances and situations, but following Him out of the man who is defined by circumstance and situation. I'm not talking about following him to where the grass is greener. I'm talking about following Him, in your soul, out of the realm where grass even matters.

Paul says "may it never be that I would boast except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world". How about following Him out of the world? No, not in your spaceship. Not when you have a heart attack. Paul didn't write that passage from Mars. He wasn't dead to the world because he lived on Pluto. And he wasn't dead to the world because Nero cut off His head. Caesar Nero did cut off his head, but he was dead long before that.

Following Jesus. Its leaving behind what Christ left behind and being found in the reality of where we have come in Him. Now listen, this is a work of the Spirit through the renewing of the mind, the conformity to His death, the revealing of Christ. But this, friends, is how you follow Him. He's not looking for you to follow Him to the grocery store. He's not hoping that you'll follow his instruction manual. He's looking for you to follow Him, in the soul, out from what is dead. And to do that you must lose your life and gain His.

You see we're not following Jesus away from the darkness. We are the darkness that we need to escape. We're not following Jesus away from death. We are the dead, and we must follow Him out from among the dead to dwell in the land of the living. You see, Jesus can't steer **you** clear from the problem, without eliminating the problem. And you and I are the problem. And to follow Him, you must lose your life and find His. I know that's not popular to say. Sadly, its just as unpopular to say today as it was when it was first said.

Mat 10:39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Mat 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Mar 8:35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

Luk 9:24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

Luk 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Luk 17:33 Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Brothers and sisters, we are about one thing here, because God is about one thing. I was recently sharing in a local church where it was clear to me that there were as many visions for that ministry as there were people in the seats. There were as many reasons for being there as there were people attending. But it must not be that way.

God is not doing a multitude of different things all over the earth. God is doing one thing. He is bringing those who will follow Him out of one realm and into another, out of one man and into Another, out of one "life" and into another. God is seeking to form His Son in you. You can't just go find the church that is preaching your version of following Him. Its not up to you to decide the nature and reality of the Way. He is the Way, has prepared the Way, and has opened the Way. And I just want to follow Him with you in that way. I just want to be joined to you in following Him through the reality and experience of His death, and into the reality and experience of His resurrection. I just want to be joined together with you in leaving behind all that He left behind and come to be found in Him.

Let me ask you a question? Is that enough for you? What if church boils down to just that? What if you remove all of the other motives for getting us to gather together, and all that remains is just this one thing. What one thing?

Php 3:10-14 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (11) if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may apprehend (that is, comprehend) that for which Christ Jesus has apprehended me. (13) Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

Incidentally, the words in this passage of Philippians "behind" and "before" have nothing to do with time in the original Greek. Its not forgetting yesterday. Its not reaching forward to tomorrow. Its forgetting what is truly behind. Behind what? Behind the cross. Behind the finished work. Forgetting, letting go of, leaving behind what He left behind. And following into what? Into that which is "before" us...in the Greek it is that which is in full view. That which is in front of, in sight of, in the presence of.

Without saying much more about that Scripture, I ask you again...is that enough for you. What if knowing Christ, the resurrection and the life, as our very own life, what if gaining Him is really the one thing we gather for. What if that's all church is. Friends, we are not gathering here on Sundays or Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, all of our meetings, **we are not gathering in order to become something. We're gathering because we already are something**, and we are desperate to know as we are known. We are desperate for the Spirit to show us the things that have been freely given to us by God.

What if we're not gathering in the earth for any other reason other than the fact and reality that we are already gathered in the heavens in Christ? Do you hear that? Do you realize why we gather? So many gather together into buildings in order to become something, to start something, to build something. Oh friends, nothing could be further from the truth. We gather not to become something, but because in Him we are already gathered. We come together in the earth because we are

already one in spirit. Those who see clearly gather together in the earth like magnets because they know the gathering together into Him is already a reality for those who have been born of Him.

I spent a number of hours in the car last week and the Lord was dealing with my heart. Its like He was saying "Jason, the church wants me to give it a million things, except what I have already given it through the cross of my Son". "Jason, you want worship to be a million different songs, but refuse to become the fragrance of Christ – true worship – unto me". "Jason, the church calls on me to follow them into every arena of their life, but they will not forsake their life and follow me".

I know that I offend people. I promise you that is never my intention, and it always burdens my heart. But I won't lie to you to keep you here. I won't pretend that there is another vision for His body other than being the expression of the life that lives within. I won't pretend that following Jesus is seeking His blessing and direction while you continue to your live your own life. I won't do it. I often feel that if I were to minimize the reality and severity of the cross and maximize the so-called benefits of Christianity this fellowship would grow in number by leaps and bounds. Conversely, I have found the preaching the cross has had just the opposite effect.

Lets look at one more verse and we'll be through.

Luk 14:26 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his *own* life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. :28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not first sit down *and* consult whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace.

I want to simply ask you to look ahead this morning. Have you looked ahead and seen where this goes? Its not going to turn a corner one day and suddenly be back to being all about us. It will forever be His increase unto our decrease, and the sharing of that life together in Him. That's where this goes.

And that's a tower that I believe few want to build. That's a war that not many will engage in. Are we interested in that? Or will we, will you, send out a delegation and ask for terms of peace. The cross offers no peace with the old man, no peace with the old creation. It offers peace with God and peace with those who share His life. But it doesn't blend with the first, the dead, the old. It divides against it. Jesus says "I did not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword". Yes a sword, like the flaming sword in the garden of Eden...keeping the fallen man, the natural man, out of His presence except through death.

I wanted to ask you this morning where you think this is going? You see, in my heart, God has slowly and systematically removed everything from church except for the knowing of Christ. No more glitter. No show. No fringe benefits. Just Christ and Him crucified working in your soul, and the joy of sharing in that together as His body. Can you handle that? I'm never going to exalt myself or anybody here. I

believe in spiritual gifts and miracles, but I will let the Lord operate those in His body according to His will. I will rejoice to see them, but I will not put them on display in His place. I believe in giftings and so-called five-fold ministry of those who shepherd the Lord's body. But I will never exalt a man or a ministry. I will not use hype to draw attention to Jesus.

While I was out of town this last time I realized even more what he have. And what we have is all that I want. We're baby's in this, we're beginners, but we have the sharing of Him. We have the sharing of Life, the fellowship of His sufferings, and the conformity to His death. We have fellowship in the light, fellowship in the resurrection. You say you don't understand what that means. I will personally meet with you and help you until you do, if you want to follow. I am as available as you are interested. And that goes for anybody listening to this on the website. Call me. Email me. But I cannot make church about anything other than the knowing of Christ, and the sharing of Him.

I talked once about not having a plan B. A plan B is something that you will settle for in your heart other than God's purpose for your existence. That purpose is, of course, that Christ be formed in you and you becoming the body of His expression in the earth through knowing Him in his death, burial, and resurrection. And generally, plan B's are not something written out or even thought out by us. We are often not even conscious of their existence. They are simply there as something that is good enough for now, good enough for today, good enough for this season in my life. Do we have a plan B?

Plan A is following Jesus. Plan A is leaving behind what He left behind and being found in Him – not having a righteousness of your own, not having anything of your own. But having a heart, a mind, and a will conformed to Him through knowing Him in the way that He provided. Knowing His death as your death. Knowing His burial as your burial. And knowing His resurrection as the resurrection and life of all that will live in Him. Amen.