



Responses to Jesus

"Fool, Fan, or Follower"

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RESPONSES TO JESUS

Divided Because of Him

John 7:1-44

Introduction: Jesus is one of the most well-known people in all of human history. However, throughout Jesus' life and ministry, people had various responses to Him, to His miracles and to His teachings. Even after almost three years of public ministry (which is when the passage we will look at took place) the people were still "divided" in their responses to Him. And the same can be said of people today...

Opening Question: Think of a well-known controversial person and discuss a few differing views (and feelings) that people have about him/her.

Read [John 7:1-44](#)

[Note: The Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths) was one of the three great festivals in the Jewish year (along with Passover and Pentecost). It was attended by Jews from around the world and lasted for eight days. Its purpose was to celebrate God's provision for the Jewish people during their wilderness wanderings before entering the Promised Land. Later, it included celebration of God's goodness in the giving of the harvest.]

Discussion Questions

1. The passage ends with the statement that "the people were divided because of Jesus." Go back through the passage and make a list of all the people mentioned, making note of their various responses to Jesus.

v.2	"The Jews"	"waiting to take His life"
v.3	"Jesus' brothers"	"did not believe in Him"
v.12	"some (in the crowd)"	"He is a good man"
v.12	"others (in the crowd)"	"He deceives people"
v.15	"The Jews"	"were amazed (at His teaching)"
v.20	"the crowd"	(confused: "Who is trying to kill you?")
v.25	"some of the people of Jerusalem"	(doubt: "Isn't this the man...?")
v.30	"they" (most likely "the Jews")	"tried to seize Him"
v.31	"many in the crowd"	"put their faith in Him"
v.32	"the chief priests and Pharisees"	"sent guards to arrest Him"
v.35	"The Jews"	(confused: "What did he mean...?")
v.40	"some of the people"	"surely this man is the Prophet" (see Duet 18:15-18)
v.41	"others"	"He is the Christ"
v.41	"still others"	(doubt: "Does not the Scripture say...?")
v.44	"some" (most likely "the Jews")	"wanted to seize Him"

[Note: All of the people mentioned in this passage were part of three major groups: 1) "The Jews"—who often in John's gospel referred to the Jewish leaders who were hostile to Jesus (which included the chief priests and the Pharisees); 2) "the people of Jerusalem"—who were the residents of the city; and 3) "the crowd"/ "the people"—who were primarily the Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from around the world to attend the Feast (but also could have included some of the Jewish leaders and Jerusalem residents, as well.)

2. How would you categorize the various responses to Jesus by the people in this passage? (e.g. Positive? Negative? Neutral? Surprising? Determined? Uncertain? Confused?)

Summary: Like the people in this passage, people today are still “divided” because of Jesus. In other words, people still have differing responses to Him, His miracles, and His teachings. And these responses can be categorized into three different types—all of which will be looked at and considered in the remaining Bible studies in this series:

“Fools”

[Note: This designation is not being used or is intended to be understood in a derogatory way, implying that some people are in every way unintelligent or unable to make good judgments. Rather, it will be used—like Jesus used it at times—for people who make poor/wrong judgments about Him. [Examples of where this word was used by Jesus in this way are when people heard His words but did not put them into practice (Matt 7:26), when a person was living for himself instead of living for God (Luke 12:16-21) and when others weren’t living in a way that expected His second-coming (Matt 25:1-13).] Therefore, in this Bible study series we will be looking at a few other examples of people who responded to Jesus in ways that He most likely would have considered “foolish” as well.

3. How else might you characterize someone who acts “foolishly” toward Jesus?

“Fans”

This designation will be used for those who are admirers of Jesus, i.e. those who like to be (or at least are willing to be) associated with Jesus and/or to be around Him. There were plenty of these types of people in Jesus’ day. They were the people who flocked around Jesus and followed Him around because of what He did—which often benefitted them personally—but with no personal commitment to Him. Today’s “fans” of Jesus are much the same. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires sacrifice. They might know a lot about Him—and even like Him—but they lack faith and/or willingness to commit themselves to Him wholly and unreservedly. And they want to keep control of their lives. Jesus may be several things to them, but He isn’t their Lord.

4. How else might you characterize a “fan” of Jesus?

“Followers”

This designation will be used for people who have understood their need for Jesus and have given their lives to Him as Lord. They love Jesus and pursue Him, His teachings, and His will. They also seek to live out His ways in a loving response to Him for what He has done and for who He is. Being committed to Him as Lord, they are willing to obey and follow Jesus wherever, whenever and whatever—no matter what it costs them. They aren’t perfect and don’t always do Jesus’ will, but this is the desire of their hearts and the overall direction of their lives. True followers of Jesus have responded with commitment to Jesus’ call to follow Him found in Luke 9:23; “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.”

5. How else might you characterize a true “follower” of Jesus?

Reflection Question: How would you describe your own responses to Jesus and current relationship with Him?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

Some Unbelieving Fools

John 10:22-39

Introduction: The first people that we are going to look at are the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day. These men were generally hostile toward Jesus and they actually wanted to kill Him. In this study, we'll be taking a closer look at these men, with hopes of understanding more about why they responded to Jesus the way that they did.

Opening Question: Think about something that you recently heard or read about that you found/find hard to believe and tell why.

