



Follow Me

Part – 4 Jesus and the Sons of Thunder

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Today we are wrapping up our series *Follow Me*. We've worked through some different people in scripture that Jesus called to follow him, and he calls every single one of us to follow him. That has been a joy for me in this series to kind of step back and take stock of what it means to follow Jesus. The words used in scripture when he's calling these people are to accompany and assist, to take part. That's a little bit humbling that we are called to take part in the Kingdom of Heaven. That is a calling that we should take seriously, that we have a responsibility to do, and yet it is a wonderful joy to get to participate in.

Most of us may have or have had a couple of different categories of friends at some point in our life. You may have or had a friend who says "Hey, I have an adventure for us. It's planned. Come one, let's go." And you're like "Okay cool." You're confident in that person and you're like, "Let's go, let's do it." You know it's going to be good clean fun.

Then you may have another type of friend who says, "I have an idea." And you know, because of your history with that person, it may not end well. And you have a lot of questions. What? Where? For how long? You have a lot of questions that you ask.

There is one group of people or one demographic that doesn't tend to ask a lot of questions, and that's young kids. I think of a two or three-year-old that we just strap into the car seat, back out of the driveway and we head out. They're not asking questions; they're just going with us. We could be going down the road, across town, maybe across the country or around the world and they are not asking questions.

I think this picture kind of depicts the point I'm making here. You see kids are content with the one with whom they go. They are not concerned about what and where and how long. And so it should be as we follow Christ, as we seek the Lord. We should be content with the one with whom we go, not asking too many questions or being concerned about details.

The neat thing about this here is we have a six-year-old right now and we'll be walking somewhere and I'll just feel his little hand reach up and grab mine. *Are you there, Dad?* Kids aren't concerned about the details. They're concerned about the one with whom they go. It might be scary following Jesus because following Jesus can call us to change some things about relationships, can lead us to change some things about lifestyles, and can lead us to change our ways and means of going about things, and that can be scary. The thing is that we have to remember that the God that we are following is both omniscient and

sovereign. That means he knows all things and has authority over all things. The one whose hand we're reaching up to hold is omniscient and sovereign.

We read in Psalm 23: **4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.** It can be scary, but he is with us.

I want to talk a little bit about Old Testament desert wandering. If you are not familiar with this phrase, if you're new to church, or if you haven't studied much of Old Testament history, desert wandering speaks of the Israelites who were God's chosen people. They were enslaved by the Egyptians and were captive for over 400 years. And God is leading them out of that situation. As he's leading them out of that situation, he's taking them to a Promised Land, a land that they would possess, and they would call their own. They would be in charge of it, and it would be theirs. As he does that, he takes them out of this situation and moves them to this other one. We have to know, geographically speaking, if you were to plug this into your Google when you're looking for the fastest route, you wouldn't hear that from the way that they went.

So, Egypt is over here and the Land of the Philistines is over here, right across from Egypt. *It's just right there, can't we just go right across?* No, the path that he takes them on is all through the desert, through the sea, across a river, around mountains and difficult places. Our omniscient and Sovereign God knows what lies ahead of them as he's taking them out of this situation of slavery, as they go to take the Promised Land, which is War. The battle to take this land and the land of the Philistines. By the way, if you think war between Israel and Hamas is new, it's about 3,300 years old. This is where it started. But, he's leading them from slavery to eventually into war.

If you and I had that picture, what would we say? "I'd like to chill in the desert for a while if you don't mind." God knew that, but the Israelites didn't. He knew that and he said, "Less the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." God is both omniscient and sovereign.

Let's look into that situation a little bit in Exodus 13: 21- 22. **21 By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.** Literally and physically, they were following Almighty God. The omniscient and sovereign God. They were following him. Not only that, as he had them in the desert, he was giving them food and water and safety, protection, providing for them. This was the situation that they were in. Yet, they were filled with discontent, concerned for their safety. They were not happy with where they were. Coming from slavery, not knowingly into war. They were discontent. So, the Israelites had forgotten what we often times forget which is our sense of safety and contentment should lie in the one we follow. If we follow Jesus, that is where our sense of safety and contentment should lie, even though it can be scary, even though we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

When we follow Jesus, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God is literally with us and in us.

