

## Follow Me 4-10-16

Lord Jesus, we beg You, don't leave us for a minute! Cause us to look to You in all things. Help us to cry out to You in trouble first! Don't let us forget that in quietness & trust is our strength! We thank & praise You for Your goodness.

Sometimes we can get caught up in the smallest detail – anything that will distract us from the real thing. Have you ever wondered why the number 153 was used to tell us how many fish were in the boat? Apparently many people have wondered. Brett Blair gives us these facts.

“Cyril of Alexandria in the 5th century said that the 100 represented the fullness of the gentiles, the 50 symbolized the remnant of Israel and the three of course was there for the Trinity.

Augustine's theory (5th century) was a little more complicated. He said, there are 10 commandments and 7 is the perfect number of grace and that's 17. Now if you add all the numbers from 1 to 17 together,  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5$  all the way to 17 you'll get 153. Then if you were to arrange them with 17 fish in the first row, and 16 in the next row, and 15 in the next row, all the way down to a row of 1 you get a perfect triangle which of course symbolizes the Trinity.

Jerome, 5th century, suggested that there were 153 different types of fish in the sea and it was symbolic of the church reaching all the people in the world.

I think it's mentioned because there were 153 fish in the net.” I agree.

To me, the most important points of the Gospel are 1. The men fished all night. They were experienced fishermen, yet when a stranger on the shore told them to cast their nets on the right side, for some reason, they obeyed. Their nets were filled w/fish. **Then** they recognized it was Jesus. And, 2<sup>nd</sup>, the fact they'd fished all night & caught nothing. (A similar story is told in Luke 5. Jesus was in the process of rounding up His disciples. After the disciples had fished all night, & after Jesus did some teaching from the boat, He directed them to go out into the deep & let down their

nets. Peter's response at that time was, "Master, we have toiled all night & took nothing! But at Your Word, I will let down the nets." Don't you love those words? We have worked all night, but if You say so, I will let down the nets. That's powerful! Going against reason to follow the command of the Lord!) I think the stories are also symbolic of what happens when we try to do things on our own – w/o the blessing of God – the power of the Holy Spirit! – compared to doing things in obedience to God's Word. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> time Jesus had shown Himself to the disciples after He had been raised from the dead. At this point in the church year, we focus on these texts – almost like they are proof texts – proving Jesus' resurrection.

If we were needing proof Jesus is alive, wouldn't we look to the story Paul's conversion as a proof text? What an amazing story! Paul had phenomenal zeal – defined as great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective. 1<sup>st</sup>, his energy was negatively directed at Christians: "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2** and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." Paul was determined! Zealous! He wouldn't ever be described as "lukewarm." Paul got knocked off his horse, was blind for 3 days, & had a disciple of Jesus, Ananias – who obeyed the Lord even tho he was afraid of Paul because news of Paul's persecution had spread - come & lay hands on him & pray. Paul, then called Saul, regained his sight & w/in days he was in the synagogues preaching "Jesus is the Son of God! Jesus is the Christ!" The Jews who lived in Damascus were amazed!

Confounded! Paul was a totally changed man! We see in this story of Paul a dramatic demonstration of what the power of God, what the Living Christ can do to a man! Even though He died, Jesus lives! He lives today!

What does this say to us? Are we zealous for the Gospel? Do we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus can turn persecutors of Christianity into devout followers of Jesus? There seem to be so many who oppose the Gospel. Who will listen? Our world is so upside down & backwards. If we say we oppose abortion, we're a part of a war on women. Has anyone talked w/one who's had an abortion? Have they heard the pain? Yes, there's forgiveness, but there's a need for deep healing. If we say Jesus has a better way than the homosexual life-style, we're homophobes, haters! Does the media ever present the opposite side where men & women are free of SSA? If we don't agree the economy is getting better, we're "peddling fiction." Oh, a national debt of close to \$20 trillion is an improvement of the economy?? Really, who will listen? We can let the situation of the world get us down, or we can seek God, realizing He has it all in control. We need to be prepared for whatever may happen – we & our children. I don't believe we get prepared lackadaisically saying "whatever will be, will be. It's all good – it is NOT all good. Everything happens for a reason." Everything may happen for a reason, but it's not always God's reason. It may be man's stupidity! The truth is people still need Jesus – the living God!

If we know that we know the only solution for life's dilemma is intimacy w/ God, it seems to me we'd be zealous about cultivating a close relationship w/ Him. We'd be in the Word. We'd be praising & thanking Him for His blessings to us. Worship would be what we are about. Now, for all of us, this most likely is at least partially true. So what's the problem?

For me, I like my life. I like being able to pick what I'm having for dinner. I like going out to lunch w/friends. I like being able to wash clothes & either put them in the dryer or hang them out. I like clean sheets, a comfy bed, & slippers. I like driving a car. I love my family. But I **do** know that none of this would be enough to satisfy for very long – there has to be more to life – plus all the stuff I mentioned could change in a moment. There's got to be more – a purpose. I know that being a child of God, able to spend eternity w/Him, is a huge blessing – but do I get kind of “Ho hum..” about it? Living day to day w/Him, I'm afraid I take an awful lot for granted - like I somehow deserve all this. I do know that I would never have been able to get thru the heart-break & heart-ache w/o the Lord. When things go well, it's difficult to remember how much I need the Lord – moment by moment. Where's my zeal?

How about you? Are you zealous for Jesus? We've read Rev.3:15 in Sunday School - “because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of My mouth..” That's scary! But you know we don't get hot by trying real hard to act enthusiastically. Being hot, being zealous, is a condition that we develop as we listen

to the Lord. We're called to expose evil, to confront it, as well as preach the Good News. It involves taking risks; it can be frightening!

Taking risks – godly ones – is an adventure, & do you know that adventure is a basic need of people? If God is asking you to speak to someone, you might not do it if **having people like you** is a higher priority than **obeying God**. You'll miss the adventure if you constantly play it safe. If you choose to confront a problem, the confrontation may or may not go well. We do what we have to do and leave the results up to God.

When we realize how swiftly things are going downhill, we get a sense of urgency – we have no idea how much time we have to reach people for Jesus. People are hungry for God, but do they know it? Or do they think other things will satisfy. We also have to remember we have an enemy – we are in a spiritual war! Satan has blinded the minds of many. We don't know who'll respond to the Gospel – but God does. Can you imagine how differently the people Peter was speaking to reacted to “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” than Americans do? Peter was speaking to exiles hungry for God's word. Many Americans would be unmoved by those words – of course we are God's special people.

But we know the Jesus who called us, forgiven us, taken our sins to the cross, lives!  
We may not get to see Him on the shore or behind locked doors like the apostles did.  
We see what He has done in the lives of others. We see what He does in our lives –  
the peace He brings when we finally surrender our burden to Him. What causes us to  
be zealous? Isn't it knowing the God of all creation calls us His own? Isn't it when we  
are again reminded of the marvelous grace of God? He hasn't given up on us. He yet  
again ministers forgiveness of sin. If God has forgiven us, if God hasn't given up on  
us, if God continues to love us & call us His own, there then is hope for anyone.

Amen.

Regarding our next hymn: vault is defined as a thing resembling an arched roof, esp.  
the sky: the vault of heaven. In Rev. 5 we heard the hosts of heaven praise the Lamb -  
“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor  
and glory and blessing!” So as we sing, we join the vault of heaven, “Christ has triumphed!  
He is Living! Oh fill us Lord w/dauntless love; Set heart & will on things above That  
we conquer through YOUR triumph; Grant grace sufficient for life's day that by our  
lives we truly say; Christ has triumphed! He is living! Alleluia!