

Following Jesus at a Distance

Matthew 26:58

Introduction

1. The Lord asked His disciples who He was, and Peter said – **Matthew 16:16**
 2. The Lord spoke of His suffering and death, and Peter said – **Matthew 16:22**
 3. The Lord spoke of the disciples stumbling, and Peter said – **Matthew 26:33**
 4. The Lord spoke of Peter denying Him, and Peter said – **Matthew 26:35**
 5. The Lord was seized, and led away, and Peter followed at a distance – **Matthew 26:58**
 6. The Lord was tried, and when Peter was asked about Him, he said – **Matthew 26:74**
 7. Peter's case shows how dangerous following Jesus at a distance can be. Am I following Jesus at a distance?
- I. Following Jesus at a Distance
 - A. Remaining Ignorant
 - a. We are to understand the will of the Lord – **Ephesians 5:17**
 - b. Ignorance is not wrong, nor is having questions or doubts.
 - c. However, some are content to remain in the state of ignorance rather than using it to drive them to knowledge.
 - i. Why is something considered sinful? unauthorized? necessary?
 - ii. Having the questions but never seeking the answers.
 - iii. What may the answers require of me? Am I afraid of what the answers might be? Am I too busy, or too lazy to seek the answers?
 - d. I can follow Jesus with what I have and that be sufficient without increasing it – following Him at a distance.
 - e. What He requires – **2 Timothy 2:15; Luke 6:47-48** (dig deep)
 - B. Holding on to Weights and Sins
 - a. The common theme of following Jesus – **Luke 5:10-11, 27-28; 9:23-24, 59-62; 14:26-27, 33; 18:28-30** – leave all and follow Him.
 - b. Some convince themselves they can follow Jesus but stay back enough to hold on to some things. I'm still following Him, but I can keep some other things I want too.
 - i. Discipleship involves exclusivity – **Matthew 6:19-24**
 - c. Fully following Jesus includes laying everything encumbering aside – **Hebrews 12:1-2**
 - i. Following Jesus does not involve rationalizing sins.
 - ii. Following Jesus does not merely ask about what is technically allowed, but what will help me to draw nearer to Him.
 - C. Making Jesus Anything Less Than First

- a. Jesus was given preeminence by the Father – **Colossians 1:18** – first rank.
 - i. Every part of our lives is to reflect this – **Colossians 3:17**
 - b. “Following Jesus” for some is simply a hobby, or a tradition of sorts, or merely a routine – not a part of their daily thoughts, activities, plans, family, etc.
 - i. Missing the assembly for something else is on the table – **Hebrews 10:25**
 - ii. Circumstances and settings can override fidelity to Him – **1 Corinthians 10:31; 15:33**
 - iii. Plans are made, and then Jesus is considered after – **James 4:13-17**
 - iv. Other Christians seem so strict and fanatic, but I’m “normal” – **Romans 12:2**
- D. Delayed Devotion
- a. A common lie the Devil tells us is that we can be “following Jesus” and then “really follow” Him later – that Jesus allows a sort of delaying period for whatever circumstances of life you’re in, and you can put off full devotion to Him and still be right with Him until then.
 - b. “Following Him” and keeping our distance are antithetical – **John 14:23** – this is not indecision or mere acquaintance but abiding!
 - c. Immediately – **Mark 1:16-18**
- II. Why would I follow Jesus at a distance?
- A. Comfortable Proximity
- a. Before Peter followed Jesus at a distance – **Matthew 26:57-58**
 - i. 3 years of following Jesus in His ministry.
 - ii. **Matthew 26:33-35** – I will never stumble, I will die, I will not deny.
 - iii. **Matthew 26:51** (Peter – **John 18:10**) – Peter defended Jesus.
 - iv. **Matthew 26:52-54** – **“it must happen thus”** – **Matthew 16:21, 24-25** – brought to Peter’s memory?
 - v. Peter has not lost all interest in Jesus. He is not willing to let Jesus leave his sight, but he doesn’t want to get too close. He’s willing to follow Jesus at a distance, but he’s not quite willing to take up his cross alongside of Jesus.
 - b. The comfort of having Him in sight without getting too uncomfortably close is a sign, not of following or loving Jesus, but the opposite.
 - c. **Social** – not too close that it affects my social life – **John 15:18-19; 1 Peter 4:3-4**

