

Matthew 16:24-26 To Follow or Not to Follow

Introduction: Jesus gave the disciples a choice. To follow Him or not to follow, that was their choice.

I. The disciples, already followers of Jesus.

- A. Talking to His disciples, Jesus said, "If any man will come after me..., Verse 24.
- B. These men had already come after Him to follow Him.
 - 1. They had already answered His call to follow Him and become fishers of men.
 - 2. For almost three years they had followed Jesus.
- C. While following Him they had seen the crowds grow from a mere handful to several thousand people.
- D. It had not really been hard to follow Jesus.
 - 1. There had been a great deal of excitement and wonder.
 - 2. There had been some opposition by Jewish leaders.
 - 3. There had been only a small inconvenience
 - 4. The hardest part had been the long hard hours.

II. A new invitation under more difficult circumstances.

- A. Jesus had just announced that He would go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed, Verse 21.
- B. He invites the disciples to go with Him if they would like.
 - 1. They would not be compelled to go.
 - 2. If they should go, it would be by their own free will.
- C. But if they go they must suffer.

III. The example He would set at Jerusalem.

- A. There He would come face to face (as it were) to His cross.
- B. He would there take up His cross and bear it up Golgotha's Hill.
 - 1. With great effort He would bear it until he would fall beneath it's load.
 - 2. He would then be put to death on the cross He had borne.

IV. The disciples called upon to follow His example.

- A. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Verse 24.
- B. They did not have to go.
 - 1. They could break all public ties with Jesus and not go.
 - 2. They could stop following Jesus.
- C. But if they should choose to go they were to follow His example.
 - 1. They were to deny themselves.
(Deny their own desire for comfort, pleasure, wealth, power, etc.)
 - 2. They were to take up their cross as He did.
 - 3. They were to follow Him to the death.

V. The choice that must be made. (a closer look)

- A. They could choose save self, Verse 25.
 - 1. One could save self by not going to Jerusalem, by not taking up the cross, by not following Him.
 - 2. One could save self from suffering and from death.
- B. But He warned that if they should save their life, they would loose it.
 - 1. He meant not merely that they would die physically, but that they would loose

- everything that makes life worth living.
 - 2. He certainly did not mean that they would lose their salvation, but He did mean that they would lose everything else worthwhile.
 - C. On the other hand, they could choose to lose their life for Jesus' sake.
 - D. And by doing so one would find his life.
 - 1. He would not get salvation, for he was already saved.
 - 2. But he would get an inward peace and joy that would make life worth while. (Also rewards and blessings.)
 - E. Jesus then raised a question: What would a man be profited if he gain the whole world and lose his life? (Word "soul" same as "life" in verse 25.)
 - 1. Even if one gained the whole world by not following Jesus, he would not profit a thing.
 - 2. He might temporarily save his life and gain material pleasures and treasures, but he would actually lose everything.
 - 3. He would soon lose his life physically and he would lose all that he had gained.
 - 4. More important, he would not have that peace and joy in his heart.
 - F. What would a man give in exchange for his life? Verse 26.
 - 1. He would give the world if he had it.
 - 2. The idea is: go ahead and give up the world now even before you gain it in order that you may gain something far more valuable.

VI. The choice the apostles made.

- A. All twelve chose to go to Jerusalem with Jesus.
- B. Even after getting there one backed out.
 - 1. He chose to save his life instead.
 - 2. He sold out the Lord and joined sides with His enemies.
 - 3. He made himself a small fortune in doing so.
 - 4. But what did it profit him?
 - 5. He lost all: his life, his money, his joy, everything.
- C. Even Peter temporarily backed out.
 - 1. He denied the Lord three times.
 - 2. But he quickly repented and followed Jesus.
- D. The end result was that all eleven chose to take up their cross and follow Jesus.
 - 1. They suffered much for Jesus' sake.
 - 2. Eventually they died for Jesus.
 - 3. But they gained in this life a great deal of contentment and joy and in the next life they gained eternal riches, I Peter 1:6-8.

VII. The choices that must be made today.

- A. The unsaved must decide whether he will trust in Jesus as his Savior.
- B. The saved must decide whether to deny himself the pleasures of life in order to serve Jesus.
- C. The saved must decide whether to suffer the stigma of being identified with the cause of Christ.
- D. He must decide whether or not to suffer persecution for Christ.
 - 1. He will suffer persecution if he lives godly.
 - 2. He will suffer persecution if he stands for truth.

Conclusion: If Jesus were here in person, I think He would close this message by saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Preached at Pleasant Hill M.B.C. 12-16-84 A.M.