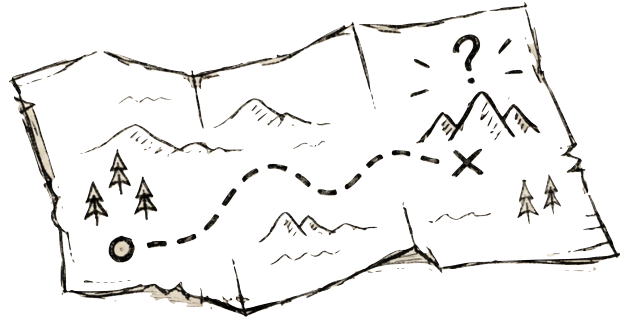


WORTH LOSING YOUR LIFE FOR

The Kingdom, the Harvest, and the Unpredictable Adventure of Following Jesus

One of the questions I like to ask young Disney Cast Members who sit around our dinner table is, “What are you willing to lose your life for?”

Usually, I get a blank look. Sometimes there is a long pause followed by a stare into the plate in front of them. Almost all of them eventually admit the same thing: they have never really considered the question before.



Truth be told, it's not a question most of us are quick to answer, let alone ask. We are much more accustomed to talking about what will make our lives better.

*What career should I pursue?
Where should I live?
What will make me happy?
What kind of life do I want to build?*

Our lives are largely organized around the assumption that the goal is to create a life worth living, protect it, improve it, and enjoy as much of it as possible.

But Jesus asks us to consider something radically different.

What if there is something worth losing our life for?

This is where the invitation of Jesus becomes far more disruptive than the version of Christianity many of us have inherited. Jesus does not simply offer to help us build better lives. He introduces us to something so extraordinary that the lives we have worked so hard to construct can suddenly become secondary to it.

***Jesus didn't come to improve the life you've built.
He came to invade it with a Kingdom worth losing it for.***

That distinction changes everything.

Something has happened to the way we talk about Jesus. In our desire to make Him understandable, relevant, and attractive, we have increasingly presented Jesus in terms of what He can do for us.

Jesus can give you peace. Jesus can help your marriage. Jesus can give you purpose. Jesus can heal your wounds. Jesus can help you become a better parent. Jesus can give you hope when life falls apart.

None of those things are necessarily untrue. They are simply too small.

Somewhere along the way, we began presenting Jesus as the answer to the life people already wanted rather than the One who completely redesigns what their lives are for. Jesus became an improvement, an addition, a spiritual resource for building a better version of the life we had already imagined.

But that is not how Jesus introduced Himself or His mission.

Jesus arrived announcing an invasion.

THE KAIROS HAS ARRIVED

Mark records the beginning of Jesus' public ministry with these words:

"The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"
- Mark 1:15

There is something easy to miss here. Jesus is announcing Good News before He has gone to the cross.

Calvary has not happened.
The tomb has not been emptied.

And yet Jesus is already proclaiming the Gospel.

What IS the Good News Jesus is talking about?

The kairos has arrived.
The Kingdom of God has come near.

The word **kairos** points to an appointed, decisive moment. Jesus is not simply saying that another date has arrived on God's calendar. He is announcing that something history has been moving toward is happening now. Eternity has stepped into time. God's reign has come near. The King is here.

The cross will become the breathtaking centerpiece of this Good News. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus will accomplish what we could never accomplish for ourselves. Sin will be confronted. Death will be defeated. Reconciliation with God will become possible.

But the Gospel does not begin at Calvary.

Before Jesus ever went to the cross, He was already announcing Good News: the Kingdom of God has come near. The cross must never be diminished, but neither should the Gospel be reduced to the cross alone. The Gospel Jesus proclaimed was the announcement of a Kingdom.

And Kingdom is much bigger than self-improvement.

MORE THAN ETERNAL SECURITY

For generations, many Christians have been taught to introduce the Gospel with a question something like this: *“If you died tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity?”*

It is an important question. Death is real. Eternity matters. Reconciliation with God matters beyond anything we could adequately express.

But it is not the question Jesus used to introduce the Good News.

Jesus did not begin by asking people where they would go when they died. He announced something that had happened while they were still very much alive:

“The Kingdom of God has come near.”

That difference matters.

When the Gospel is reduced primarily to eternal security, salvation can begin to sound like a transaction concerning our future destination. Believe the right things about Jesus now so that your eternity will be secure later. Following Jesus can then become strangely disconnected from the actual life we are living between conversion and death.

But Jesus announced a Kingdom that changes life **now**.

The kairos has arrived **now**. The Kingdom has come near **now**. Jesus invites us to repent **now**, believe **now**, follow **now**, and begin living under the reign of God **now**.

This does not make eternity less important. It makes the Gospel bigger.

