

Not a Fan: Completely

Luke 9:23

Well, to a lot of our chagrin, the summer is beginning to wind down. The kids are headed back to school. We took a very nice vacation and I was able to accomplish everything I set out to do. One of the cool things was I took my oldest son Caleb to Deer Creek State Park, south of Columbus. Just the two of us. We did some bike riding, eating, bowling, swimming, spitting and scratching – drowned a few worms on the lake. And my purpose was really inspired by what I learned in our Men's Fraternity here at Friends. I wanted to take Caleb away and talk about what it means to be a man, specifically a man in Christ. I wanted to talk to him about things like the birds and the bees – and we did – but it was more than that. And God was so good – it was natural because I also got to talk to him about how God shapes our view of sexuality and when we follow His plan He blesses us and keeps us from harm and heartache. It was just an awesome time. And I hope to do that with each of my sons over the years.

One of the good things about this shift in the season is that it means football season is almost here. For you Browns fans – is it going to be a season of misery and frustration or could things turn around. For a big Buckeye fan like me – it means right now – we are undefeated – and who knows, with each passing week – maybe they can beat that team up north and get to the big one!

Two of my boys will play football this year. Now as a fan, I'll be excited to see the games. But their players- that means – they've been working hard. They're doing sprints, working on fundamentals, wearing pads, hitting each other, starting to design plays. In fact if you happen to be a football player in high school or college or for that matter the NFL, you've been two-a-days. And for you, even when the season ends, your preparation and work doesn't. You've got to keep fit. You keep working throughout the year to get better.

Fans on the other hand, well, depending on the season we move on to the next big thing. From the Browns, to the Cavs to the Tribe. As a fan, you can just sit back comfortably in the stands, drink hot chocolate, eat a hot dog, pay attention or not. If you're a rich fan you can sit in one of those loge boxes and watch the game on the monitor. But when you are in the game, you're working hard, you're committed to the team doing what it takes to win. There's a difference between a fan and being in the game.

On Sunday, September 13th we as a church are going to begin a season of challenge where we are calling for every person in this congregation to "Get in the Game!" To stop being a fan, and instead become part of team of people committed to God's growing us together and building this church. That means we start with fundamentals. For us that means, making God's Word the priority in our lives. So quite simply, we're going to ask you to make a practice of bringing your Bible to church every Sunday. This is your gear. Carry it, open it, - let it be true – Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Let's make the statement to each other that our faith is founded in confidence in God's Word. But of course, this has to go beyond just carrying our Bible; that alone doesn't do much. The person who has a playbook hasn't necessarily read it. So together as a community we are going to take the E100 challenge. And over a series of 100 days, Monday thru Friday, we are going to ask that we all make a commitment to read 50 essential Old Testament passages and 50 essential New Testament passages. You will hear more about this as we go along – but at this point I wonder if you would just begin to pray with me – Lord, set my heart aright – that I might be ready to engage in your Word in a new and fresh way.

Because the truth is this – and this is burdening my heart this morning – are you a fan or follower of Jesus? The word "fan" is simply defined as an "enthusiastic admirer." Someone

who can sit in the stands and cheer once in a while when things are going well, and maybe boo loudly when they aren't. My prayer and challenge for us as a church is that we not be a stadium full of fans but we'd be committed to the team, fully committed in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus, you lead the way, I will follow you. I'm in.

If you read the Gospels, Jesus, at different points in His ministry, would draw a line in the sand and He would separate the fans from the followers. Now His wording was a little bit different. Instead of fans and followers He'd call them goats and sheep. He would talk about the wide road that many traveled compared to the narrow path that few find and go down. But He would draw a line and He would separate those people.

One such instance is in John 6. Jesus is at the height of His ministry and we read that large crowds were following Jesus. He was very popular. He was working miracles. He was providing food from just a few loaves of bread and some fish, and a lot of people were in the crowd getting excited about Jesus. But verse 2 says "a large crowd followed Him, because they saw the miracles." Why are they following? Because of the miracles. Hey, this is neat stuff. Hey, free food. Hey, this is fun.

