



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Follow Me

Date

Part One – Our Conversion

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Well, 2018 is here. The first Sunday of the year is here. I love new beginnings. I love Mondays. I love start-overs. I love mulligans. I love anything that allows us to try again. That's what a Sunday like this feels like to me. We get to try again to love Jesus, live for him, and be used by him for his kingdom to grow.

So, here we are! We all sit here today with different expectations, different hopes, and different needs, so I want to focus us in a little different direction than we've been heading for the last year of Sundays. We're going to take a break from our verse-by-verse study through the gospel of Mark, just for a few weeks, and we're going to begin a new series called *Follow Me*. It's going to be about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, what the Bible says that actually requires.

You guys, I think we are so desperate in this day and age to have some clarity on this because there's such a growing confusion and a very dangerous deconstruction of biblical Christianity happening right now before our very eyes, all around us where we live. I think if I had to give a label to this brand of Christianity we're seeing rise up all around us, I would call it *progressive Christianity*.

We're seeing a growing number of ministers, churches, and entire denominations laying down their Bibles and denying the exclusive saving gospel of Jesus Christ through his shed blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. We're seeing whole churches, beginning with the leadership of those churches, just pushing that stuff to the side and sometimes completely off the table.

I believe this brand of Christianity is motivated by one thing, and that would be fear. There's a fear amongst a lot of Christians today of not looking progressive enough in the eyes of the culture, so they're abandoning thousands of years of orthodox Christian theology, teaching and believing whatever it takes to avoid the enemy fire of rejection, ridicule, and persecution.

As sad as that is, it is of no surprise. Our Bibles actually warn us of the day... The Bible calls it the "last days" in 2 Timothy, chapter 3. The Bible warns us that in the last days, incredible

compromise and carnality is going to invade the people of Christ and his church, so we see that happening right before our eyes.

However, you guys, we're also seeing something else, perhaps just as dangerous and even more confusing to Christians. I would label this brand of Christianity as *Christianity-lite*. It is pervasive and taking over many lives and churches. I think we're seeing Christians minimizing their Christianity to just a few basic beliefs and religious activities, as long as they're convenient.

We're not seeing a lot of genuine passion. We're not seeing a whole lot of moral conviction anymore. We're certainly not seeing a lot of courage to engage the culture in spiritual warfare with the spiritual weapons we have and the transforming power of the gospel. We're not seeing that. It's a form of Christianity all around us that denies the power of the gospel to transform lives and to make a difference in our world. It's a Christianity that has lost its saltiness and is putting its light under a bushel.

I just felt incredibly convicted to begin the year by taking some time to remind ourselves of what it means to be a Christian. Today, we're going to talk about our *conversion*. Becoming a follower of Jesus requires a supernatural change of direction, a change of course in our lives and hearts. We'll get to that in just a minute. Next week, we're going to talk about our *cost* for being a Christian. Yes, the gospel is the declaration of God's grace and salvation for sinners, and yes, God's grace is free, but please never forget that it doesn't come cheap.

In part three, we're going to talk about our *commitment*. A follower of Jesus is a slave to Jesus. That's what the Bible refers to us as: slaves of Jesus. We exchange our shackles of our sin's destructive rule and reign in our lives and we put on new shackles, the shackles of his loving rule and reign over our lives. That's our commitment.

We're going to talk about our *consecration* and remember the follower of Jesus is on a journey of ongoing sanctification, becoming less controlled and defined by sin and more controlled by grace and defined by holiness. That is our consecration. Then, we're going to talk about our *community*. We talk about this a lot around here. Followers of Jesus must do life with other followers of Jesus. Christianity cannot, does not, and has never worked in isolation.

The last message of this series is going to be about our *commission*. True followers of Jesus talk to others about Jesus. They tell others about Jesus. Each message, beginning with today, is going to conclude with an invitation to a true life of discipleship.

I confess to you that I'm nervous about this. I'm nervous for us as a church, because every week, inevitably, at some point along this six-week series, we're going to hear God's voice. We're going to hear God's Word calling us to decide whether or not we really mean it if we call ourselves Christians.

That's going to require us to be humble. It's going to require us to kind of look at ourselves and evaluate whether or not we are who we say we are. Right about now, some of you are on your phones Googling other churches you could attend for the next five weeks. I get that. You've

already elbowed the person you're with, saying, "We're out of here. We'll come back in a couple of months when they're done with this." I understand that.

