

Text: I Peter 2:21

Theme: Following in His Footsteps

May 7, 2017

I realize we're grateful it's springtime, but I want you to picture in your mind a set of footprints leading through the snow. You don't know where they will lead, but you decide to follow them nevertheless. As you go about a hundred yards, the footprints break off in two directions, so you choose to go left. In another fifty yards, they break off in three directions. Which do you choose? Which will be the right choice? In our text, Jesus invites us to follow, to follow in His footsteps.

I. Christ calls us to follow in His footsteps. A. Yet we aren't very good at following.

1. We are slow to follow because we are distracted by other footprints. If you could count every footprint made in Medford in a single day, how many footprints would you find? Surrounded by so many footprints, we often follow the path that looks most inviting, most intriguing, most adventurous. By doing so, we find ourselves off course, following a detour that we don't even realize is a detour. Because we are so easily distracted, we find ourselves lost when we thought we had life all figured out. Multiple footprints leave us with multiple opportunities to choose the wrong direction.

2. We are slow to follow because we fail to listen to His voice. Voices are as numerous as footprints. Because there are so many, some sound more inviting, promise us a wonderful life, and draw us away from the voice of our Shepherd. We'd like to believe it doesn't happen, that, we, as His sheep are immune, yet it happens. Reasons may differ from person to person, but whatever the reason, we choose to listen, not to our Shepherd's voice, but to another voice that seems more inviting, a voice that often challenges the voice of our Shepherd and leads us to believe that we are being deprived when we already have the best life could offer.

3. We are slow to follow because we fail to believe He is our example. When a teacher provides an example of how to do a math problem, following the example is simple. But in the classroom of life, things aren't that simple. Instead of one example, we're surrounded by multiple examples like a multiple choice test. To make matters even worse, those examples are coming at us in a rapid fire manner. We don't have hours to make our choice. We often only have moments. The result? Sometimes, we follow the wrong example, and soon we find ourselves wandering instead of following His example which will always lead us down the right path.

B. Although we're not always good at it, why do we strive to follow in His footsteps? 1. We follow because our Shepherd cares about us. Think back to a challenging time, a time when you felt no one cared. What thoughts went through your mind? What questions kept resurfacing in those moments? We've all been in that place more than once. We know how it feels when it appears that no one cares. Yet, even in those moments, we hear the voice of God, "I care about you. I am the Good Shepherd and I have always and will always care about you. Come into My presence and I will show you how much I care" and those words motivate us to follow.

2. We follow because of His promise. In the latter part of our Gospel, Jesus says, "If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." That promise motivates us to follow; it's the promise that stands out above all His other promises. Each promise of God motivates us to follow, but the promise of salvation, of eternal life, of spending

eternity in heaven, the promise of no more pain, heartache, sadness, stress, fatigue, exhaustion, sleepless nights, worrisome days - that's the ultimate promise, the promise that leads us to say, "I will follow wherever He leads because I know that, in the end, I will arrive in the most wonderful place I could ever imagine!"

3. We follow because it's how we obtain the abundant life. How many people can you name who think some other path is a better path, who think they are missing out on life? Some people are never satisfied; they never find contentment or peace of mind. Yet we know what they don't know or have chosen to ignore. By following in His footsteps, we have access to the abundant life here and in eternity. That abundant life will look different and be different from person to person on this side of heaven. Yet as we follow in His footsteps, we know we are living His life, the right life, the abundant life, a life beyond any life we could ever create or discover on our own.

C. Realizing the benefits of following, how do we follow? 1. We follow by acknowledging that we are His sheep. What's so great about being one of His sheep? What's great is that He is our Shepherd! We're surrounded every day by other sheep, but those sheep don't know where they are going. Because we are His sheep, we follow by believing He will lead us to the best pasture, the pastures of eternal life. We follow by believing He will be there when we stumble, when we wander off the path, when we get lost in the woods, when we are too tired to take another step. And we follow by being sheep who are grateful they have such a great Shepherd.

2. We follow by listening to His voice. Our Gospel says that the sheep follow because they know His voice. Out there are hundreds of voices attempting to attract our attention. Yet, as His sheep, we choose to listen to the One voice, the voice we have known since we were little children. Like a child who knows his or her mother's voice in a crowded shopping mall, we know the voice and we listen to the voice of our God. All those other voices lead to a dead end, but His voice leads us to the waters of eternal life. As we tune into His voice, although surrounded by all those other voices, we follow because we know we are going the right direction.

3. We follow by living the abundant life. "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." Our Good Shepherd came to give us life here and in eternity. While we wait for eternity, Jesus says, "Live the abundant life I give you each day. Make the most of each moment. Live each day for Me and I promise that you will exit this world hearing the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Following in His footsteps is what we do when we live as He has called us to live. As we make the most of every opportunity, seek His guidance, and step out in faith, we find abundance where others see nothing, and we find ourselves following in His footsteps.

4. Following footprints in the snow may be a rather simple task. Yet, when we follow in His footsteps, the task may be challenging, but I assure you that the rewards will be truly out of this world. Amen.