Read [John 10:22-39](#)

Discussion Questions

[*Note: This incident took place only a few months before Jesus' death. Jesus is at a large Jewish gathering and "The Jews" (Jewish leaders) are gathered around Him.*]

1. The Jewish leaders asked Jesus to tell them if He really is the Christ. Was their inquiry sincere?

Their inquiry seems insincere. They had already been looking for a way to kill Jesus (John 5:18; 7:1) and had even attempted to do so before this (John 8:59). And here, once again, they are ready to kill Him (v.33).

2. Why did the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus?

Because of His blasphemy. He was claiming to be God.

3. Did Jesus deny or affirm their accusation?

Jesus doesn't deny their accusation, but rather He affirms that He had said that He was God's Son. (v.36)

4. What does Jesus make clear is the real reason why they do not listen to Him and accept His claim to be God's Son?

It is because of their unbelief. (vv.25, 37, 38)

5. Why didn't the Jewish leaders believe Jesus to be God's Son, and therefore follow Him?

Three main reasons:

1. Read John 6:41-42

⁴¹ At this the Jews (the Jewish leaders) there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"

What is the reason for unbelief found in this passage?

Reason #1: They thought that Jesus was only a man (and therefore, could not be God).

Note: This is the one reason mentioned in our passage (see 10:33). But there are more...

2. Read John 7:41-42, 52

(Some of the people said): “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” ⁵² They (the Jewish leaders) replied: “Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

What is the reason for unbelief found in this passage?

Reason #2: They thought that Jesus didn’t have the right credentials.

[Note: In their hostility toward Jesus, the Jewish leaders were wrong here. Jonah (an OT prophet) came from Galilee, and others might have as well. However, they did know that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem in Judea (where Jesus was actually born—though they didn’t know this), not Nazareth in Galilee (where Jesus grew up—which they did know)]

3. Read John 5:16-18

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things (healing) on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

What is the reason for unbelief found in this passage?

Reason #3: They thought that Jesus kept breaking the Sabbath (c.f. Mark 2:23-3:6)

[Note: Other passages would reveal how Jesus—in the minds of the Jewish leaders—broke other “laws” as well (e.g. He ate with tax collectors and “sinners”)]

Summary

The Jewish leaders were “fools.” They not only didn’t believe Jesus (and therefore wouldn’t listen to Him or follow Him), but they also wanted to kill Him. And eventually they did!

Not all “fools,” however, are hostile to Jesus. But many do not follow Him because of unbelief—which can exist for many different reasons.

6. What are some of the reasons that keep people today from believing and fully following Jesus?

Some of the reasons are the same as those of the Jewish leaders (e.g. How can Jesus be both a man and God at the same time?)

However, some of the reasons may be different (e.g. How can Jesus be the only way to God? How could Jesus rise from the dead? etc.)

Application Questions

- Are you a “fool” as well because of your unbelief in what Jesus said or did—even if you aren’t hostile toward Him?
- What issues of unbelief keep you from believing and fully following Jesus?
- What might help you to believe?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

A Pretending Fool

Matt 26:14-25, 47-50

Introduction: As we learned from our last study, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus. They eventually get their way, but not without help from others. This study will focus on one of their “accomplices”—Judas Iscariot—who will also be shown to be a fool in his response to Jesus.

Opening Question: Share about a situation in which you were taken by surprise by finding out that someone who you thought was a friend and for you was really someone out to hurt or discredit you.

Introduction to Judas Iscariot:

[Note: Judas Iscariot was one of “the Twelve” chosen by Jesus out of all of His “disciples” to be with Him throughout His entire earthly ministry (Luke 6:12-16). This gave Judas the opportunity to walk in close fellowship with Jesus, to learn from Him and to experience His grace and power. He was also given power and authority from Jesus and sent out in His name to do the ministry of preaching the gospel, casting out demons and healing the sick (Luke 9:1-2, 6).]

Discussion QuestionsRead [Matt 26:14-25](#)

1. With all that was said about Judas earlier regarding Jesus’ relationship with him, why is what we read about him in these verses so shocking?

Judas was loved by Jesus. He was also trusted by Jesus (e.g. he was given responsibility to do ministry in Jesus’ name; he was given charge of the money bag, John 13:29; etc.) Here we see him doing a very unloving thing toward Jesus and breaking the trust that he had with Him.

What does it reveal about him?

*He was a pretender (i.e. he showed outward loyalty but had no heart commitment to Jesus).
He loved money more than he loved Jesus. (See also Matt 26:6-13 and John 12:4-6.)
He was a traitor (willing to betray Jesus for thirty silver coins).*

2. In v.21, Jesus tells his disciples that one of them would betray Him. What do Jesus’ words in vv.23-24 communicate to Judas—and offer him at the same time?

*What he is about to do had serious (and eternal) consequences
He didn’t have to do it. He could confess and be forgiven.*

What is revealed further about Judas in his question back to Jesus (v.25)?

*His use of “Rabbi” instead of “Lord” (which was used by the other disciples, v.22) showed his lack of understanding and/or relationship with Jesus.
He was unwilling to confess and repent.
He continued to deceive.
He was a liar, knowing full well what he was about to do.*

[Note: John 13:26-30 tell us that as soon as Jesus identifies Judas as the one who would betray Him, Judas went out to do what he had planned to do.]

Read [Matt 26:47-50](#)

3. What do Jesus' words to Judas reveal about His relationship with him—even knowing that Judas was about to betray Him?

He still loved him. (He calls him "friend")

Read [Matt 27:1-5](#)

4. What did Judas realize? What did he fail to remember and do that left him a "fool"?

*He realized his wrongdoing.
However, he failed to confess his sin to God and find forgiveness for it.
He ended up killing himself.*

Summary

Judas Iscariot was a "fool." Some would say that he was the greatest fool of all time and made the greatest error in all history. Some are less harsh on him because of his remorse. In any case, he will always be remembered for one thing: his betrayal of Jesus.

