

Are we following the Lord?

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Let us turn to **John 8: 12**

John 8: 12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

It is important that we know who the Lord Jesus is.

He is the centre of our lives; He is the One who has given us hope, given us eternal life. He is the One who can transform us so that we can find true meaning in life.

So here the Lord Jesus tells us: "I am the Light of the world".

We can consider from the angle of who the Lord Jesus is, but a good way to appreciate what this means is to consider the implications for our lives. The Lord Jesus not only said, "I am the Light of the world" but He also said: "...he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life".

It is very important that we have the Light of life.

If we do not have the Light of life, we will be walking in the darkness; and here, "the darkness" refers to moral darkness, moral evil – we will not be able to enter into the presence of God, have deep fellowship with Him. So, we must have the Light of life from God.

How do we receive that Light?

He says: "...he who follows Me... will have the Light of life".

So then what does it mean to follow Him?

If we think in terms of a general understanding, it must be something very attractive. The Lord Jesus, the Creator of the universe, the Saviour of the world, the One who performed so many miracles – surely to follow Him must be the most exciting thing in life, the most wonderful experience that we can have. Who would not want to follow Him?

But then we may have many different ideas as to what following Him means. The Jews, different ones had different ideas: some of them, they wanted Him to be the King, to lead them; others wanted Him to perform more miracles, to provide for them in the material realm.

Let us consider a situation where someone said to the Lord Jesus, "I will follow You" and consider what the Lord Jesus said to him.

Luke 9: 57-58

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."

58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Here is a man who of his own accord expressed clearly, "I will follow You wherever You go." It seemed something very significant, positive, a deep commitment: He was willing to follow the Lord Jesus wherever He went – no conditions.

Did he know what it meant?

Why did the Lord Jesus respond to him the way He did? Why did not the Lord Jesus say, "Good, come, follow Me"? Or, why did not the Lord Jesus ask him, "Do you know what it means to follow Me?" He said neither. We are told the Lord Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

The Lord Jesus did not say, "Come, follow Me" or "No, you cannot follow Me". He just told him what it might mean to follow Him; this is just an example of what it might mean to follow Him. Was he prepared for that?

What if this man were prepared for it? "Yes, I do not mind. Foxes have their holes, birds of the air have their nests, You have nowhere to lay Your head. I am quite used to it; I travel everywhere, I sleep out in the open; it is not a problem for me. I will follow You."

If he had said that, would he then be truly following the Lord Jesus? Maybe... maybe not...

What would constitute truly following the Lord Jesus? Does it mean accompanying Him in His travels in such situations would mean following Him? Was that what the Lord Jesus meant?

We all know that following the Lord Jesus is the same as following God; and what does it mean to follow God?

Following God in the heart of it is in the realm of the spirit, it is in the realm of the heart: the heart must follow God. That is the critical issue.

Are we prepared in our hearts to follow God: identify with Him, His ways, His goals, His objectives?

What God wants to accomplish: do we appreciate that, do we want it? Are we prepared to move together with Him in that?

If in our hearts we want to follow the Lord Jesus, but with our own objectives, with our own goals, with our own desires in terms of what the world can offer, then we cannot truly be His disciples.

When the Lord Jesus called the people to come to Him, those who were weary and heavy-laden, He said, "Learn of Me". And what was He asking them to learn from Him?

They were to learn how to be humble in heart then they would find rest for their souls. They were to be identified with Him in terms of the moral direction and character and to develop those qualities then they would truly be His disciples. A disciple is a learner and a disciple must learn well and if we learn from the Lord Jesus, we must concentrate primarily, first and foremost, in the realm of the heart.

But then we may ask the question: If that were the case, why did the Lord Jesus say, "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*"? Is it not enough if we tell the Lord Jesus, "Yes, I identify with You; I want to be a good person like You; I want to develop the highest moral quality in my heart. I am willing to learn from You." Would that not be following Him? Would that not be sufficient?

Well, there is a good reason why God created us with a body. The body helps us to understand what is in our heart.

Yes, we can say, "I love God with all my heart" but when the Lord says, "Come with Me" in this situation or that situation which may be difficult or unpleasant or painful, we hesitate; we may not be prepared to move with Him.

So that reveals our identification with Him is not deep enough. If it were deep enough, there will be no hesitation. Wherever He goes, we go; whatever He does, we accompany Him. We are prepared to move with Him.

The meaning of this verse basically is to bring across this message.

“...the foxes have holes”: yes, they can be comfortable, they can be protected from the weather; “the birds of the air *have* nests” – they too find their shelter – “but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head”. His life is exposed to all kinds of difficulties and dangers – this is just an example of a situation that may be so.

So He asked the question without stating it: “Do you still want to follow Me?”

And if that man truly wanted to follow Him, there would be many more lessons to learn. Just being willing to stay out in the open, not to have anywhere to lay your head is not sufficient in the path of learning to identify with Him, but this is an important aspect.

Why is it that it is so difficult to move together with the Lord Jesus in practical situations of life?

As we ponder over our lives, we know that a primary reason is this body that we have. This body just does not like the things that God may want us to go through or to do. Whether it be sickness or death or any other issue that may be unpleasant, we may not be so eager to go through situations like that with Him.

Ultimately, it is the meaning that is important. Can we appreciate what God wants to do? Can we identify with Him?

If we do not deal with our body, it will be very difficult for us to move together with the Lord.

The Lord Jesus went through forty days without food in preparation for His ministry. That was an aspect of the discipline of the body for a spiritual purpose.

