

## Follow Jesus

✠ **In the light of repentance (vv.12-17)**

✠ **As “fishers of men” (vv.18-23)**

In the name of Jesus, the Light of our life, dear fellow disciples of our Lord:

This is the time of year when a single set of taillights can be a real life saver. I don't know about you, but when the snow is blowing on some darkened freeway, I don't want to be the first car. I would rather drop my speed a few miles an hour and follow the leader. If he slows down, I slow down. Worse case scenario – if he hits something, I slow down really fast. Two tiny lights can put fried nerves on ice.

When it comes to finding our way from earth to heaven on the crowded lanes of life, how else can you avoid all the pitfalls and broken guard rails? This is not some boring four-lane across the prairie. Each day takes us higher and higher up the steep slope that either ends in heaven, or a sudden drop-off to eternal disaster in hell. It will take more than tiny red tail lights to get us home safe and sound. Only one Man has ever passed this way before. He is the only one with either the knowledge or the care to go slow enough to lead and fast enough to get us there in time. Two words: **Follow Jesus** – first...

✠ **In the light of repentance (vv.12-17)**

This was a dark time in the life of our Lord Jesus. His cousin and faithful forerunner, the last prophet of the Old Testament, had just been thrown in prison. It would only be a short while before the executioner of wicked King Herod would hand a bloody platter to his dancing stepdaughter who took advantage of his drunken oath by requesting the head of John the Baptist. But just as the lights of a distant town look brightest on the darkest night, so the light of Jesus our Savior shines brighter than ever as He travels through the darkness of this world's sin and unbelief. *“He returned to Galilee”* and there fulfilled the seven centuries old prophecy of Isaiah: *“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*

That ought to bring great relief to all of us, for we are *Gentiles...living in darkness* and *in the land of the shadow of death*. We've sanitized it physically, so that few of us ever see a dead body except at a funeral. But what we cannot escape is the spiritual *death* and *darkness* that trouble our lives and bring depressing ruin to our souls. I see it in couples living together unmarried and unable to figure out why everything seems so dark around them. I see it in active church members very aware of how much they are working, but in the dark and assuming the worst about the service of their fellow members. I sense this darkness whenever I find myself so easily distracted from God's Word and His will for my life. The *darkness* of that dread decision in 1973, “Roe v. Wade” when the highest court in our land gave mothers permission to abort their own unborn babies, is a *darkness* that has settled on us more than we realize. The sin is in our tacit acceptance of this barbarism whenever we fail to *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.”* (Proverbs 31:8 NIV)

Jesus' coming to that backwater region of Galilee is what turned the lights on for them, and still does for us today. He shines the light of God's truth on our sinful backsliding, and lazy acceptance of evil just as a powerful set of high beams would illuminate a guardrail missing from the side of a mountain. The simple command, *“You shall not murder,”* is not fulfilled to the satisfaction of holy and almighty God until we have also done whatever it takes to “help and befriend [our neighbor] in every bodily need.” When we stand in judgment on unwed mothers struggling to provide for themselves and their babies abandoned by boyfriends, husbands and fathers, we judge ourselves as lawbreakers. The same God who

says, ***“You shall not commit adultery,”*** says, ***“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*** Religious people have no excuse for all the times we’ve turned away from those in need or failed to notice the needy around us. ***“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*** (James 1:27 NIV)

The broken guardrails of God’s law are just the first thing Christ lights up. As we **Follow Jesus**, we see a single word on a sign that says how to stay right behind Him safely on the road to heaven. In English the sign says, ***“Repent.”*** In fine print a reason: ***“For the kingdom of heaven is near.”*** This planet and the human race is nearing the end of its 6,000 year journey. In the last miles to avoid the eternal fires of hell we need *to change our minds* about the seriousness of sin. It must be dreadful indeed to require the blood of God’s own Son to wash it all away. But ***“repent”*** also means *to change our minds* about God. Why try choose your own way through life when God’s own Son shed His innocent blood to cleanse every stain of self-indulgence, selfish ambition and self-willed rebellion against His holy laws? When John the Baptist’s severed head could no longer speak the words, Jesus proclaimed the same message loudly enough for us to hear today: ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*** **Follow Jesus – In the light of repentance** and find the greatest purpose life can ever have. **Follow Jesus...**

### ✠ As ***“fishers of men”*** (vv.18-23)

These two sets of brothers – Peter and Andrew, James and John – had heard and seen Jesus before when their teacher, John the Baptist, said, ***“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29) They had spent some time with Jesus already, but then for some reason had gone back to their family fishing business. “A man has to make a living, you know? People are busy, don’t you see? Families have all sorts of activities that take up tons of time these days – if you’d only get with the program! It’s pretty hard to click off the new HD TV to read my Bible or prepare for Bible class. Email takes up so much of my time! How can I spend time in prayer and the study of God’s Word, much less talking to my neighbors about Jesus? What makes you think they want to hear about Him anyway?”

Piecing the Gospel accounts together, and if the harmony experts are right that this parallels Luke 5:1-11, these four Galilean fisherman were unbelievably busy right then. We don’t have all the details in translation as nicely as we’d like, but this seems to be the time Luke reports Jesus borrowing Peter’s boat to preach to the crowds on the shore, then telling him, ***“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”*** (Luke 5:4 NIV) You may remember Peter’s objection about fishing all night and catching nothing, but then agreeing to go out anyway. It’s truly awesome how they caught so many fish that it nearly swamped the boat of partner brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee, when they rushed to help haul in the astonishing catch. Peter’s guilty plea, ***“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord”*** (Luke 5:8 KJV), was met by Jesus’ kind reassurance, ***“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”*** (Luke 5:10 NIV) In both accounts the four fishermen brothers left nets, boats, and father Zebedee to **Follow Jesus – As *“fishers of men.”*** Apparently, they were convinced that nothing else was more important.

What trips you up in your Christian walk? Is it the rod and reel, the boat and trailer not for livelihood, but for pleasure? Is it the family that means more to you than Jesus? They won’t be there, you know, when you stand before the judgment seat of God. And they cannot find their way up this mountain to heaven any better than you can. In fact, if you’re the father of children or the husband of a wife, it’s your responsibility to make sure you **Follow Jesus – In the light of repentance**, so that they can follow you according to God’s command. We have fish to catch, all right, **As *“fishers of men”*** caught by the Master Fisherman Himself. His hooks don’t hurt; they heal. Those who are caught by Him finally get to live. He never throws any back. He does not want to live another day without you. How do you say, “Thank-you!” to such a kind and loving Savior? How do you thank the One who turned the lights on for you? How do you thank the Lord who sacrificed Himself for you? Break down the barricades. Throw off whatever sin muddies up your tires. Nothing is more important than these two simple words like two welcome taillights in a storm. Just do it! Just **Follow Jesus**. Amen.