Most of us probably wouldn't ever consider doing something like he did toward Jesus. However, many of us do love some things more than we love Jesus and often times go after this greater love instead of Him. And because of this, are "fools" like Judas.

5. What are some of the things in people's lives that they might love and pursue more than Jesus?

Money, people, success, approval, or admiration of others

Another way that Judas was a "fool" was that he was a "pretender." His outward show of loyalty to Jesus was meaningless because he lacked a true inward relationship with Him.

6. How do some people "pretend" in their relationship with Jesus? What might this look like?

Doing the "right" things that make them look "righteous" (e.g. going to church), but not doing them out of a love for Jesus.

Saying the "right" things to others (or Jesus), but not really meaning them in their hearts.

And finally, Judas was a "fool" because he didn't seek forgiveness from God for his wrongdoing. Thinking that it was too late for him, he ended his life in suicide.

7. Why do people sometimes think that they have done something (s) so bad that God could never forgive them? What might true "Jesus-following" remorse and forgiveness seeking look like?

Application Questions

- How might you be "pretending" in your relationship with Jesus?
- Are there some things in your life that you love more than Jesus?
- In what ways do your words and/or outward actions not really reflect what is in your heart regarding Him?
- Are you being a "fool" by not seeking forgiveness for certain wrongdoing(s) in your life?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

A Cowardly Fool

John 18:28-19:16

Introduction: The people that we have looked at in our last two studies—the Jewish leaders and Judas Iscariot—all had been around Jesus much of His 3+ years of public ministry. The person that we will be looking at in this study, however, only meets Jesus in the closing hours before His death. Never-the-less, like the Jewish leaders and Judas Iscariot, he has a major role in it.

Opening Question: Share about a time when you made a decision/did something based on what others might think of you or do to you, rather than on what you knew was right.

Read [John 18:28-19:16](#)

Context: The Jewish leaders had already arrested and tried Jesus, pronouncing Him guilty of death according to their Law (Mark 14:53-64). Therefore, they take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, who alone had the authority to execute Him.

[*Note: If you have time and would like to do so, read the other accounts of Jesus' trial before Pilate: Matt 27:11-26; Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:1-25. Whether you read them or not, have three people turn to these passages and be ready to read portions out of them during this study.*]

Discussion Questions

1. What do you sense is Pilate's view of this situation of the Jewish leaders bringing Jesus before him for execution?

It seems that Pilate didn't really want to be bothered by it.

[*Note: Read Matt 27:18. Pilate knew that it was out of envy that the Jewish leaders had handed Jesus over to him.*]

2. Overall, how would you describe Pilate's response to the charges made against Jesus?

He thought Jesus was innocent. (Three times he says, "I find no basis for a charge against him," 18:37, 19:4, 19:6)

[*Note: Read Matt 27:19. Pilate's wife also thought Jesus was innocent and wanted Pilate to let Him go.*]

3. How did Pilate's interactions with Jesus further influence his thinking about Him?

Pilate had heard Jesus affirm that He was the king of the Jews (Read Luke 23:3), but also that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36).

He may have wondered if what Jesus said was true. (Read John 19:14-15 and 19:22)

4. What solutions did Pilate offer to help placate the Jewish leaders (see 18:39 and 19:1-3)?

He offered to release Jesus (in accordance with an agreement the Romans had with the Jews to release a prisoner at the time of Passover).

He had Jesus flogged, and also allowed his soldiers to treat Him cruelly.

How did the Jewish leaders respond?

They insisted that Jesus be put to death.

5. Look at John 19:7. What made Pilate “afraid,” and why?

Pilate may not have understood Jesus’ claim or believed it, but in any case, it shook him.

So, what did Pilate want to/try to do?

He wanted to release Jesus and therefore tried to set Him free (v.12; cf. Luke 23:20).

6. What pressure came against Pilate that finally caused him to hand Jesus over to be crucified?

He was being threatened by the Jewish leaders that, if he were to release Jesus, he would be accused of being in opposition against the Roman Governor, Caesar (which may have cost him his job, even his life!).

[Note: Matt 27:24 also states that the crowd (because of the influence of the Jewish leaders) was in an “uproar,” putting a lot of pressure on Pilate to hand Jesus over to be crucified. Therefore, as Mark 15:15 tells us, “wanting to please the crowds,” he handed Jesus over.]

Summary

Pilate was a “fool;” a people-pleaser and a coward. Despite knowing that Jesus was innocent of the charges against him and that setting Him free was the right thing to do—because of his fear of the crowd, the Jewish leaders, and the Roman government—Pilate cowardly gave in to his fears and had Jesus crucified anyway. Because of this, he has been remembered throughout history as the one who was responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion, even though he tried to put the responsibility on others (Matt 27:24).

[Note: The Nicene Creed (the profession or creed of faith most widely used in Christian liturgy) states that, “For our sake he (Jesus) was crucified under Pontius Pilate” and that “he suffered death and was buried.”

7. What are some of the pressures that influence people today to not respond to Jesus with faith and courage, or to not do the things that Jesus commands—even when they know that what they are doing (or not doing) is wrong?

Pressure from peers (with potential loss of friends, respect, social status, etc.)

Pressure from parents and other family members (with potential loss of support, care, etc.)