- d. **Professional** – not too close that it affects my professional life – **Revelation 2:9** (Smyrna’s poverty a result of Jewish blasphemy?)
 - e. **Familial** – not too close that it affects my family relationships – **Matthew 10:37**
- B. Deniability
- a. Peter followed at a distance, and when some inquired as to his connection with Jesus, he denied Him as Jesus said He would – **Matthew 26:69-74**
 - b. **Doctrine** – distinguishing between big and small matters to find wiggle room when I’m not entirely on board – **2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 2:7**
 - i. Includes remaining in ignorance to be able to maintain deniability.
 - c. **Morality** – not committing to following Jesus too closely to require the strictness of His purity, but not being overly worldly – **1 Peter 1:15-16; James 1:21**
 - d. **Priority** – following Him, but not too close in case something “better” comes along and I have to miss out on it – **2 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 11:24-26**
- III. What will following Jesus at a distance accomplish?
- A. Pain and Regret
- a. The immediate aftermath of Peter’s denial:
 - i. **Matthew 26:75** – He wept bitterly.
 - ii. **Mark 14:72** – He thought about it.
 - iii. **Luke 22:61-62** – Jesus looked at him.
 - iv. This is where following at a distance leads.
 - b. If our choice is to follow Jesus at a distance instead of continually close the gap and get closer, the distance will only increase, if only gradually over time, until Jesus is too far to see, and you cannot even seem to follow Him – **Isaiah 55:6-7** – seek Him while He is near!
 - c. Following at a distance can only result in pain and regret – **Luke 13:22-27**
 - i. **“in Your presence”** – but not WITH You.
 - ii. **“in our streets”** – but not in our HOME.
 - iii. **“Lord, Lord”** – but merely a title, they are **“workers of iniquity”**
- B. Betrayal and Destruction
- a. Before Peter “followed Him at a distance,” another did for far too long.
 - i. Peter was right there with Jesus until the night He was betrayed.
 - b. Judas had followed from a distance for a long time:
 - i. **John 6:70-71** – shortly after the feeding of the 5,000.
 - ii. **John 12:1, 4-6** – 6 days before the Passover of Jesus’ death.

- c. Judas followed Jesus at a distance for so long that one day He got close enough to betray Him with a kiss – **Matthew 26:47-49**
- d. He kept His distance so long that He couldn't see the grace and mercy Jesus would provide Him despite His betrayal – **Matthew 27:3-5**
- e. Paul describes what following at a distance results in as he writes of acting the opposite way – **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**
 - i. Why go through the motions, spend the time, strain to keep Him in sight while simultaneously keeping Him far enough away, only to be completely disqualified in the end?
 - ii. Why not genuinely follow Him?

IV. Follow Me

- A. Peter followed Jesus at a distance and learned the hard way that it doesn't work.
- B. However, Jesus gave him another opportunity – **John 21:18-19** – His renewed invitation, like the first, was not to follow at a distance, but follow Him so closely that one can't tell where Jesus begins and you end – in life and death.

Conclusion

I walked behind the lantern's glow,
Afraid to stand too near;
I loved the Lord, yet loved my safety,
And yielded more to fear.

The night was cold; the fire burned,
Its warmth a brief disguise;
But distance dimmed the Master's face
Until I met His eyes.

Not when I fled, nor when I failed,
Did mercy turn away;
The rooster's cry broke through my pride
And ushered in the day.

For Christ still seeks the ones who trail
Behind with faltering breath;
He calls us from the shadows near
To follow Him through death.

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