But as you read that chapter, Jesus challenges them to this deeper more intimate relationship with Him and in verse 66, here's what we read. It says, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." In fact reading – Jesus looks at the twelve disciples and says – "you do not want to go to do you?" A lot of them went home because Jesus says, "it's time to get serious. It's time to define this relationship" – and what He offered isn't what they wanted.

And I wonder how many of us here have just come because we like what we see. You know someone comes to church and they're well-meaning –we've fed right into this philosophy.

But they'll say 'well, we're church shopping. We're church shopping. What do you have to offer us?' And we show them around the store. Well look what we have here for you. Look what we have here for your kids. And you know that's great, but the danger can be that what you win them with can sometimes become what you win them to. And at some point you've got to say, "OK, what's the relationship? Put everything else aside. Where do you stand with Jesus?" Are you here for the miracles? The show? The free food? The nice people? You see Jesus wants a relationship with you – but on His terms. Where He is Lord. Where He is in charge. Where you are not a fan sitting above judging what's happening on the field – but you're in the game following your leader.

A few weeks ago I preached on the image of three chairs and I asked you where do you sit? Well, a third chair person – they aren't even in the stadium – they don't believe and they don't want anything to do with Jesus. Second chair people are fans. They can come and go, it's this casual association they have with the game. First chair people are absolutely committed – they are in the game, following Jesus with their whole hearts.

One of the things I did while I was on vacation was preach to a new Friends Church in Stowe, Ohio just off the campus of Kent State University. The church is a Taiwanese Fellowship and they had invited me to come while their pastor was on vacation. Well I decided to preach the message I shared with you on the three chairs. It was a really good sermon. What I did not take into account was they would have an interpreter for me. And that changes a lot of things in your message. One, and you can feel sorry for these people – it means the message is twice as long. But two – not everything translates. For instance I told them the story I told you that I had a drug problem when I was a kid. I was drug to church on Sunday morning, drug to church on Sunday

evening and drug to church on Wednesday night. Well, I don't think that translates into Taiwanese quite the same. All I know is – they haven't invited me back.

Jesus isn't looking for fans – He's looking for followers. But this is where a lot of us are this morning. You really don't mind coming a few times a month. It's not too much trouble and a little behavior modification is a good thing. We all need to be challenged, right, once in a while? But you get a little uncomfortable when you feel like things are going too far. Maybe you've got Bibles at home but the only time you really open them is when you come to church, or maybe yeah, you pray, - when you get in trouble or at a meal. And yeah, you love Jesus. I mean, you love Jesus – you don't want to go to hell. But if you want to be sarcastic to your wife, then you're going to be sarcastic to your wife. You love Jesus, but hey, if you want to go get drunk, you're going to get drunk. You love Jesus but don't talk to me about saving sex for marriage. Come on. And don't talk about money because it's my money. You love Jesus, but don't ask me to forgive the person who's hurt me. Don't ask me for a deeper level of commitment. Could He want more than that?

A major was promoted to colonel and received a fancy new office. As he entered it for the first time, sitting in the nice new chair, a knock came at the door. He said, "Come in," then quickly picked up the telephone receiver as a corporal walked in. "Just a minute," the colonel said to the corporal. "I have to finish this call." Then the colonel began speaking into the mouthpiece: "Sorry about the interruption, General. Yes, sir, I will take care of that. Yes, I'll call the President after I finish talking with you, General." The colonel ceremoniously put the telephone down, turned to the corporal, and said, "Now, What can I do for you?" The corporal replied, "Well. Colonel, I just came in to connect your telephone."

Here is the problem with thinking you love Jesus, but doing your thing – it’s going to be exposed sooner or later as not real, not true, not you. Here is what it comes down to. We want a “no strings attached” relationship with Jesus. We want to follow Jesus closely enough that we get all the benefits of the relationship without any of the cost. We want to get to heaven, we just want to do our thing before getting there. We want to follow Jesus closely enough that we get all the benefits of Jesus without actually carrying a cross. And Jesus says that’s not enough.