Pressure from coaches and teammates (with potential loss of playing time, recognition, etc.)

Pressure from employers (with potential loss of job, promotions, financial gain, etc.)

[Note: James 4:17 states that “Anyone who knows the good he/she ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” This includes how we respond to Jesus and what we do with what He has commanded.]

Application Questions

- Are you a “fool” like Pilate because you haven’t responded to Jesus with faith and courage?
- Have you neglected to do (or not do) what you’ve known to be right in regards to Jesus and His commands because of your fear of what others might think of you or do to you?
- How can you stand strong and courageous in your faith and in an on-going right response to Jesus and in doing what is right—even in the face of opposition and pressure?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

The Sad Fool

Mark 10:17-27

Introduction: In this study we meet someone whose view of Jesus seems positive, and who sincerely wants to do what was right. This is why, as we will see, his response to Jesus is so surprising—and sad.

Opening Questions: What is something that you have that is so important to you that you find very difficult (maybe even impossible) to lend or give to someone else? Why?

Read [Mark 10:17-27](#)

[Note: This incident happens right after Jesus had spent time with some little children who were brought to Him (vv13-16).]

Discussion Questions

1. In this encounter with Jesus, a man (Matt 19:22 tells us that he was a young man) comes running up to Jesus, falls on his knees and asks Him a question: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v.17). Why do you think he asks this question?

He may have asked the question having just heard Jesus say to His disciples that anyone who does not receive the Kingdom of God (and therefore, inherit eternal life) like a little child, will never enter it (v.16)—which may have left him wondering, “What must I (a young man) do...?”

Why do you think it was so important to him?

As we will see, the man had worked hard and done a lot in hopes of earning his way into God’s Kingdom (i.e. earning eternal life). However, with what he had just heard Jesus say, he may have become unsure that he had done all of the “right” things.

2. Jesus first answers the man’s question with a question: “Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.” (v.18) Any idea why Jesus might have said this and what He was trying to communicate?

Jesus was essentially asking, “Do you realize the true meaning of calling me what belongs to God alone?” In essence, Jesus was encouraging the man to consider His true identity, i.e. that He Himself was God.

3. Jesus goes on to say: “You know the commandments” and goes on to list five of the Ten Commandments. (Read v.19) What do you think of the man’s response (v.20)?

The man may have responded sincerely because, as a Jew, at age 13, he would have assumed personal responsibility for obeying the commandments—and he may very well have worked hard and done a good job of keeping them.

4. Look at what Jesus says in response to this. (Read v.21)

Do you think that there really was only “one thing” that the man lacked?

No; Jesus knew that the man wasn’t perfect except for one thing. However, He did know that there was something that the man needed to recognize and “do” that was standing in the way of him inheriting eternal life.

Why does Jesus tell the man to “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me”?

Jesus loved the man. However, despite all of the good things that the man had done, Jesus knew of the man's great love for his wealth—and that this was an area of His life that he hadn't given up complete control of to God. Therefore, he put the man to the test to determine what he would choose—would he (the man) or He (Jesus) be in control of his life.

Why did Jesus have the right/the authority to ask these things of the man?

Jesus was God. Therefore, the man needed to trust and obey Him.

5. What was the man's response? Why wasn't he able to do what Jesus told him to do, and what does this say about what was most important to him?

(v.22) "he went away sad, because he had great wealth."

The man loved his wealth more than he wanted to do what it took to have eternal life.

[Note: It wasn't that the man didn't love God or that he wasn't willing to give some (and maybe even most) of his life to God. However, he wasn't willing to give God (and in this situation, Jesus) control of all his life. And this is what Jesus was asking him to do.]

6. What is verses 23-27 all about? What does Jesus say about the "pull" that wealth has in peoples' lives? What does He say about the power and ability of God?

Wealth is one of many things that people desire so strongly that they are unwilling to give up to allow Jesus to have complete control of their lives. God, however, can help people do this if they are willing.

7. What are some other things that people desire so strongly that they are unwilling to give up to allow Jesus to have complete control of their lives?

Relationships, lifestyle issues, areas of interest and investment (job, sport, career path, etc.).

Summary

This man was a "fool." He had worked hard to be "righteous" and truly wanted to have eternal life, but he wanted even more to be in control of his life. He was unable to fully trust (and obey) Jesus and follow Him because there was something more important to him that he needed to give up control over—but couldn't.

Application Questions

- Are there things in your life that are so important that they keep you from giving Jesus complete control over your life? (e.g. money, career, comforts, things you like doing, relationships, etc.)
- Are these things more important to you than knowing that you will receive eternal life when you die? [Consider Jesus' words: "What good is it for you to gain the whole world (i.e. have whatever you want), and yet lose or forfeit your very self?" (Luke 9:25); and the words of Jim Elliot (a missionary killed by the people he tried to share Jesus with) "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."]

RESPONSES TO JESUS

A Secret Fan

John 3:1-21, 7:50-52, 19:38-42

Introduction: So far in this series, we've looked at several people who responded to Jesus as "fools." However, not all were hostile or indifferent toward Jesus. In fact, the rich young man was actually drawn to Him and sought Him out. In this study, we will again see someone seeking out Jesus because of his admiration of Him. How will he respond to Jesus and His words?

Opening Question: Talk about a secret "crush" that you've had on someone and tell how and why you kept it a secret from that person and others.

Read [John 3:1-21](#)

Discussion Questions

1. As a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin), why did Nicodemus go to Jesus? What was different about His view of Jesus vs. the views of other Jewish leaders?

