

“D.T.R.”

by Rom A. Pegram (10/8/17)

Are you a follower of Jesus? That’s the question that will be dealt with in the next several weeks, as we share in this ‘Fan or Follower’ worship series together. But, *have you ever thought seriously about that question?* Yeah, I know, you’ve been asked that question before; it’s so familiar that you usually just dismiss it. Not because it makes you uncomfortable—not because it’s scary in any way. My guess is you usually dismiss it ... because it’s *redundant—unnecessary* at this point in your life! Am I right ... maybe?

If you’re here today, you may fall into one of 2 groups. You interested? There’s the...

- **‘Fish on the Back of the Car’ Group** – You’re serious enough about your faith that you went to the local Christian book store, found one of those fish symbols (which stands for the Christian faith, of course) and pasted that on the back of your car ... for all to see. In which case, when you’re asked, “Are you a follower of Jesus?” your reply is something like, “Hello! Are you serious? There’s a fish on the back of my car!” *Are you a follower of Jesus?*

Before we go on, let me mention what I’m not asking. I’m not asking:

- Do you go to church?
- Are your parents or grandparents Christians?
- Have you ever appeared in a church pictorial directory?
- Did you grow up going to VBS or church camp?
- Is your ringtone a worship song?

Those *aren’t* the questions were asking today... Here’s the point: Many of us are quick to say ‘I’m a follower of Jesus,’ but we’re *not* really sure what *that* means... One of the most sobering passages in the Bible is when Jesus talks of a day when *everyone* will stand before God (Matthew 7:23). On that day, many who call themselves Christians—identify themselves as ‘followers of Christ’—will stand confidently in front of Jesus, only to hear him say, “I never knew you. Get away from me.” *Well, maybe those folks are a part of the second group, the...*

- **‘Why do People Have Fish on the Back of Their Car?’ Group** – If you’re part of this group, you find the question about Jesus *non-relevant*. It’s not that you’re against it or offended by it; it’s just *not relevant* ... but, in a way that’s different from the first group. If you’re a part of this group, the question just doesn’t seem worth answering. You mean no offense; you’re just not into it...

But, what if, just for one moment ... you pause and ask yourself: “What if all of life comes down to this one question? What if there really is a heaven and a hell, and where I spend eternity comes down to this one question?”

Could it be that this may be the most important question we’ll ever answer? And *guess what? We don’t get to define what it means; only Jesus does...* So, we’re going to explore today just what this question is all about. What does it really mean to be a

follower of Jesus? One thing's for sure; there's a D.T.R. moment coming up soon... Listen to our Bible story for today: This is the famous story of a man named 'Nicodemus' (John 3:1-17, NLT)...

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." ³ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." ⁴ "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" ⁵ Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit." ⁹ "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ¹¹ I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. ¹² But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. - John 3:1-17 (NLT)

D.T.R., by the way, stands for "Define the Relationship." And this is where we have to begin in order to determine who we really are—a follower of Christ ... *or just a fan...*

Some of you might have recognized the letters 'D.T.R.' and know what they mean. If you're still not sure, let me explain: For a young man involved in a romantic relationship, these letters are enough to strike fear into his heart. He likely dreads the D.T.R. talk for as long as possible. I've even known a few guys (friends) who have terminated the relationship when they sensed the D.T.R. talk was coming!

A friend went on a first date. They went to dinner. They began the awkward first date conversation. They talked about his family. They talked about her family. While they enjoyed the main course, they talked about movies they enjoyed. And then it happened... While they were eating dessert, the girl asked my friend the dreaded question: "Where do you see this relationship going?" BOOM! On the very first date, she was trying to have the D.T.R. talk! Needless to say, that was the first ...and last ... date!

Sometimes, it's not the right time for this talk, but sooner or later ... *this is exactly the talk Jesus wants to have with us!* Did you know that? That's what was really going on in

our Bible story for today, with Nicodemus and Jesus. Jesus wanted to find out if Nicodemus was going to be a follower ... or just a fan. Let's begin here today:

In John 3, we read about a *FAN* named Nicodemus. But, you should know that he wasn't just any fan. He was a well-known, well-respected man of God. Nicodemus was a member of the High Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin—an elite group of religious leaders. He'd been an admirer of Jesus for some time...

- Listening to Jesus' teaching, he couldn't help but be inspired...
- Watching Jesus work incredible miracles, he was impressed by that, too...
- But, what he was most impressed by was ... Jesus' compassion & love...