We read about that in John 14: 15 -17 -**15 "If you love me, keep my commands.** (These are the words of Jesus) **16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you**

forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Paul later wrote in one of his letters in First Corinthians, ***Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that you have the Holy Spirit in you?***

Those who choose to follow Jesus are in Christ and have an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God literally with you. You don't have to reach anywhere to hold his hand. He is with you. You have an indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Like the Israelites, we know where we've been, and often times we know where we want to be, don't we? We look ahead at a situation we are in. We may be in a desert or dealing with something. We look ahead and know where we want to be. The Israelites had pillars of fire and smoke to lead them. Obviously, we don't have pillars of fire and smoke, but we do have scripture and the Holy Spirit. As we look at each situation and we seek God's wisdom, if we seek discernment, we want to know where God desires us to be. We use scripture and the Holy Spirit. We look in the scriptures for examples. How did Jesus handle the situation? What does God say about this? And we seek the prompting of the Holy Spirit. That's not just your feelings. It's more than that. And if you think the Holy Spirit is leading you in something contrary to the Holy Spirit, you're wrong. It is the Word of God using the spirit of God to communicate with you. They will not contradict one another.

So the prominent attitude among the Israelites in their wondering is they were opinionated and forceful. They rebelled. They wouldn't repent from their sin. They turned away from God. They turned from the laws that he had laid out for them that would keep them in the way that he desired for them to be.

This was much like two men who were very close to Jesus in his earthly ministry. Audio plays – "Let's get ready to rumble!" You can't have a name like Sons of Thunder without an introduction like that. It sounds kind of like a pro wrestling tag team, doesn't it? Sons of Thunder. We get introduced to these guys in Mark 1: 19-20. Keep in mind this is right after Jesus called Peter and Andrew. Adam taught us about them a couple of weeks ago. ***19 When he had gone a little farther...*** That's right after calling Peter and Andrew. ***...he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay...*** That's important. ***...he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.***

A couple of weeks ago, we read that Peter and Andrew followed Jesus immediately, right? But what we are seeing here is Jesus did something without delay... with a couple of guys who have the nickname Sons of Thunder. (James and John) You would think that Jesus, when he was calling his disciples, might look at them and think *they are clearly going to be difficult. These guys are going to be hard to work with, they are going to cause trouble*, but that's not the case. He called them without delay, just like he calls each of us without delay, regardless of your personality, regardless of your tendencies. He calls each of us without delay.

Then we go on in Mark 3: 14-19, and we get one of the summaries of the disciples that Jesus called. ***14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. 16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to***

whom he gave the name Peter), Peter means Petra, which means rock. The rock on which I will build my church. 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder")... So there it is. 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Now, we don't get specific details about why they were nicknamed the sons of thunder, but most theologians and scholars believe, and we can imply when we read about their account in scripture that it's because of their temperament, their ambition, their drive, their speech, their strong will.

Are there any parents out there convinced you're raising God's next iterations of the Sons of Thunder?

Not only did Jesus call them, but he also called them to his inner circle. He had this inner circle of three of the disciples that he brought nearer to him than the others, that he had closer personal relationships with. The other was Peter, Petra, the rock. And James and John that were part of Jesus' inner circle. He brought them along to participate in things that the rest didn't get to participate in. One was the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. And the other was when he withdrew to pray at the Garden of Gethsemane before he was to be betrayed.

Jesus called these three to participate in moments of glory and in moments of sorrow. Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Jesus brought these three along with him, including James and John, the Sons of Thunder.

I think it's worth us taking a little pitstop here and developing something that we can observe from this. Now we've been introduced to all three of the inner circle of Jesus. Whenever we can observe something that Jesus was clearly intentional about, I think we can assume two things. 1) He did it on purpose. God doesn't do things by accident. 2) We should learn from it and apply it. I'm talking about the way Jesus structured his earthly relationships.

In his earthly ministry, Jesus impacted many. There were many who learned from him. There were many who repented because of him. There were many who benefited, physically, emotionally, or spiritually from him. He impacted many. So, how should we apply that? We should impact many. If nothing else then by the way we live. With our words and our actions, we should impact many people, hopefully, people are benefit from us, either physically, emotionally, or spiritually. People may be learning from us just by watching the way that we live. Hopefully, people, through our evangelism, can be repenting because of us. We should be impacting many.