He was an admirer of Jesus and he showed respect toward Jesus (referring to Him as "Rabbi"). He believed that Jesus had come from God and that God was with Him.

Why did he go at night?

He didn't want others to know that he was spending time with and talking to Jesus.

What might it have cost Nicodemus if others knew that he was a "fan" of Jesus?

*His reputation as a religious leader and member of the Sanhedrin
His job and source of income
The respect of his co-workers, friends, and family*

2. Why do you think Jesus says what He does to Nicodemus? What is he trying to communicate?

As a devout, orthodox Jew, Nicodemus probably presumed that His place in God's Kingdom was assured. Jesus, however, cuts to the core and addresses what is really needed.

Just as physical birth is needed to enter into this world, spiritual birth—that can only come from God—is what is needed to enter into His Kingdom.

Nicodemus' admiration of Jesus and belief in certain truths about Him weren't enough to get him into the kingdom of God.

[Note: Biblical belief is more than mental assent or verbal acknowledgement of things that are true. James 2:19 says that "Even the demons believe—and they shudder!" Belief in Jesus must be accompanied by commitment and it must affect how a person lives.]

What does it mean to be "born again" ("born from above" or "born of the Spirit")?

Being "born again" refers to "spiritual rebirth," which is the transformation that comes from God as a result of a person's repentance of the sin of running their own lives, their faith in Jesus' work on the cross and ability to run their lives, and the giving of their lives to Him as Savior and Lord. And this transformation results in one being a "new creation" with a "new nature" (2 Cor 5:17), able to know God and to please Him, marking them as His children and giving them entrance into His Kingdom.

3. What do Nicodemus' responses to Jesus tell us about his understanding of what Jesus was saying?

He doesn't seem to understand, and there is no indication of him making any kind of decision to be "born again."

It seems that he remained a secret admirer of Jesus, not having the courage to take his relationship with Jesus from words of belief to a life of committed fellowship.

Read [Luke 9:26](#)

4. In what ways and in what circumstances are people "ashamed" or afraid (like Nicodemus) to identify with Jesus and to follow Him, no matter what the cost or how others might view or treat them?

Read [John 7:50-52; 19:38-42](#)

5. What do these passages tell us about Nicodemus? What changes do we see in his relationship with Jesus?

He shows courage by publicly speaking up on Jesus' behalf (which resulted in a harsh rebuke from his co-workers).

He shows respect (and love?) for Jesus by publicly getting involved with and spending a great amount of money on the preparations for Jesus' burial.

6. Did he ever become a follower of Jesus?

We don't know, as no more is recorded about Nicodemus in the New Testament. It seems, however, that maybe—because of his public words and actions—he had moved from being simply a secret admirer to someone willing to be outwardly associated with Jesus. However, it remains unknown if he ever was "born again" or if he ever truly moved from being a "fan" to being a "follower" of Jesus.

Summary

When we first read about Nicodemus, he is no more than a secret "fan" of Jesus. Unlike other Jewish leaders, he believed certain truths about Jesus and he was attracted to Him. However, despite this positive view of Jesus, he was unwilling to give up what it might have cost him to become His follower. And therefore, his relationship with Jesus remained hidden from others throughout Jesus' life.

Toward the end of Jesus' life, and immediately following His death, Nicodemus seemed to show more courage and willingness to publicly identify with Jesus and to publicly show his admiration of him.

7. When people want to move from being secret "fans" of Jesus to being committed "followers" of Him, what might it take and what can/should they do to live this out?

It will mean we must be born again.

Along with God's help, we will need the help and encouragement of others.

Application Questions

- Are you a secret "fan" of Jesus (like Nicodemus), and ashamed or afraid to publicly identify and live as a "follower" of Him?
- If so, and you'd like to change, what can you/we do to help you live this out?
- Have you been "born again"? [Note: This is the most important and needed step in becoming a follower of Jesus.]

RESPONSES TO JESUS

Some Fans and “Fringe” Followers

John 6:1-35, 60-69

Introduction: Throughout Jesus’ public ministry, crowds of people regularly gathered around Him to see Him, listen to His teachings and to witness and experience His miracles. Most in the “crowd” remained mere spectators and/or recipients of what He had to offer them. However, some who met Jesus actually followed Him from place to place and identified themselves as His “disciples.” And out of this broader group of disciples, Jesus chose “the Twelve.” In this study, we will see all three of these groups of people responding to Jesus in different ways.

Opening Question: Tell of a time when you started something, but then—because it demanded something more than what you were able or willing to give—you stopped or gave up on it.

Read [John 6:1-35](#)

[Note: As background information to this text, Mark 6:30-33 tells us that “the Twelve” had just returned to Jesus from being sent out on a mission by Him. In an attempt to get away to be with them to debrief and rest, a great crowd gathers around Jesus. And as we see in vv1-13 of this passage, Jesus performs a great miracle by feeding 5000 men and their families]

Discussion Questions

1. In verses 13-26, Jesus leaves the crowd and eventually crosses over to the other side of the lake (Sea of Galilee)—and the crowd followed Him. Why?

Jesus says that they were looking for Him “not because they saw miraculous signs (and therefore believed), but because they ate the loaves and had their fill” (v.26).

They were looking for more bread! [Note: When they ask Jesus for another miraculous sign, they ask him to continually feed them, as God fed their forefathers in the desert.]

How is this like some people today who want to be around Jesus only for what they might get from Him (and/or being associated with those who follow Him)?