Folks, please don't tell the 'fish people,' but...

AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES, WE MAY REALIZE WE'RE JUST A FAN... Verses 1-2 tell us, again: "There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. 'Rabbi,' he said, 'we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.'" Nicodemus was a HUGE fan of Jesus, but ... *this was his D.T.R. moment...*

It would be easy to overlook the very first part of v. 2 here: "After dark one evening...." *Why in the world would Nicodemus come to Jesus at night ... even though he had plenty of opportunities during the day?* I've a few ideas...

- At night, no one would see him...
- At night, he could avoid awkward questions from other religious leaders...
- At night, he could spend time with Jesus without anyone knowing...
- If he could speak with Jesus at night, perhaps he could have a relationship with this Rabbi without having to make any real changes in his life—nobody (i.e. co-workers, friends, family) would have to know...

'Sounds a lot like FANS I know... Heaven forbid I'd ever get directly involved in a sport or activity myself; just let me sit in my living room and love the game that way ... and it won't have to affect the rest of my life—my work ... or my relationships!

Folks, if you don't know this already, here's a reality you need to know: **THERE IS NO WAY TO FOLLOW JESUS WITHOUT HIM INTERFERING WITH YOUR LIFE!** *Following Jesus will cost you something.* Or, as Pastor Mike Slaughter would put it: Following Jesus will cost you everything! There's the truth about being a follower of Jesus... So, let me ask you this, at the point we're at now: Has following Jesus cost you anything? Most of us don't mind Jesus making some minor changes in our lives but Jesus wants to turn our lives upside down ... for his Kingdom! Here's the truth one more time: **FANS WANT JESUS TO INSPIRE THEM, BUT JESUS WANTS TO INTERFERE WITH THEIR LIVES...** *At some point in our lives, we may realize that we're just a fan of Jesus...*

BUT THERE'LL COME A TIME WE'LL NEED TO COMMIT TO BE A FOLLOWER!

Verse 3 says, “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.’” Let me ask the question in another way, as we continue to define what it means to be a fan ... or a follower of Christ: Have you made a decision *for* Jesus ... or have you committed *to* Jesus? There is a difference; there maybe shouldn't be, but there is! Unfortunately, and many times due to unhealthy teaching, many have made a decision to *believe in* Jesus ... without making a *commitment to follow* Jesus! (As my dad used to say, “Even the devil believes in Jesus, so that doesn't give you great bragging rights!”) When we decide to believe in Jesus without making a commitment to follow him, we become nothing more than fans ... and that was never an option with Jesus!

Folks, Jesus doesn't hold back with Nicodemus, does he? Following Jesus would require a commitment that would cost Nicodemus a great deal...

As we look at what it means to follow Jesus in the next several weeks, this'll become a theme! As a matter of fact, all throughout scripture, this is true...

- Moses couldn't follow God without standing in front of the Pharaoh...
- Noah couldn't follow God without building an ark that brought ridicule from his neighbors...
- Daniel couldn't follow God by praying to him alone, without being thrown in a lion's den...

Following Jesus isn't something you can do at night where no one notices. It's a twenty-four-hour-a-day commitment that will interfere with your life. And at the outside chance someone forgot to mention to you what it really means to be a Christian, let me be clear:

- There is no forgiveness without repentance...
- There is no salvation without surrender...
- There is no life without death...
- There is no believing without committing (*and we'll be talking about all these things in the next few weeks*)...

Well, perhaps today, you've begun to question who you are in Christ. Maybe you've discovered you've been one who's *believed in* Jesus—maybe for years. You don't mind coming to Jesus when it's convenient—when it won't affect the rest of your life. But, that folks ... as we've learned ... is the definition of a FAN. Again, *that's not an option with Jesus*; Jesus is looking for those who'll *commit* to him, to his ways, to his plan for their lives; he's looking for FOLLOWERS. The truth is, *FANS WANT JESUS TO INSPIRE THEM, BUT JESUS WANTS TO INTERFERE WITH THEIR LIVES!*

Are you at a point today, very much like Nicodemus, where you're sensing the nudge of God to move from *belief in darkness* ... to *following him in the light*? (It's kind of the difference between being a 'believer' and being a 'disciple' of Jesus; we hear that term too.) ... Consider this, would you? “*Are you a follower of Jesus?*” It may be the most

important question of your life ... and we'll be looking at this question more—together—in the weeks to come...