
WHO ARE YOU GOING TO FOLLOW?

One Sunday there was cheering and songs of praise.

- Five days later, the shouting of the crowd was for HIS death.

One Sunday it was, "THY kingdom come."

- Five days later, it was, "Our will be done."

How could things change so quickly?

- Was it a different crowd? No, the same one.
- Maybe it was something HE did during those five days?
 - Perhaps. HE did chase the money changers out of the temple.
 - What caused that crowd to suddenly change who they were following and to turn against JESUS?

Do people really change their loyalties that quickly?

- Have you been paying attention to the political opinion?
 - What causes such sudden changes in faithfulness or alliance?

It actually does happen that way, you know.

- One incident, one mistake, one thing misspoken,
 - can ruin a friendship,
 - end a marriage,
 - cost a job,
 - split a church,
 - divide a family.
- I could never understand why my brother could so fiercely defend me against others,
 - and then just as fiercely attack me.
 - Perhaps he thought he had a personal right to fight with me that no one else had.
 - Perhaps he was concerned that how people perceived me would reflect on him.

Why did the crowd turn against JESUS?

- Why did even HIS disciples let HIM down as they did?
 - How could those who committed to follow HIM so easily turn against JESUS?
 - Perhaps it is a good idea to take a moment to consider in every situation what might be the other person's motivation.

Take Peter, for example.

- At the Last Supper, he stated in front of the disciples, "Even if everyone else deserts YOU, I will never desert YOU."
 - And then he did.
- Why make such a bold statement? Pride? Self-confidence?
- And why did he then deny JESUS?
 - Instead of pride, doubt?
 - Instead of self-confidence, fear?

Or what about Judas?

- To the religious leaders he asked, "What will you give me if I betray HIM to you?"
 - Betray his RABBI, whom he had followed for three years?
- Why do that? Greed? Disappointment?
- And why later did he repent and try to return the money he had negotiated?
 - Instead of greed or disappointment, remorse?

What about Pilate?

- Though he announced to all who could hear, “I find no crime in this man,”
 - he later took a basin and washed his hands of the situation and allowed a man he found innocent to be put to death?
- Why?
 - To try and shirk his responsibility?
 - To protect his image and prestige?
 - To give the people what they wanted, even if it was wrong?

What motivates our actions?

- Not just in here, but in our families, in our workplaces, in our political loyalties, in our friendships, wherever we are?

Comedian, Jeff Allen explains his motivation for the choices he makes in marriage: “Happy wife, happy life.”

- He explains that motivation based on some advice his uncle gave him the day he was married and became a husband.
 - His uncle said, “When you are in an argument, there are two questions you have to ask yourself:
 - “Do I want to be right?” or, “Do I want to be happy?”
- Happy wife, happy life.
 - But would such motivation really make you happy in the long term?

Giving in to the wrong motivation can lead us to places where we really should not be, or make decisions that are not the best in the long term.

- How many like to hear stories about political candidates who struggle in their personal relationships?
- Or about athletes who give into the temptation to use illegal drugs or abuse their spouses?
- Or about celebrities who make the same mistakes other human beings make?
- There is a fine line between news we need to know and gossip we want to know.
 - And frequently what motivates us is the desire to feel better about ourselves by holding others to a higher standard than we hold ourselves,
 - and then to see the great and mighty fall.

What about JESUS? What motivated HIM?

Throughout His public ministry, it is very clear that His motivation was always to do what was pleasing to GOD,

- and what furthered the kingdom of GOD.
 - JESUS wasn't motivated by being liked by others.
 - JESUS didn't base His choices on what would be best for HIM.
 - JESUS didn't give into the wishes of and pressure from others—and that's what got HIM crucified.
 - Those of you who will be here on Good Friday will hear JESUS' final words from the cross—as statement of what motivated HIM and WHO HE followed:
 - “FATHER, into YOUR hands I commit MY spirit.”

So, what is the bottom line when it comes to making our choices in life?