A “feel good” feeling, a group to be a part of, “health and wealth,” etc.

2. What does Jesus tell them that they should work for/seek after (vv.27-33)?

“Food that endures to eternal life” (v.27) and “bread” that “gives life” (v.33)

3. When the people ask for this “bread” (v.34), where does Jesus say that it can be found?

Jesus tells them that it is found in Him; He is “the bread of life” (v.35; see also vv.48, 51).

What did Jesus mean when He said that He is “the bread of life”?

When Jesus claims that He is “the bread of life,” he is claiming to be the only true source and giver of spiritual life and sustenance. Like physical food provides what our physical bodies need, Jesus says that He alone can provide what our spiritual lives need.

What did Jesus say was needed in order for them (and us) to get this “bread”?

They/we need to come to Him (vv.35; see also vv.37, 44, 45).

They/we need to believe in Him (vv.29, 35; see also vv.40, 47).

Read [John 6:60-69](#)

4. Why did many of His “disciples” (and probably many in the crowd as well) find Jesus’ claim that He was “the bread of life” a “hard teaching” and difficult to accept (v.60)?

Some might have been confused (What did it mean that He came down from heaven? That we need to eat His flesh? That we will never go hungry?).

Some, because of their unbelief, might have been unwilling to accept His exclusive claim that He was the only true source of spiritual truth and substance.

Some might have been too proud and self-reliant, not willing to accept that Jesus was enough.

What did they end up doing (v.66)?

“Turned back and no longer followed Him.”

Given their response, why do you think they had been following Jesus up to this point?

As we have seen already, many were with Him because He gave them something to eat! Others, who maybe had been following Him for some time, may have done so because of political reasons (see vv. 14-15; “they intended to come and make Him king”).

Why did they stop following Him now?

He wasn’t who they wanted Him to be (free bread provider, political leader, etc.) and He now was asking things of them that they were unable to believe and/or do.

5. What did “the Twelve” do? Why? What was the main difference between them and the other disciples who stopped following Jesus?

They continued to follow Him because they believed that “He had the words of eternal life” and that “He was the Holy One of God.”

Summary

Both the “fans” and the “fringe followers” in this account became “fools” by distancing themselves from Jesus when following Him was no longer self-gratifying and/or easy. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He calls us to follow Him for who He is—not for what we think He is or want Him to be. He also calls us to believe what He says and to do it—even if we don’t always understand and/or find it hard to do. And if we are to follow Him, He calls us to find in Him (“the bread of life”) all we need for spiritual life and sustenance.

Application Questions

- Do you pursue Jesus as the only true source and giver of spiritual life and sustenance?
- If not, who is Jesus to you? Why do you associate with/stay connected to Him?
- What happens in your life when Jesus asks something of you that isn’t enjoyable or easy for you to do?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

Three Wannabe Followers

Luke 9:57-62

Introduction: As we saw in our last study, it was common for Jesus to have lots of people who moved around with Him in His travels and ministry. However, not all did so just because of the benefits they received from Him (like getting free bread to eat!). In this study we will look at three men who seemingly wanted to follow Jesus, but who were tested by Him as to their readiness to do so. Through these tests, we will see more clearly what it means and takes to truly follow Him.

Opening Question: Talk about a time when you really wanted to do something but didn't because of what you discovered it would cost/require of you.

Read [Luke 9:57-62](#)

Discussion Questions

[Context: These verses tell us that Jesus interacts with three men while “walking along the road” (v.57). He was actually headed to Jerusalem (v.51), where He knew He would die (v.22)]

What are some of the similarities in these three situations?

All three men seemingly wanted to follow Jesus (two initiate their willingness and desire; one responds with his willingness and desire when Jesus calls him). None of them, however (so it seems), end up following Him. In fact, in every situation, Jesus seems to be making it really hard to follow Him!

1. The first wannabe follower (vv.57-58)

This man initiates his willingness to follow Jesus with a sweeping promise to follow Him “wherever” He goes. How does Jesus test this man’s readiness, and what does He imply about what it truly means to follow Him?

*Jesus says He doesn't have a home (i.e. He is without comforts and security).
Jesus was headed to Jerusalem (and this meant He would experience betrayal, rejection, abandonment, humiliation, and much suffering—as well as a gruesome death).*

Jesus was basically asking the man if he was willing to give up comforts and security—and even his own life—to follow Him.

Following Jesus means following Him wherever He goes and/or wants to lead us.

What are some of the places/situations that people find most difficult to follow Jesus? Why?

2. The second wannabe follower (vv.59-60)

This man is called by Jesus to follow Him. What do we see in the man’s response?

*He calls Jesus “Lord” (indicating at least a certain level of respect toward Jesus).
He asks to do something “first” before following Jesus (possibly indicating that though he was willing to follow Jesus, he wasn't willing to do so at that time).*

What seems strange—even uncaring—about Jesus’ response to the man’s request?

The man's request was a reasonable one—one that was in accord with religious, social, and family norms of the time. [Note: It may have been that his father had recently died and that because of this, he needed to take care of the burial arrangements. Most likely, however, the

man's father was still alive and thus he wanted to take care of his father in his old age and wait until after his father's death and burial to follow Jesus.]

What was Jesus really implying/requiring in His call to the man to "Follow me"?

Following Jesus means a radical transfer of loyalty and priorities. As Jesus says elsewhere, those who follow after Him must "Seek first His Kingdom..." (Matt 6:33). So important to Jesus was the business of following Him and promoting God's Kingdom that it took precedent even over the burial of family members.