The Good News is not merely that because of Jesus I can go somewhere different when I die. The Good News is that because of Jesus I can belong to an entirely different Kingdom here and now.

Eternal life is not simply life that lasts forever. It is life reconciled to God, lived under the reign of Jesus, beginning now and continuing beyond death.

That means salvation cannot be separated from surrender. Jesus does not simply secure my destination. He becomes my King.

And once Jesus becomes King, the central question of my life is no longer simply, *“Where will I go when I die?”*

It becomes:

“What is this life now for?”

JESUS IS NOT A LIFE UPGRADE

Self-help begins with the life I want and asks how Jesus can help me achieve it. Following Jesus begins somewhere entirely different.

It begins with surrender.

Jesus does not appear in the Gospels offering Himself as a spiritual addition to people's existing lives. He walks into those lives and says, "Follow me."

Fishermen leave nets. A tax collector leaves his table. People reconsider possessions, relationships, ambitions, loyalties, enemies, status, power, forgiveness, generosity, and what they believe constitutes a successful life.

Jesus does not merely change what they believe. He redesigns what their lives are for.

That is what happens when a Kingdom invades.

If Jesus is King, I no longer get to determine the purpose of my life and then ask Jesus to bless it. My time, money, relationships, ambitions, home, career, definition of success, and sense of security are all reconsidered. Even my life itself is reconsidered.

Jesus invades our lives so radically, and reveals a Kingdom so extraordinary, that surrendering everything to follow Him, even our very lives, becomes worth it.

That's not self-help.

That's surrender.

WORTH LOSING YOUR LIFE FOR

Jesus said something that sounds almost absurd within a consumer understanding of Christianity:

"Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."

We often talk about what someone gains by following Jesus. Jesus was remarkably willing to talk about what following Him could cost.

That does not mean Jesus glorifies suffering, inconvenience, or deprivation. Following Jesus is not a competition to see who can construct the most uncomfortable life. The point is not discomfort. The point is Lordship.

If Jesus is Lord, comfort cannot be Lord. Convenience cannot be Lord. Security cannot be Lord. Success cannot be Lord. Predictability cannot be Lord.

I cannot surrender my life to Jesus while simultaneously reserving the right to determine everywhere He may take it.

This is why following Jesus is inherently unpredictable. Not because Jesus is intentionally trying to disrupt our lives, but because He is leading them.

THE ADVENTURE WE CANNOT CONTROL

We have sometimes made Christianity remarkably predictable. Attend this. Believe this. Join this. Complete this. Serve here. Give this. Follow this pathway.

There can be value in rhythms, practices, gatherings, and community. But none of them can replace the unpredictable reality of following a living Jesus. You cannot reduce following a Person to a predetermined pathway.

Sometimes Jesus may lead you toward a neighbor or a stranger. Sometimes toward a dinner table or toward someone whose life is nothing like yours. Sometimes toward generosity you had not budgeted, forgiveness you would rather withhold, or a relationship that takes years. Sometimes He may lead you toward another culture or across an ocean. Sometimes He may ask you to stay when you want to leave. Sometimes He may ask you to leave when you desperately want to stay.

Following Jesus is not unpredictable because Jesus is unreliable. It is unpredictable because we are not leading.

That is adventure.

Not manufactured excitement. Not recklessness. Not novelty for novelty's sake.

Adventure is what following Jesus feels like when we surrender our demand to know where He is taking us.

And that creates an unavoidable tension with a version of Christianity built primarily around comfort and convenience.

A consumer asks, *"What works best for me?"*

A disciple asks, *"Where is Jesus leading?"*

Those questions can lead to very different lives.

THEN JESUS POINTS TOWARD THE HARVEST

Once Jesus has disrupted the assumption that our lives belong primarily to us, He begins redirecting our attention outward, toward people, toward places, toward what God is already doing beyond the boundaries of our religious lives.

Jesus tells His followers:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” - Luke 10:2

Notice what Jesus does not say. The harvest is disappearing. The harvest is resistant. The harvest is uninterested. The harvest is scarce.

Jesus sees something His followers apparently struggle to see: *plenty*.

The problem in Jesus’ description is not the harvest. The harvest is already abundant. In fact, Jesus describes it as so plentiful that there are not enough people to see it and enter it. He does not tell His followers to pray for a bigger harvest. He tells them to pray for more workers.

Perhaps our greatest harvest problem, then, is not scarcity.

It is sight.

We can walk through a plentiful harvest every day and never recognize it. We can see coworkers, neighbors, strangers, immigrants, students, servers, patients, tourists, and friends without seeing what Jesus sees. We can even conclude that people are uninterested in God while Jesus is standing in the middle of the same world declaring, *“The harvest is plentiful.”*

The harvest does not need us to manufacture spiritual opportunity. It needs followers of Jesus who have learned to recognize where He is already at work and are willing to enter it.