He ministered with 12. You can't minister with hundreds. You can't work with hundreds. Jesus' daily life and word were with a dozen guys. We know from that example that we can't partner and team with every single person we meet, in person, online everywhere. We can't do our daily life and our daily work with that many people. We can't be teammates in that way.

And then, inner circle... He had an intimate relationship with three. Three that he shared his deepest struggles with, three that he rejoiced in his most personal victories with.

So, how does that apply to us? Same thing. Over the past 20 years, we've kind of gotten this wrong and we've really blended it all up. Part of it, a lot of it probably has to do with the internet and social media. Because what do we do? We want to influence many. We want to influence as many people as we can, not necessarily concerned about impacting people by helping them to repent, helping them to learn, maybe so, but we want to influence many. We tend to want to minister with as many people as we can. We want to team up with as many people as we can. We see this in our ministries. A lot of people want to partner with us. As a church family, we can't minister with everybody, every ministry partner that comes along, because it wouldn't be efficient.

I think probably the most important one is we tend to, in the way we share our emotions, our victories, and our sorrows, with the world through the internet, we tend to think that we have a close and intimate relationship with a lot of people. The reason that leaves us empty and unfulfilled is because that's not God's design for our relationships. That's not how Jesus structured his relationships.

In his earthly ministry, though, Jesus had a close and intimate relationship with three people. But here's the great thing. In his resurrection, he desires that with every single person. He wants a close and intimate relationship with every single person through His Word and through His Holy Spirit, confession, and belief in Him.

So we have James and John, Sons of Thunder. Again, they were part of this inner circle. James was the son of Zebedee. He was not James, son of Alphaeus. And he was not James, the brother of Jesus. And then John was his brother, therefore, also the son of Zebedee.

What we know about John – Most scholars believe that he wrote the gospel of John and that he wrote the epistles of First, Second, and Third John. Many believe that he might have written the Revelation. So that's James and John.

Let's look now at the personality and temperament that earned them this nickname of Sons of Thunder. Let's go to the scene where Jesus has been resurrected, the tomb is empty, and Mary Magdalene... We talked about this a few weeks ago on Resurrection Sunday, right? The tomb is empty, Mary Magdalene sees the empty tomb and she runs back and tells the disciples. Then what we get is Peter, one of the three, and John take off running toward the tomb. We read about that in John 20: 4 - **Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.** If you don't think God has a sense of humor, then you might not be reading scripture close enough. All scripture is breathed by God, inspired by God. And it was written by man. It was written by a man named John. Who was the other disciple? The other disciple was John. We see that he made it a point to say here, the other disciple, himself, outran Peter and reached the tomb first." So, when you read into the undertones of John's writing and his personality here, he said, "This was a race and I won." That's his personality. I can relate to John. Can anyone else relate to John? "Everything is a competition and I'm going to win." right?

So, honestly, it was worse in my youth. I truly believe God redeemed me from that burden, at least mostly. That spirit still comes up in me sometimes. There was a word that was often used to describe me by my peers or my parents or anyone else and that was *over-competitive*. I had a different word for it – winner.

Is anyone else bothered by the fact that we don't keep score in some of our youth sports now? I go to one of our kids' soccer games and someone says, "What's the Score?" I have to say, "They don't keep score, and we are winning 8 to 2." Some of you can relate. You're competitive in everything. Everything from your Christmas lights display to the potluck. You take your dish and you set it out. Throughout dinner, you kind of browse back around the food, and you're looking and noticing how much is left in each dish. And then someone might say, "Hey, I really liked your casserole." You say, "Oh, thank you. I don't know if you noticed, but it's the only empty dish." And in your head, you're saying *I win*. You need to chill out. It's dinner with your small group, okay?"

We see this attitude in James and John though. This is one of two attitudes that we are going to develop today that we can learn about from James and John, sons of Thunder.

Luke 9: 51 – 56 is where we'll pick up. **51 *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*** This is Jesus as he was making his way toward the Holy City and the time that he would be betrayed, beaten, and crucified. He was making his way there to celebrate Passover. What we know about him and his followers is that they were inherent to the laws that God had given that they would worship only the one, true God.

52 *And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem...* Again, his face was set towards Jerusalem which meant he was determined to worship only God. And he was going to celebrate Passover there in Jerusalem.