[Note: v.60 probably means, "Let the (spiritually) dead bury the (physically) dead," implying that there are people who aren't in the Kingdom of God who can deal with earthly matters but that Kingdom people (i.e. true followers of Jesus) must give themselves—as a priority—to Kingdom matters.]

Following Jesus means following Him whenever He calls us to follow.

What are some of the things that hinder/keep people from completely following Jesus now?

3. The third wannabe follower (vv.61-62)

Like the first man, this man initiates and expresses to Jesus his willingness to follow Him. However, like the second man, there is a "but first" request—a reason for why he can't or doesn't want to follow Jesus at that time.

What is this reason, and why does it seem to be a reasonable request?

Family relationships are very important to God. Plus, there was a biblical precedent to the man's request (see 1 Kings 19:19-21)

What do you think Jesus is implying and requiring of the man in what He says to him?

There is always a cost to following Jesus. Even very important things like our relationships with family members must take second place to following Jesus and doing the work of the God's Kingdom (see Luke 14:26).

[Note: Jesus' reference to the plowman who looks back most likely refers to the would-be follower of Jesus whose affections and attentions are still on what was left behind.]

Following Jesus means following Him whatever it may cost us.

What are some things that Jesus may ask people to give up/leave behind in order to follow Him?

Summary

In these three situations, Jesus is testing the readiness of those who say that they want to follow Him. His desire—and the need of any wannabe follower of Him—is not that they give Him part of their lives or that they live part of their lives for Him, but rather that they count the cost and give all of their lives to Him. He deserves—and demands—no less.

Application Questions

- What would your life be like if you followed Jesus completely—no excuses, no restrictions, no "but firsts"—wherever, whenever, and whatever?
- What is keeping you from giving your life completely to Jesus and to following Him?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

A Fan Becomes a Follower

Luke 19:1-10

Introduction: In Luke 9:51, we saw that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where he would die. In this passage, he's almost there. We find Him passing through Jericho—a city about 17 miles from Jerusalem. Here he meets a “fan,” who, through his encounter with Jesus, has something radical happen to him. He becomes a true follower of Jesus!

Opening Question: Many people in our culture today want to change in some way. Where do they typically turn to for help?

Read [Luke 19:1-10](#)

[Note: Jericho was a border city with several trade routes passing through it. Because of this, it had a customs station which would have generated a lot of money from customs taxation. Also, because it was one of the wealthiest cities in Palestine, other tax income would have been extensive as well.]

Discussion Questions

1. What do we know about Zacchaeus before he meets Jesus (vv.1-4)?

He was wealthy, chief tax collector (How did he get his money? What was this job like?)

[As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus would have had others working for him. These tax collectors made money by extorting more money in taxes from the people than what they were contracted to pay the Roman government--and Zacchaeus would get a portion of this overage.]

He was short. (What problem did this present?)

He hadn't met (or even seen) Jesus before but wanted to see Him. (Why?)

He was a “fan” of Jesus. (How do we see this lived out?)

2. Look at v.5. What is interesting about what Jesus says to Zacchaeus while he was in the tree?

Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name. (And He had never met him before!)

Jesus invites Himself to be a guest at Zacchaeus' house (implying spending time, eating with him, etc.)

What does Jesus' use of the word “must” indicate about His plan and desire for Zacchaeus, and how does what He says in v.10 give us help in answering this question?

Jesus was on a mission “to seek and to save what was lost”; Zacchaeus was “lost” and needed to be saved; Jesus took initiative to seek out Zacchaeus in order that he might be saved

3. So...what did Zacchaeus do (v.6)?

Zacchaeus came down from the tree “at once” and welcomed Jesus gladly into his home.

Given what we saw in the last study about the “but first” responses of two of the wannabe followers of Jesus (Luke 9:59, 61), what is significant about the words “at once” in Zacchaeus' response?

This is the response of all who want to be true followers of Jesus (cf. Matt 4:18-22).

4. What was the reaction of the people to what happened? Why?

They got upset that Jesus wanted to be the guest of a “sinner.”

We are not told how long Jesus stayed in Zacchaeus’ house. However, we are told in v.9 that as a result of being with Jesus, Zacchaeus was saved, i.e. He received salvation.

5. What does it mean to be saved/to receive salvation?

It means to being spared from receiving God’s just wrath and from experiencing eternal punishment and separation from Him (which we deserve for our sins), but also receiving God’s forgiveness and the promise of eternal life with Him (which we don’t deserve).

How is someone saved? How do people receive God’s gift of salvation?

It comes through 1) the realization and sorrow of sin, 2) the turning away from sin (repentance), 3) the coming to Christ in faith, and 4) the giving of our lives to Him.

[Note: For an understanding of what Jesus meant by saying that Zacchaeus was a “son of Abraham,” (see Gal 3:7, 29). It would have meant that he had true faith and that he belonged to Christ.]

6. How does what Zacchaeus says in v.8 show what had happened to Him? What were the “fruits” of his faith and the initial life changing outcomes of becoming a follower of Jesus?

He promised to give half of his possessions to the poor.

He promised to pay back anyone who he had cheated by giving them four times the amount he had taken from them.

[Note: Zacchaeus’ restitution amount was on the high end required by Jewish law (see Ex 22:1-9).]