Others of you are thinking, "Why can't we just be satisfied with just finding out what the Bible says and believing it? Isn't that what a Christian is? Just believe in Jesus and then just let the rest take care of itself." I get that as well. We have let the craziness, complexity, confusion, and insanity of our world just drive us so crazy. We're just trying to make sure we know who Jesus is and that we love him. Other than that, we'll just kind of let the chips fall. That is not the abundant life for which Jesus came to die.

Let me answer that question with a question. I don't want you to answer it out loud. Just let me ask it and you think about it. What would you call a person who prays a prayer of salvation, accepts Jesus by faith, and follows him as their Lord and Savior? Don't answer that. In your vocabulary, what do you call a person who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

Now, if you were to say, "Well, isn't that a Christian?" you would be right, but did you know that word is used only three times in the New Testament to describe that person? Three times is all. Some of you might have said, "Well, I think you would say that's a follower of Jesus." Again, you would be right, and the New Testament only uses that word five or six times to describe the person who accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Others of you immediately thought, "Well, you would call that person a believer." Again, you would be right, but did you know that word is only used 15 times in connection to people who accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Some of you might have thought of the word *disciple*, and you would be really right. You'd be extra right. That word is used 264 times to describe followers of Jesus.

That's significant, don't you think? I think it would be really beneficial for us to understand what this designation means. Why that word to describe a person who follows Jesus? Let me define the word *disciple* for us so as we move forward, starting today, we're going to all be on the same page.

In the Greek language, there are actually four different words or combinations of root words for the words *disciple* or *discipleship*. Due to time, I'm not going to get into all the contextual nuances of that. I thoroughly enjoyed that work over the last couple of weeks. I just don't think you would enjoy it as much as I did here, so let me kind of scrunch it all down and give you what I believe to be some really insightful definitions of what is required of us to be able to call ourselves a *disciple* based on what the word actually means.

When you think of the word *disciple*, the first thing I want you to think about is the word *student*. A disciple is a student with the full intention of serving and submitting to the authority of Jesus as our Teacher. It's a commitment to accept everything he says as inarguably true for all people for all time. That's where a disciple begins, as a student.

Secondly, it goes beyond the student/teacher relationship. It describes or carries with it the idea of *being one* with Jesus. A true disciple is intimately bound to or attached to Jesus by his Spirit that lives in us. In fact, you will remember that in Scripture, in the New Testament, often the relationship between Jesus and his followers is that of a Groom and his bride. There is an intimacy of oneness that is included in the idea of being a Christian because his very Spirit resides in us, being one with Jesus.

A third aspect of this idea of being a disciple is *to imitate*, or imitation, to be an imitator. A disciple is obligated not only to certain beliefs, but to a certain and specific kind of conduct and behavior. There is a lifestyle attached to being a disciple of Jesus. It is not just a label; it is a way of life.

Fourthly, I want you to think of the word *follower*, which we've already used a little bit. The word *disciple* carries with it the idea of one who goes behind or, literally, pursues after. So, the disciple of Jesus is required to leave behind the past, whether good or bad, and follow and pursue his Lord and Master to a new life and an eternal future together.

Now, if you were to take all of that and put it into a sentence, here's what it would say. *A disciple is a Spirit-filled follower of Jesus who continually learns the doctrines of Scripture and faithfully and obediently lives the lifestyle they require.* I'd encourage you to just stare at that for a minute so we're all on the same page when we use this word.

As I stared at that this week, based on this biblical understanding of what it means to be a disciple, could we not conclude that all disciples are Christians, but not all Christians are disciples? This is where I want us to start from today. *What does it mean to be a disciple?* That concludes my introduction, and I'm going to start preaching now. We're going to begin with that goal. What is required of a person to become a true disciple of Jesus, moving from not being a disciple to being one? What has to happen for a true conversion to take place?

I want us to look to Acts, chapter 2, for the answer to that question, so I'm going to ask you to get your Bibles open to Acts, chapter 2. You're going to be familiar with this. If you don't have a Bible with you today, please, please grab one of our Bibles around you. You need to look at this for yourself. Don't take my word for it. If you have an app on your phone, get it open to Acts, chapter 2.

Let me give you a little lead-up to the moment we're going to start reading here. The lead-up is that Jesus has just been crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. He has been alive for 40 days after his resurrection and he has appeared to the disciples and over 500 others, and he's doing signs, wonders, and miracles. He's talking to them, fellowshiping with them, teaching them, and eating with them.

