

## GOD STILL CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM

Reading: Matthew 4: 12-23

Do you sometimes read bits of the Bible or come to church and think, “It’s always the same message”? Each year a few weeks after Christmas we read about Jesus calling his disciples; and, of course, the message IS the same. In fact, if you check Jesus’ message, “Repent for the kingdom of God is near,” it is exactly the same as what John the Baptist was preaching before he was arrested. (I’ll say more about that later.) Repentance and following God is a very common message in the Bible and in church, isn’t it - but you’d expect God’s core message to stay the same. If He’s speaking to us and guiding us, then situations may change over time, but his core message to us to follow Him isn’t going to change. It’s the same for us in our relationships with each other (husband and wife, with our children, with other relatives, or with our friends): things change and adapt, but the basis of our relationships stays much the same. Well, we’re in a relationship with God, and the basis of that will also stay the same: “Repent and follow me.”

Jesus still calls us to follow Him, and that’s not a one-off thing. We need to renew that response each day, and to refresh it regularly. It’s good to ask ourselves, “Am I just a Christian out of habit, or is it something I am CHOOSING for today, ie renewing my response to follow Him, with all that that entails?”

And following Him always involves repentance. The Greek word “repent” means “realise afterwards”, in other words, to think about what we do, to be self-aware (without delving deep into ourselves), and to notice, “That went well,” “The way I said that came over OK”; or “That wasn’t very good,” “I had a bad attitude then,” “I really messed up

then.” So “repent” means admit our mistakes and then DO something about them. That’s why the Greek word came to mean “to turn around”, ie to begin a complete change in our attitude and behaviour on a certain matter. Repenting is a constant part of renewing our response to Jesus to follow Him.

Finally, put yourself in the shoes of Jesus as He hears that John has been arrested and He deliberately takes up the baton with exactly the same message as John. He’s not deliberately provocative; He goes away from Jerusalem and the south of the country and begins his ministry in Galilee. But He has the same message word for word as John, even though He knows, or is beginning to realise, where that is going to lead Him. That’s courage! Well, we know that at present Jesus and the Christian message aren’t very popular in Britain. Are we prepared to be followers of Jesus and to carry that same message on - living it out ourselves and speaking to others?

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