7. Did Zacchaeus continue to follow Jesus?

We don’t know for sure, at least from what is recorded in the Bible. However, a homily given by Clement of Alexandria (bishop there from 150-215 AD) reveals that this man Zacchaeus actually went on to be-come a bishop himself in Caesarea. If this is true, it means that Zacchaeus gave up his lucrative job as a chief tax collector and became a pastor of pastors!

Summary

In this story, Jesus sought out and called Zacchaeus to move from being a “fan” to having faith in Him and becoming His follower. Zacchaeus’ decision to do so not only had future and eternal ramifications, but immediate ones as well. His decision to follow Jesus meant both a transformation in his heart and radical changes in his life.

Application Questions

- Are you a follower of Jesus? If so, what radical—even sacrificial—changes has this brought into your life?
- What might Jesus be asking you to do right now as a loving response to the salvation He has given you?

RESPONSES TO JESUS

A Committed (but not perfect) Follower

Luke 5:1-11, Mark 10:28-30, Mark 14:27-32, 66-72, and others

Introduction: Throughout this Bible study series, we've been considering what is probably the most important question in life: "What is our response to Jesus?" We have seen that some people respond to Jesus as "fools"; i.e. they make poor/wrong judgments about Him out of unbelief, unwillingness, etc. We also have seen that some people respond to Jesus as "fans"; i.e. they admire Jesus and like (or at least are willing) to be associated with Him and/or to be around Him but haven't made a personal commitment to Him as Lord. In this study, we will look at a person who was a true "follower" of Jesus, i.e. someone who loved Jesus and pursued Him, who sought to live out his life in a loving response to Jesus for what He has done and for who He is, and who had given his life to Jesus and was committed to Him as the Lord of His life. This committed (but not perfect) follower of Jesus was Peter.

Opening Question: Think about a time that you let down someone/a group of people (like a teammate or your team). How did you feel? What kept you going and moving past your failure?

Read [Luke 5:1-11](#)

[*Note: Simon = Peter (see John 1:42)*]

Discussion Questions

1. Before this account, Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39), which probably caused Peter to appreciate and respect Jesus. This may have been why he was willing to stop cleaning his nets and let Jesus get into his boat to teach the crowds (even though he was tired from fishing all night and just wanted to finish his work and go home). It also may have been why he was willing to put out into deep water in the middle of the day and get his nets dirty again (even though as a skilled fisherman he knew that fishing was done at night in the shallow water, and therefore believed that they weren't going to catch anything!) At the end of this account, however, Peter's response to Jesus was to leave everything and follow Him (v.11)

What caused this change of response in Peter toward Jesus?

Jesus had revealed His authority in an area of Peter's life that he felt confident in, thus proving that He was capable (and worthy) to lead Peter's life.

What might it mean for him to leave everything to follow Jesus for the next 3+ years?

His vocation, business and source of income, his family, his home, etc.

[*Note: This same response of "leaving everything" is seen in the lives of others who responded with a YES to Jesus' call to follow Him (e.g. Levi in Luke 5:27-28) and is what Jesus taught and commanded as being the needed response to following Him (Luke 14:33).]*

Read [Mark 10:28-30](#)

2. Jesus acknowledged and commended Peter's response of "leaving everything" to follow Him. What does Jesus say will be the reward for all those who respond to Him in the same way?

They will receive back "one hundred times" as much as they gave up—both in this life and in the life to come.

Why do you think Jesus includes the phrase "'and with them, persecutions"?

Following Jesus is not always easy, and often times results in being "persecuted" for Him.

[2 Tim 3:12 "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"]

Read Mark 14:27-31, 66-72

3. What do we see happening in this passage in the life of this committed follower of Jesus? What was his heart's desire? What did he end up doing instead? What does his response to his failure show?

Even though Peter had a strong love for Jesus and a deep commitment to Him, he failed. His response to his failure showed that he had understood what he had done and had felt great remorse as a result. [Note: Luke 22:62 tells us that he "wept bitterly."]

Read John 21:1-19

4. What hope does this passage give to all who love Jesus and want to follow Him faithfully, but who know that they, too, will experience (or have experienced) failure at times in doing so?

Jesus' love and commitment to His followers never ends or wavers when we fail. Rather, if we love Him, He helps us to get back up and to continue to follow Him.

[Note: The verb tense of "Follow me" (v.19) gives the meaning "Keep on following me."]

Skim read Acts 2:14-5:42

5. What further hope do these accounts give for those who love Jesus and want to follow Him?

Peter went on to become a bold evangelist for Jesus and a leader in the early church, suffering much for his faith in and commitment to Jesus.

[Note: As the ultimate evidence of his commitment to Jesus, Christian tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome under Emperor Nero for following Him.]

Summary

Peter was a follower of Jesus who gave up everything to follow Him (i.e. he "denied himself" and said YES to following Jesus). His heart's desire was to know and to do what Jesus wanted because of who He was and because he loved Him. He wasn't, however, perfect, and he therefore didn't follow Jesus perfectly. Despite this, he continued to seek Jesus' forgiveness and help to live his life for Him (i.e. to "take up his cross" and say Yes "daily" to following Jesus). And as a result, he proved to be a committed (but not perfect) follower of Jesus for the rest of his life.

Application Questions

- As a result of what you've learned from the Bible studies in this series, would you say you are a "fool," a "fan," or a "follower" of Jesus?
- If you'd like to become a follower of Jesus, what would it mean for you to "deny yourself," "leave everything," and follow Him?
- What hope and encouragement does Peter's example of being a committed, but not perfect, follower of Jesus give to you in making a decision to follow Jesus?