Now, right before he ascends to heaven, he tells his disciples to go back to Jerusalem and to pray and wait, and so 120 of them go back to Jerusalem. They go back to the upper room and 10 days of praying is going on. They're there, they're not sure what's going to happen, and they're not sure how long to wait.

On the tenth day of praying together, it happens: The Holy Spirit of God descends and the same Holy Spirit that indwelt Jesus is now in them. When that happened, their praying all of a sudden went viral. It was first-century viral. That's where that started, right there. They were praying all at once, 120 of them, and it must have gotten loud.

They were praying, the Scripture tells us, in different languages, languages they didn't even know before the Holy Spirit came into them. It just happened to be that they were there during the week of the Feast of Pentecost, where there were thousands of Jewish people from all over the religious world descending upon Jerusalem.

Apparently, that morning, there were hundreds, a huge crowd that was disturbed by the noise and praying and what sounded like craziness coming from this window in this upper room in the streets of Jerusalem. The people started stopping and talking, thinking, "Are these people drunk?" They were amazed and confused and they didn't know what the heck was going on.

Peter hears the commotion and the Scripture tells us he gets up and opens the window. There was this massive crowd, three times as big as this room right now, filled with people. Imagine that crowd, all just smashed on the street. They're looking up, thinking, "What is this?" Peter looks down at them and he explains to them that this is exactly what the Bible said would happen. This is exactly what Jesus told them might occur.

He preaches to them the very first sermon of the church after the death and resurrection Jesus. That's where we're going to get our answer. I'm going to ask you to stand now for the reading of God's Word. Acts, chapter 2, verse 14:

"But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed [this crowd]: 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day [9:00 a.m.]. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

Peter just quotes the prophet of the Jewish people, Joel, and says he described this very moment. Then, in verse 22, he says,

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David [the great Jewish king] says concerning him,

'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

O God, bless the reading, preaching, and hearing of your Word right now. In Jesus' name, amen.

This whole sermon is saturated in the gospel. All over what we just read was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In essence, Peter is saying, "This Jesus whom you crucified is alive. For the last 40 days, we have been with him, listening to him, watching him, learning from him, fellowshiping with him, and eating with him. He is alive!" He is preaching this with all of his heart.

Peter stops preaching in verse 36, which is where we stopped, and something very unexpected happens in verse 37. I am sure Peter never saw this coming. I can't wait to ask Peter, when I get to heaven, "You didn't see that coming, did you?" He would say, "What?" I'd say, "You know. Acts 2." I picture Peter going, "I didn't see it coming." Look at verse 37, when Peter stops.

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" They realize in this moment that Jesus really is who he says he is, and they can't deny it. They can't ignore it. It is piercing their hearts. They are overwhelmed and reeling under the power of the Holy Spirit's conviction. It's true, and now a

decision has to be made. Now, they can't be neutral anymore. They can't be in the middle. They have to decide. "If he is who he says he is, he requires something of us."

Understand something. These people already believed in God, just like a lot of us did when we were converted. These people are good people. Most of them are moral. They're not child molesters, rapists, or murderers, just like a lot of us weren't when we were converted. They just realized something in this moment. They now realized all of their niceness, decency, religion, or whatever it was wasn't enough, and they say, "What can we do? What do we do now?"

What Peter *doesn't* say next is just as important as what he *does* say next. What he doesn't say to them is, "Oh, okay. Well, be more moral. Just do a lot more good things." No, he doesn't say, "Keep more religious rules better. Stop breaking God's laws." He doesn't say that at all, because answering God's call to be a disciple doesn't begin with what you have to do or stop doing for God. No, it begins with what God has done for you. Look at his answer in verse 38.

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off [or far from God], everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked [crazy] generation.' So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Wow! Here begins, I think, the application for us today.

1. *Our conversion must begin with repentance.* True conversion, true Christianity, true discipleship begins with repentance. Becoming a disciple of Jesus starts with a complete change of heart regarding my sin. Sin is anything and everything I say and do that violates God's good and holy laws for living in relationship with him.

In Acts, chapter 17, we read, "**The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now** [since the cross] **he commands all people everywhere to repent...**" Isn't that interesting that repentance is a command of God? It's not an option. It's not a suggestion. God commands every man, woman, and child to repent of their sin.