Men, I don’t know how this worked in your relationship. But when Mary and I were off and on dating and at times it was excruciating – there came a point – when she basically let me know – if we aren’t getting married – I’m walking away. I knew that if there wasn’t an engagement ring on her finger either at her birthday, Christmas or that New Year’s Eve – she was moving on. And you know how that ended. It was time to make a decision to get in, or get out.

This verse we will be focusing in on over the next few weeks is Luke 9:23. This key verse is in each of the synoptic Gospels. This is what Jesus says and in this invitation He defines what it means to be in relationship with Him. Here is what it means if you want to follow Me.

Jesus says “If anyone... it’s a fairly inclusive terms – anyone. That means anyone. Would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me. That’s the relationship He is looking for. Where you stop calling the shots, and you let Him be in charge. Sometimes the church sends the message: “whatever you want, you can get it here.” But the message of the Gospel is give up everything. These two things can collide and if we’re not careful what we do is we replace the message of Jesus the King, “Deny Yourself,” and we replace it with Burger King, “Have it your way.” And it creates fans instead of followers. So people come to Christ because, “Hey, who doesn’t want eternal life? I’m for that. Who doesn’t want salvation? Count me in – I’ll be a fan

of Jesus. But at some point Jesus calls for something more, something deeper. He calls us to be completely committed followers.

I've shared this story with some of you. When I was in college my senior year I was student body president, had preached in chapel, was getting ready to go to seminary. But the reality was in many ways, I was living in the second chair, I was a fan of Jesus – but there were some things in my life that Jesus didn't want there. That spring Asbury hosted a Holiness Conference – and Prof Lauter preached – and as only he could he preached on God wants our whole hearts – sin is serious and deadly. And I looked at my life and I felt convicted, I knew I was harboring sin. And one of those nights I went to the altar. “Lord, I want to surrender. I want to give you everything I am.” And I began to pray, but I wasn't free. In fact I was under this heaviness the conviction was so real. So I remember the next day in the afternoon bowing down on a couch, praying God, deliver me, forgive me, make me totally yours. And my mind went to Rev. 2:17 where it says I will give to him a white stone and a new name. And the white stone represented a pure heart –and I am not a mystic – I don't hear. But that moment I felt and heard God say to me – I'm giving you a name. Geoff, You are Confessor. And then He said I want you to live up to that name. And in that moment I got this vision where I saw myself standing in front of the chapel confessing some of the stuff, sin in my own life in front of 1200 students, all the faculty. I quickly got out of that room.

That night Prof preached again –and he preached on holiness and obedience and I was under conviction – so I went to the altar. And I said Jesus, I love you. I want to be yours completely. And by the way, if you want me to be confessor – that's what I'll do. And I said, Lord, if you want me to confess to whole crowd, I'm willing.” Well, I felt better. God really didn't want me

to do it – he just wanted me to be willing to do it. I thought was kind of like the Abraham and Isaac story. Abraham really doesn't have to put the knife in Isaac. He's just has to be willing.

So I walked out of that chapel – and wouldn't you know the dean of students stops me and says Geoff, You've been on my heart all day. I think you have something to share in chapel tomorrow. Would you do that? And I said yes.

The next morning I went to Prof I said, the Lord has put something on my heart. And I got up in front of everybody and I began to share with them how I had put on one face, but in so many ways was living another. And in that moment I realized something, I realized that God was making me confessor – not a confessor of sin. He doesn't want me to stay there – but he was making me a confessor that Jesus Christ is and must be Lord.

And you know what happened? That service which began at 10:00 o'clock on Friday morning – it didn't end until Tuesday morning at about 11:00 AM. Because I wasn't the only one who needed to confess and pursue God and stop being a fan, and start being a follower. It's an amazing thing seeing hundreds of students worshipping and sharing together at 4:00 AM on Saturday night.

Now I'll tell you there have been other moments, when I've been more fan than follower – but when God convicts me He always takes me back to that place. And He said Geoff, we settled this right here. Confess me as Lord. You follow me.

Are you a fan or are you a follower?