How might we avoid giving into the wrong motivation?

How might we make positive choices in our relationships, jobs, loyalties, and affiliations?

- By deciding who in life we ultimately are going to follow.
 - Remember the popular question in the 90's: "What would JESUS do?"
 - JESUS sought to do what was pleasing to GOD.

Maybe that sounds a bit too simple.

- And maybe that's what you'd expect to hear in church.
 - But it doesn't make it any less true.
- You will be a better husband or wife or parent or child if you put GOD's will first—not your spouse's or parent's or child's will.

Parents, what happens when you take your child to the toy store?

- They want everything, don't they?
- And if you gave them everything they wanted, that would make you pretty special in their eyes, wouldn't it—for a time.
- But what does GOD want you to do?
 - To show them what to value in life?
 - To teach them how to earn what they want?
 - To make good decisions about what is important?
 - As a parent, who are you going to follow?
 - Your child or GOD?

You will be a better student or employee or supervisor or friend if you put GOD's will first.

- Peer pressure can be powerful,
 - whether it be to fit in with the crowd,
 - or to get that boy or girl to like you,
 - or to get ahead in the company.
- Who you decide you are going to follow will determine whether you stand up for what you know to be right
 - or give into what you know is not what GOD wants.

I have a friend called Ryan.

- Ryan was a lawyer who worked for a very successful firm representing very well-known and important clients.
- The philosophy of this firm was to intimidate everyone with whom they dealt on behalf of their clients.
 - That intimidation included criticism, demeaning, using profanity, and threatening.
 - That behavior was reinforced by the way the junior partners were treated by the senior partner,
 - and how they were encouraged to treat those who were subordinate to them.
- Following a Christian, Ryan began to question the values and practices of his firm,
 - and especially those of the senior partner who was proud to announce to others that he was a Christian and to say to them, "GOD loves you," right after he berated them and cursed them.

Not too long after that retreat, Ryan quit the firm.

- He did so without another job to go to.
 - He and his wife, Anne, decided that it was more important for them to follow GOD's values and that they would find a way to get by on her salary.

It has been a challenge for them financially.

- Ryan and Anne find life to be much better and both of them are much happier in spite of those challenges.
- Ryan went back to school to work on a new career—one that will allow him to more genuinely fulfill his commitment to follow JESUS.
- He still prays for his former boss and talks to him occasionally.
 - His boss still likes to say to him, “GOD loves you.”

Following JESUS and putting GOD first will take you to new places, and more focused decision, and perhaps even new priorities in your life.

- Might following JESUS and putting GOD first help you to make decisions you’ve been putting off?
- Might it improve your marriage?
- Might it change who you support for public office?
- Might it motivate you to step out in response to needs that have been gnawing at you for some time?

Following JESUS and putting GOD first will change your life.

- It will cause you to put the needs of other ahead of your own needs.
- It will move you to serve others without thought of compensation or acclaim.
- It will cause you to set aside your desires for the sake of the situations of others.
- It will lead you act in ways that will create a sense of accomplishment and purpose and direction that has been missing,
 - because you are aligning yourself less and less with the world and more and more with GOD.

Following JESUS and putting GOD first will help you to know what choices to make in difficult situations

- and bring peace to your life, even when those choices are uncomfortable and unpopular.

People today are not that much different than those in JESUS’ day.

- We can be easily influence by what we hear and what we think we want.
- Each of us must ask ourself, “To which voice will I listen?”
 - My own?
 - The crowds?
 - Those to whom I have given influence?
 - Or GOD, who says of JESUS, “This is my SON, the beloved. Listen to HIM!”

Today we celebrate that JESUS comes as KING—“THY kingdom come.”

- This week we witness His commitment to GOD’s love for all people as HE goes to the cross and dies for all—“THY will be done.”
- Each day we are faced with decisions we must make based on the motivations to which we give priority.
 - In each and every choice we must pause and pray and then ask ourselves the question—the most important question we will ever ask:
 - Who am I going to follow?