There are many other people who have also done that in terms of going without food for forty days, but it does not help them spiritually.

The discipline of the body that is beneficial must have a direction: it must have at its heart the desire to identify with God; to serve Him, to honour Him, to love Him, to move together with Him, and it has to be done in a spirit of dependence on God, moving together with Him.

So it is not enough to say, "I love the Lord, I am willing to do the things that He wants me to do" but when the time comes when it is difficult, we hesitate and we are not so prepared to do so.

How then can we help ourselves? How can we prepare ourselves so that we can be more ready when the Lord calls?

The apostle Paul was very conscious of this and he took steps to deal with his own life and though he had served for many years in faithfulness to God, he was very conscious that this was an area that he needed to pay close attention to; otherwise he might fail God and be disqualified from the race.

1 Corinthians 9: 24-27

- 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.
- 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
- 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;
- 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

We know that the apostle Paul was a very disciplined man and he was prepared to go through great difficulties, but he was very conscious he needed to maintain that discipline of his body if he were to continue to be faithful to God.

It is a serious matter. He is not talking about a casual stroll; he is talking about a race that may end in life or death. It is something very serious and important.

He says, "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim". There is a direction; there is a purpose. He knew where he was going; he knew what his objectives were.

"I box in such a way, as not beating the air". It is not just for fun; it is a battle that we need to be engaged in, we need to fight the evil one and we must be effective.

So in order to do that, he says, "I discipline my body and make it my slave". It is easy for us to become slaves of our body but here the apostle Paul tells us he made his body his slave. In order to do that, we have to learn to discipline our body. What would that mean in practical terms?

For different people, different areas may be more significant but the underlying principle is that our primary concentration, intention, motivation is to fulfil God's purpose in our lives, to work out His will.

So in order to do that, we must subject this body to the will of God.

That is to say, if we are very sleepy, we do not just fall asleep just because we are sleepy. It is not wrong to fall asleep when you are sleepy, when it is the right time to sleep; it is in order, we must take care of our body and have sufficient sleep. But when there is something that God wants you to do and it is important and you fall asleep, how are you to fulfil the will of God?

That is what happened to the disciples when the Lord Jesus was facing the event of the cross: He told them, "Watch with Me"; they fell asleep, but these were people who could stay up all night fishing and not fall asleep.

So too there are many people who can stay up all night watching World Cup but when it comes to spiritual events, they may not be able to stay awake. What is it that our bodies are inclined towards?

Likewise it does not mean that whenever we are hungry we eat, because there are times when there are urgent matters to attend to and God wants us to concentrate on them, and it may not be appropriate to eat.

But then we say, "I cannot help it. My body wants to eat; I have to eat." So if we are not disciplined, then we will just eat – and not just eat... indulge in eating – and this will worsen the degree of discipline in the body.

Likewise if we feel lonely, we get married because "I want to have a companion". So if I am lonely, I find somebody to marry. Is it wrong? No, it is not wrong; it is not wrong if you are lonely, you find somebody to get married to. But there is a condition: it must be on the basis that it is meaningful to God. We do not just do it because we feel this is what we would like to have.

So if we do not discipline our body, many of these actions that we take will not be in line with the purposes of God; and the more we do that, the more we will not be able to continue in the right path.

So then, we may say, "There are some people who can survive under very rough conditions without a bed but there are others who cannot. There are others who can fast for a long time and they are all right, but I cannot fast for so long – I have medical problems."

So does it mean that those who are physically more fit will be more able to fulfil the will of God? That is not true either.

God is very understanding. He knows us; He knows our circumstances, He knows our difficulties and He gives room.

What God is interested in is first and foremost and ultimately: your heart.

So the meaning is that you must express that meaning in the context of what you can meaningfully do; and for different people, the expression will be different. That is something each one of us must look to God to seek to understand what is appropriate for us.

But what is critical is the preparedness, the willingness, to do anything that God wants us to do and to recognize and to believe that if God wants us to do something, He will enable us.

So we may physically not be able to do a particular thing in the usual situation but if God wants us to fulfil that, we can trust Him that He will specifically enable us to fulfil it.

After all, God is the Creator of the universe; He is the One who sustains the whole universe by the word of His power and He works through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is prepared to give us His life and to strengthen us. And that is why the Lord Jesus performed so many miracles in His life: to help us to understand God is not limited in the physical realm.

Whatever God wants to accomplish, He can do it. Yet, it does not mean that because God can perform all these miracles, your life will be a very pleasant, easy life: whatever the problem, God can just solve it for you; He can protect you, He can strengthen you so that life will be very pleasant and easy.

The way the Lord Jesus responded tells us that walking with Him may not be easy and often is not easy; but neither does it mean it will always be very difficult; and it does not mean that the more difficult it is, the more meaningful it is.

We must ultimately walk with the Lord: whether it be in the valley of the shadow of death or beside still waters, it makes no difference. He is our Lord: we follow Him; we walk with Him.

So that is the direction that we need to set our hearts. If we really want to follow the Lord, then it is primarily one spirit with Him, moving together and expressed in this body in the way we live our lives each day.

So then as we come before the Lord, let us ask Him to help us understand who the Lord Jesus is and how we should follow Him.

Let us ask Him to help us to recognize if in our lives we have not disciplined ourselves in the right direction and this hinders us from truly following Him.

Let us ask him to help us so that we can work together with Him by His enabling, to grow in moral and spiritual strength and quality of character in our hearts, so that He can depend on us in what He wants to accomplish.