

The Call to Follow
Matthew 16:21-28
Legacy Baptist Church
October 18, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The following is a portion of a newspaper article from the October 12, 2009 edition of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette entitled, [**“Televangelist Links Wealth to Strong Faith”**](#) by **Frank Lockwood**.

The bible is full of jaw-dropping dreams, visions, and divine visitations, but none quite like this one, shared by televangelist Kenneth Copeland during a sermon at Little Rock’s Agape Church. “The Lord woke me up in the middle of the night,” Copeland told worshippers on Sunday. “There stood Jesus with a huge tray and the tray was heaped with cookies, and he said, ‘Kenneth, have a cookie’.” Grabbing for one of the bedtime snacks, Copeland said he replied, “I believe I will.” If you have enough faith to move mountains, Copeland suggested, God can give you the desires of your heart: vigorous health, limitless wealth, unending happiness and eternal life – plus new airplanes and fresh-baked goods. You believe. You receive. “Have faith in God,” Copeland said over and over. “That’s God’s plan. Increase. Increase. Growth all the time. Better and better and better.” As the national unemployment rate creeps toward double digits, Copeland argued that Christians should be exempt from economic downturns. “Big brother” Jesus “bore the curse of poverty” so that the rest of us wouldn’t have to scrape together nickels and dimes, Copeland argued. “We are family – joint heirs – with the wealthiest man that exists.”

May I be so bold as to say, “This is heresy”? Either that or John the Baptist wasn’t really the greatest man who ever lived because his life and teaching, according to Copeland, would have reflected faithlessness not faithfulness, for John said,

"He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.

John 3:30

No, the truth of the matter is, Copeland, and other televangelists like him, are nothing more than false teachers propagating a false gospel. They are literally selling a gospel that is completely different than the one Paul freely shared and they should therefore be accursed.

Church, Jesus did not bare the curse of our poverty. Jesus bore the curse for our sin. And His call to follow Him is not a call to self-fulfillment, health, and wealth, but a call to selfless living. But don’t take my word for it, listen to Jesus Himself. Turn to Matthew 16 and let’s read verses 21-28.

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. (22) Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." (23) But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (25) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (26) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (27) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (28) "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Matthew 16:21-28

The contrast between our passage and the newspaper article is stark. Mr. Copeland speaks of self-fulfillment, health, material prosperity, and blessing. Jesus speaks of selfless living, suffering, spiritual poverty, and blessing. In the end, Mr. Copeland is calling people to follow themselves and that is exactly what Peter was reprimanded for. Think about it.

Jesus had begun to show His disciples the truth regarding His work and the necessity of His going to Jerusalem, His suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, His murder, and His resurrection. All four of these things were contrary to what they believed the Messiah needed to do and Peter goes so far as to vocalize his opposition. “God forbid it!” “Heaven forbid that be the plan!” “Heaven forbid You, as the Messiah, should suffer that fate. You, as the Messiah are going to lead the long awaited rebellion. You are going to lead our march to freedom. You are going to set up the long-awaited kingdom.” And while he says, “This shall never happen to you” in his mind he’s probably thinking, “This should never happen to me/us.” This isn’t what I/we deserve. I/we have committed the last two years to you and your cause. I’ve/we’ve earned more than this. I/we deserve more than that fate. This isn’t what I/we want. This isn’t what I/we signed up for. This isn’t my/our plan.

The false teachers and televangelists in our day do the same thing. But it’s not just the leaders like Mr. Copeland, its people in general. Sometimes it’s impossible to determine which came first. Is it the false teaching that produces the selfish appetites in people or is it the selfish appetites in the people that demand the false teaching? The truth is, there are many people who want to hear this false message. Paul says,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, (4) and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

People want their ears tickled. They want a message that feeds their own egos, their own desires, their own plans, and their own agendas. They don’t like God’s plan so they devise their own. They make up their own path based upon their own desires which are all rooted in their preoccupation with and love for themselves.

And Jesus, knowing all of this about Peter and about people in general, says, “Get behind me. You are hindering me. Your mind is set on the wrong things. Your mind is set on what you want not what God wants. You are focused on yourself, you desires, your wishes, your agenda, your path, your course. Peter, it’s all about you. And when I called you to follow me, that’s not what I had in mind. The call to follow me is not just slightly different, it’s completely different. What you have in mind is not what the Father or I have in mind. In fact, what you have in mind is evil.” And in verse 24 he says, “The call to follow Me involves **A NEW DEVOTION, A NEW DESIRE, and a NEW DIRECTION.**” We’ll look first at the **NEW DEVOTION**, but before we do, we need to make sure we understand that Jesus isn’t talking about a pre-requisite to following. He isn’t saying, “Do this first and then come or then follow. What He’s saying is, “This is what following looks like; this is what followers do; this is what characterizes those who follow me. If you are going to follow, this is what following looks like, this is what you must be committed to.” And then He lays out the characteristics.