The question is...*But why?* Here's the answer to that. It's because sin has separated us from God. That's what Scripture tells us. In God's love, grace, and mercy, God has made it clear that our sins must be forgiven and removed, and when we die, we will face the judgment and be guilty, and we will be condemned forever. So, God says repent. Repent! Jesus said, "I tell you, unless you repent, you too will all perish!"

This is why more religion doesn't save you. This is why more rules can't save you. Listen. You understand this, right? Laws and rules are not made to remove our transgressions. Laws and rules are made to punish our transgressions. So, the answer to the repentance command is not to try

and make ourselves better, because we can't. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of God's standard, of God's glory."

Repentance is simply the decision to confess and own the fact that we're guilty and to take our trash bag (or truckload, for some of us) of sin and lay it down, lay all of them down at the foot of the blood-stained cross of Jesus Christ.

All of it: the lies, selfishness, anger, greediness, self-righteousness, all forms of sexual immorality and perversion, hatred, the sins of drugs and alcohol abuse, stealing, gossiping, lack of respect for authority and for parents, taking the Lord's name in vain, vulgar language, physical abuse of others, slander, laziness, gluttony, lust, materialism, pride, and love of money, just to name a few. All of it.

Repentance is to admit to it, confess it, and lay it down at the cross. Why? Because God shows his love for us in while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. You see, when Jesus died, his death counted as the punishment and the payment for our sin. The innocent paid the fine for the guilty ones. He did what we couldn't do for ourselves. So, repentance is the key that unlocks the vault of all of God's grace and forgiveness. Not our goodness, *his* goodness! We love him because he first loved us!

Romans 8:1 promises, "**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" By repentance and faith in Jesus' death on the cross, our sins can be forgiven and removed, all of them, every one of them. Our guilt and condemnation are exchanged for his righteousness and salvation.

Repentance means our failures do not have to be final. Repentance means our sins do not have to be fatal. Scripture says, "**...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**" That's the promise. That starts with repentance, but there's something else. Look at what Peter says. He says, "**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...**"

2. *Our repentance is to be confirmed by our baptism.* Baptism is the public declaration of a heart that is trusting in Jesus by repenting. Baptism is that beautiful outward sign or symbol. It's an expression of what has happened in the heart that has repented. The water of baptism is not magical. It's not mystical. It's not holy water. It doesn't even come from Jerusalem.

That water represents the blood of Jesus that has washed away our sin. When we go under that water, it represents the burial of our sin in a grave, just like Jesus took our sin to the cross and then buried in the grave. It is over. It is done. It is gone, and when we come up out of that water, it is a beautiful picture of starting over. It is a new life. It is resurrection to living in a relationship with God through Christ with sins forgiven and removed. Today is an invitation to begin this year, to make today the day you choose life once and for all, that you repent and be baptized.

Some of you have never done this before. It's not that you don't believe in God. You're not necessarily an atheist or opposed to church, but you have never surrendered your life. You have never taken your sin, laid it down, and walked away from it. Today, God invites you to repent once and for all, to walk away from every way of thinking and way of living that violates God's holy laws for you to be in relationship with him and then to be baptized.

Notice baptism wasn't a question. It wasn't a suggestion. It was a part of the beginning of true conversion. Some of you in this room are disciples of Jesus. You love Jesus, but you've never been baptized. Today is an invitation for you to settle that once and for all, to not linger in the excuses, good or bad.

For some of you, it's like, "Oh, it just hasn't been convenient." For others of you, nobody has really ever explained to you the significance of baptism and that it's very much a part of the picture of true conversion and discipleship. For others of you, the excuses are really lame. "Oh, I don't know. I don't like to get my hair wet in front of people," or, "I don't know. It's kind of embarrassing." You just don't have an excuse, and you know it in your heart; it's just time today.

This is the purpose of this series. What does it say? That's what we do. We repent and we're baptized, and so I'm going to also invite many of you. If you're a disciple of Jesus already but you haven't been baptized, then let's take care of that. If you're not a disciple of Jesus yet, come forward today. I'm going to invite you.

We're going to do this. No manipulation, emotional tugs, or weirdness. In just a minute, we're going to stand up and I'm going to ask you to come down one of these aisles and say, 'Okay. I surrender. I'm laying it all down at the cross and I'm going to repent and ask Jesus to forgive me and take away my sins. I'm committing to follow him in baptism.' Again, for others of you, the decision for Christ has been made. The decision for baptism has not. Today is that day. Would you bow your heads just for a moment? Would you let me pray?