The Samaritans were a different race of people. They were a people that were from Jews that had married and had children with Gentiles and the problem they had is that they took on the worship tendencies and the practices of those Gentiles, so they were worshipping idols, and they were participating in pagan rituals. They even had kind of their holy place where they would go worship. And so, the Samaritans then viewed Jesus and his disciples as these people who were just holier than thou. they just think they are so much better than us. That's why they didn't receive him because his face was set on Jerusalem. He was determined to worship the one, true God.

Are there any examples that you can think of today, Christians, where people hate you because you declare that you are going to adhere to truth and worship the one true God? A lot of them, right? I want to just call two of them out because they are hot-button topics and we don't avoid the hot-button topics, we just face them head-on. One is abortion and another is gender sexuality and marriage. It's simply because knowing what we believe, the world will hate us. We might not have even met a person or said anything to them or declared anything, but they know if you follow Jesus, this is what you believe and therefore, I hate you. Those are just two of them. But simply because we believe that life begins at conception and that abortion kills an innocent child or because we believe that God created them. Male and Female, he created them, and marriage was designed to be between a man and a woman, we will be hated.

54 *When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"* Is that not a "we're going to win this" attitude? Is that not our response often when we're faced with bitter disagreement and hatred? I can almost see them kind of step back and put their fists up. They are ready to fight. That's kind of the attitude or the posture that

we might take. Maybe not in person because let's be honest in Northwest Arkansas and Southwest Missouri, we probably don't face too much disagreement with a lot of our core beliefs as Christians, but, again, we get online and there it is, and we're faced with it. Psychologists will tell you when you're consuming it online, your physiology and your emotions react the same as if you are there in person. So, we submit ourselves to that, so when you're hearing that stuff, you're ready to fight, But if only we had an example from scripture to know what Jesus would do.

55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 Then he and his disciples went to another village. He rebuked James and John for saying we want them destroyed. Jesus, can we call down fire and have them destroyed?" His response was rebuke. We don't know exactly what that rebuke sounded like, but I would guess it was something like, "Have you been paying attention at all? Do you not know how I handle things? This is not how I handle things." He rebuked them and then they went on to another village. He turned his back on the offense, and he kept his eyes on the pursuit of the Father's plan to redeem the world through his death, burial, and resurrection.

So, how can we apply that practically? I think first let's look at another example. Joshua, who was leading the Israelites after Moses, was about to take them into the Promised Land. And here he stands before the Israelites who had rebelled, who wouldn't repent from their sin, who were participating in idol worship, who were not confident, they were not satisfied with the God that was leading them and Joshua stands before them, these people that may even hate him because he's declaring truth and calling them to repentance. He says, choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Then he turns and puts his eyes on the Promised Land

What does that look like for us, practically speaking? What do we do?

We stand firm in our beliefs no matter the attacks. We don't waver in our beliefs. We turn our back on the offense, and we keep our focus on the Kingdom.

What good is it going to do to call fire down on someone? Does that accomplish anything for the Kingdom? Part of Following Jesus is participating in the kingdom, doing things the way Jesus did. He turned his back on the offense and kept his eyes on the kingdom.

Let's look at a second attitude we can learn about from James and John. In Mark 10: 25 – 40 - **35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."** Has a teacher in here ever had that request from a student? I can't imagine asking another person that, let alone the Son of God, the Messiah. What an audacious request. I would expect rebuke from him here, but he said, **36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."** Look at these two phrases here. "We want" and "Grant us." Gimme, gimme, gimme. I want this You see the attitude developing. **Jesus said to them, 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can,"**

Clearly, they don't understand. What the cup was that he was going to drink? The very cup he asked in the garden for the Father to take from him, the suffering he was going to face. What is the baptism he

was going to be baptized with? You know that when we do our water baptism, it's symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection, participating with Christ in that. He was about to participate in the actual death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus is saying, "Can you handle it?" They're like, "Yeah, let's do it." That I can win attitude. I can win without complete understanding of what is going on. **...they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.** They didn't understand. They thought they understood but they didn't. But Almighty God is omniscient and he is sovereign and he understands what you need, what you don't need.

So, we know following Jesus is an act of sacrifice. It's not the pursuit of a reward, but the good thing is, the wonderful thing that God worked into his plan is that following him comes with a reward.

Matthew 16: 24 -25 says, 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.** We can find life in sacrifice We can find life in Christ.