And suddenly Mark 1 and Luke 10 begin illuminating one another.

The Kingdom has come near. The harvest is plentiful.

These are not two disconnected observations. Together, they create a radically different paradigm for following Jesus.

The Kingdom tells us what has arrived. The Harvest tells us where we are sent.

Jesus stands at the center of both.

TWO REALITIES AT ONCE

Imagine putting on a pair of 3D glasses. One lens allows us to see the Kingdom. The other allows us to see the Harvest.

Look through only one lens and something is missing.

Kingdom without Harvest can become abstraction. We can talk endlessly about God's reign, mission, theology, renewal, discipleship, and the Gospel while remaining largely disconnected from the people Jesus described as plentiful.

Harvest without Kingdom can become little more than humanitarianism or relational technique. We can love people, serve people, and build relationships while losing sight of the extraordinary reality Jesus came to reveal.

But something happens when we begin seeing both simultaneously.

The Kingdom has come near. The Harvest is plentiful.

Ordinary life suddenly gains extraordinary depth.

The neighbor is no longer merely a neighbor. The coworker is no longer merely a coworker. The dinner table is no longer merely furniture. The café is no longer merely somewhere to drink coffee. The workplace is no longer merely somewhere to earn money.

The apartment building, classroom, hospital, neighborhood, restaurant, retirement community, university, theme park, and city street become places where the Kingdom might become visible.

Not because we turned them into ministry locations, but because we finally learned to see what Jesus sees.

THE KINGDOM BECOMES VISIBLE

This changes the way we think about revealing Jesus.

The Good News is not merely information we carry into the harvest. It is a reality that has first invaded us.

If the Kingdom has reordered my life, there should be evidence. It becomes visible in how I value people, how I listen, how I forgive, how I welcome, how I give, how I use my home, how I respond to interruptions, how I treat people who cannot advance my ambitions, how I remain present when there is nothing obvious to gain, how I love without an agenda, and how I follow Jesus when I cannot predict the outcome.

The Kingdom becomes visible through people who have surrendered themselves to the King.

This is where evangelism becomes more than transferring information. We do not simply enter the harvest carrying a message about another reality.

We enter carrying evidence of it.

And as relationships form, trust grows, conversations deepen, and Jesus becomes visible, something may begin to emerge.

We do not have to know beforehand what it will be.

We do not enter the harvest knowing what we are going to build. We enter attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and willing to discover what expression of His Kingdom might emerge among them.

FROM SURRENDER TO EXPRESSION

This creates a very different movement. Jesus announces the Kingdom. The Kingdom invades our lives. We surrender our lives to the King. Jesus leads those surrendered lives into the harvest. We discover that the harvest is already plentiful. Through ordinary relationships in ordinary places, His extraordinary Kingdom begins becoming visible.

What emerges there does not have to look like something we have seen before.

It may happen around a dinner table in Paris, a flat in London, a café in Mexico City, or an apartment in Tokyo. It may happen in a break room in Orlando, a university in Berlin, a neighborhood in Nairobi, a hospital corridor, a backyard, a park bench, or a conversation between two people who had no idea Jesus was already present.

The question is no longer, *“What should we build?”*

The question becomes, *“Jesus, what are You doing here, and how can I follow You into it?”*

HARVEST FORWARD

This is where Harvest Forward begins.

Not with a program, process, pathway, or another strategy for getting more people to attend something Christians have already built.

Harvest Forward begins with two realities Jesus Himself announced:

The Kingdom has come near. The harvest is plentiful.

And one invitation:

Follow me.

Everything else emerges from there.

Curiosity becomes the posture that asks, ***“Jesus, what are YOU doing?”***

Relationship becomes the expression that asks, ***“Who are YOU inviting me to love?”***

Adventure becomes the surrender that says, ***“Wherever YOU are going, I’m coming.”***

We do not need to make following Jesus artificially difficult. We do not need to manufacture discomfort. We do not need to romanticize sacrifice.

We simply need to stop requiring Jesus to fit inside the lives we have already designed. Because Jesus did not come to improve those lives. He came announcing another Kingdom. A Kingdom so extraordinary that fishermen dropped their nets. A Kingdom so valuable that Jesus compared it to treasure worth selling everything to possess. A Kingdom capable of rearranging our ambitions, relationships, possessions, priorities, calendars, careers, homes, and futures.

A Kingdom worth surrendering control for.

A Kingdom worth stepping into the unknown for.

A Kingdom worth following Jesus anywhere for.

A Kingdom worth losing your life for.

The greatest strategy before the Church is not another program, process, pathway, method, or model.

It is much simpler.

To see again what Jesus saw:

The Kingdom has come near. The harvest is plentiful.

And then to recover the courage to respond to the invitation that started the adventure in the first place:

Follow me.