Jesus, I ask that you would perform the miracle of faith right now in this room. I pray for those who are broken in their own sin, God. Jesus, give them a glimpse, a vision of being cleansed of all of the guilt, shame, regrets, and even all of the ignorance of their sin. O God, show them today that you love them that much.

God, I pray for those who are here right now and they're broken because of those who have sinned against them. O Jesus, give them a glimpse of a life freed from the sadness, anger, fear, and confusion of what life has offered them so far. O God, I pray that those in this room who need to surrender in obedience, trust, and faith will, in fact, today.

God, let today be the day of their salvation, the day when they are committing to follow you, to be a true disciple, baptized in the name of Jesus. God, may today be that day, the day of being born again, with all of the old things gone and all of the new blessings from heaven available. O God, do the impossible now. In the name of Jesus, amen.

In just a minute, we're going to stand and we're just going to sing that song again that we've already sung. Church, listen to me now. The minute we begin singing, the minute the first word is sung, that's when the invitation begins. Just turn to the person next to you. Just nudge them or look at them. They would be glad to step back.

I'm going to invite you to join me. I'm just going to come down here. No shenanigans. We're just going to do what it says. We're going to respond to the call of God to repent and receive the forgiveness of Jesus that comes from his death on the cross. We're going to respond to follow that up in baptism in his name. We're just going to pray together. There's going to be no halo landing on your head. You're not going to grow any wings like an angel. You're just going to do what God has invited you to do, what he has provided for you to do.

Let's get to our feet and now let's let God do the miracle. You come. I'm going to be right here. You come and let's do what he says.

[Song]

O come to the altar
The Father's arms are open wide
Forgiveness was bought with
The precious blood of Jesus Christ

O come to the altar
The Father's arms are open wide
Forgiveness was bought with
The precious blood of Jesus Christ

[End of song]

Wow! This side of the room obviously listened to the message! Right now, the angels in heaven, the Bible tells us, are rejoicing, but listen. I know it's so hard to do this, because none of us want the attention on ourselves. None of us want people thinking it's about us. All I can say to you is it's not about you right now. It's about God and what he has done for you. It's about you simply saying, "God, I give up. If you've done that for me, I surrender. I'm going to repent and receive Jesus, and I'm going to be a real disciple who follows you."

I don't want you to leave here, again, resisting God's invitation to you. I know some of you are standing next to a spouse. Some of you are standing with your kids. Some of you are standing with a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Others of you have your parents standing right there and you're thinking all these thoughts. You need to stop thinking that and you need to remember what God has revealed to you and what he has said. I just want to sing this one more time. The people

around you will rejoice for you. Stop worrying about you and trust God today. Okay? Come on. Let's sing it one more time. You come. Come on.

[Song]

O come to the altar
The Father's arms are open wide
Forgiveness was bought with
The precious blood of Jesus Christ

O come to the altar
The Father's arms are open wide
Forgiveness was bought with
The precious blood of Jesus Christ

[End of song]

Okay, those of you who have come forward, I want you to turn around and face me up here. Okay. We're going to just pray together. These words aren't magical. They aren't mystical. They're words that come from the heart. Every word that passes over our lips first comes from the heart.

I'm going to lead you in a prayer that just says, "God, I give up. Save me," or, "Receive me back," if this is a recommitment. Commit to trusting him for the rest of your life. I'm going to pray these words, and then you're going to repeat them after me out loud. Just quietly, right where you are. Let's all bow our heads right now, including you. You who have come forward, repeat these words for me.

Dear God, I admit I'm a sinner and I need your forgiveness. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me. Today, I lay my sin at his cross and I receive all of your forgiveness, grace, and love. Today, I commit to being a true disciple, a follower of Jesus, baptized in his name. Amen.

Let's rejoice, church! We want to give you something to go home with today. We're just going to start the process now of walking the next step through baptism, but we want to give you something to go home with today. There are some people standing right here. They're ready to go. I want you to just walk over there and let them give you that and find out who you are, and then you're free to go. Go ahead and head that way right now.

Church, I don't know what God is going to do over the next six weeks, but I just pray that when it's all said and done we're going to be a church filled with people who have no doubt what it

means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ who follows him. Be praying for the next few Sundays, and let's just expect that God is going to do miracles just like now. Amen.

I can't wait to see you next Sunday. God bless you.