And then a little bit later in Mark 10: 45 after James and John had said, "We want, grant us" Jesus said, **"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.** They misunderstood. They didn't know how this whole thing works.

I want to put a picture up here on the screen. Just a warning, it may be a little disturbing to some of you. (A picture of a cereal box opened from the middle of the box.

This illustrates these two attitudes of James and John, the Sons of Thunder, not kept in check. They are opinionated they're aggressive, they're strong-willed, not seeking the desires of the Lord or the ways of Jesus. And I want that magically delicious thing. Give it to me. I'm going to go get it. Not even understanding what's on the other side of that bag. They didn't know what the drink of this cup would be. This is what can end up happening if we handle situations as James and John might have, unchecked by Christ, by following him. He kept them in check. They followed him. Their attitudes, their demands. To follow Jesus, we must sacrificially put aside our own desires. Jesus did. He came to serve, not to be served. That's what it means to follow him, to act like Jesus. Not, "I want." "Grant me." We should make bold petitions. Hear me on that. You should make bold petitions to God, but the petitions should be made in such a way that "Lord, if it is your will, grant me this." Not, I want you to give me whatever I want." Make bold petitions – Lord, if it is your will..."

Before we wrap up, I want to redeem our sons of Thunder. Don't want to leave them hanging. John, who was one of the Sons of Thunder, we know later became the Apostle of Love. So, as he was called and listed in these 12 to follow Jesus, he had this attitude. Jesus still called him without delay. By the end of it all, we know him as the Apostle of Love. He was a pillar of the church. What we can infer from that is that he was transformed by his accompanying Christ, in his taking part in the Kingdom. It changed him. Following Jesus should change you. It should change me. Things should change as a result of following Jesus.

A common prayer we have in our house is “Lord, give us wisdom to know the right thing to do and the courage to do it.”

Where do we get our wisdom to know the right thing to do? From scripture. Where do we get the courage? From the prompting of the Holy Spirit. God, help us to know the right thing to do and the courage to do it.

We talked about Christianity and people maybe having hatred towards us because of our beliefs, but know this... To say I'm a Christian gives me a label. And people may hate me for some things for that. But to say I'm a follower of Jesus implies I'm taking action in following Jesus. So, we should all be taking action in our faith. So, then the question is when the last time was you made a change in your life as a result of following Jesus? When we take communion together, we have a time of reflection. We hold the elements, and we approach the Father, asking him, through his Holy Spirit, to reveal any unrepentant sin that we need to confess, any relationships that we acknowledge need to be mended. Anything we need to change, either in our lifestyle, in our attitudes, in our ways and means, things that we're doing.

I want to encourage you instead of once a month when we take communion here, that in your daily prayers which you should be praying daily and in your daily prayer, before petitioning to god please give me this if this is your will, that you say, “Lord, make my heart clean. Reveal anything in me that needs to change in my life.

If you are a perfect person, raise your hand. That's Adam Donyes' favorite test question because if you raise your hand then pride is your sin. We all have something that needs to be changed. So, when was the last time you changed something as a result of following Jesus? To be more in step with his ways and his commands.

Jesus says, “Follow me.” He knew James and John's personalities and he called them immediately. Without delay, he called them. He knows each one of us. He knows our tendencies. Whether you have chosen to follow Jesus or not, he knows your tendencies. If you have not chosen to follow Jesus and placed faith in him, he knows your tendencies, he knows your personality, he knows your sin, and he is still saying “Come to me.” He still wants you as part of his inner circle, a close and intimate relationship with him. To confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, if you are already following Jesus, he's right there. You don't even have to reach up and hold his hand. The Holy Spirit is in you. Listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, read the scriptures, and seek wisdom to know the right thing to do and the courage to do it.

Father, We love you and we are grateful for your Word and the truths in it. We acknowledge that we are sinful people, and that each of us needs you. We're grateful for the sacrifice that your son did not come to be served, but to serve. We are grateful for his sticking to the plan for the redemption of all mankind, which includes us.

For the one that hasn't placed faith in Christ, Lord we pray that you would open their heart that they would hear the truth, that they would know the truth would, in fact, set them free from the bondage of sin. Lord, we pray for those that are following Jesus that they would be sensitive to the prompting of

your Holy Spirit in us, through your Word that we would know the right thing to do. Lead us Lord in paths of righteousness for your name's sake.

It's in Christ's name that we pray, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.