A NEW DEVOTION

He begins with a **NEW DEVOTION**. Jesus says,

*"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must **deny himself**.*

Devotion is defined as “**loyalty or as a strong enthusiasm and admiration for another**”. Unfortunately, prior to a born again experience, prior to conversion, man’s loyalty, or man’s strong enthusiasm and admiration is for himself or herself. There isn’t a stronger devotion than for oneself. We all were loyal to and admired

ourselves more than anyone else. We were number one, and everything we did revolved around us. Everything we did involved some type of worship of ourselves.

Jesus understands that devotion and says, “If you are going to follow me, your devotion has to change. You are going to have to have a **NEW DEVOTION**.” Actually, the word means to **disown**. So He’s saying, “A follower of mine has to disown himself. No more strong enthusiasm or admiration for yourself.” Why? Because there is nothing really to admire. That was David’s point in Psalm 14,

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. (2) The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. (3) They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.

Psalm 14:1-3

There is nothing within us, nothing about us, worthy of admiration, worthy of loyalty, worthy of worship. And Jesus is telling His disciples that those who follow Him must acknowledge that unworthiness and therefore possess a **NEW DEVOTION**. Their devotion must change from themselves to Him. That is why He began the beatitudes by saying,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4) "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:3-4

A **NEW DEVOTION** means those who follow acknowledge their spiritual poverty or bankruptcy. They mourn their sin, they mourn over their own spiritual condition and therefore no longer admire themselves. They are no longer enthusiastic about themselves because they know there is nothing to be enthused about.

But He doesn’t stop there. That is only the first characteristic. He quickly adds the second.

A NEW DESIRE

*(24) "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, **and take up his cross***

Desire is defined as “**a wish or longing for something**”. Prior to conversion, man’s wishes and longings are focused on prosperity, wealth, health, ease, and comfort. Prior to conversion, our desires revolve around our fleshly lusts and appetites. We want material possessions. We want prestige. We want power. We want what we want, when we want it. We want a life free of discomfort, pain, trouble, and strife. Not only do we want it, we believe we deserve it.

But Jesus says the life of a follower will be characterized by the exact opposite. He says, “One who follows me, will take up his cross.” The life of a follower will be characterized by a couple of things. One, he will continually put to death those fleshly lusts and appetites. There will be a desire to mortify those lusts and the sin that so easily entangles us. There will be a constant desire to die to ourselves. As **Dr. MacArthur** has said,

“You must perceive following [Jesus] as putting on the instrument of your own execution.”

John MacArthur
Winning by Losing: The Paradox of Discipleship
Matthew 16:24-28

But not only that, those who follow will also develop a possible longing for or at least an expectation of humiliation, suffering, and persecution. As one pastor I read this week said,

If the Father gave His Son a cross, then do we think that His intention for us to be conformed to Christ would leave us cross-less? Christ learned obedience through suffering even though He had no sin. Can we, who still struggle with remaining sin, learn obedience without a cross?

Phil Newton
South Woods Baptist Church

This is exactly one of the points we talked about at our Men's Fraternity study on Wednesday. Peter, would take these words to heart and pen the following,

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. (20) For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. (21) For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, (22) WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; (23) and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; (24) and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (25) For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 2:19-25

A follower is one who desires to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and contrary to what Mr. Copeland thinks, that path is a path paved with suffering. It is a dying to self, it is a dying to selfish desires, it is a fleeing from youthful lusts, it is a mortifying of our sin. It is a desire to be marked like a bondservant (explain) so that attention might be drawn to the master, so that others might know how wonderful the master is.

A NEW DIRECTION

*(24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and **follow Me.**"*

The last characteristic is found at the end of verse 24. A follower will have a **NEW DIRECTION**.

Direction is defined as **"the way in which someone goes or points"**. It is also defined as **"instructions given by someone who is in control."** Prior to conversion, the ways in which we go are determined by ourselves. We have our own plans, or own objectives, our own agendas. We go where we want to go when we want to go. We do what we want to do when we want to do it. We take pride in our personal control and in our ability to call the shots.

But Jesus says, that all changes if you follow me. No more personal control. No more calling the shots. No more going your own way. No more going down your own path. One who follows me will seek the Father's Kingdom first. One who follows me will seek my righteousness. One who follows me will follow my Father's word and His commands. One who follows me will follow in humble obedience and will be willing to go where the Father wants him or her to go and do what the Father wants him or her to do. I came to do the will of the Father. A follower of mine must want to do the same. A follower does not make up the rules, he follows the rules. He doesn't make up the direction, he follows the direction that's been set. He doesn't alter the plans, he sticks to the plans as they've been presented. He doesn't stray, he follows close behind.

CONCLUSION

A follower will have a **NEW DEVOTION, a NEW DESIRE, and a NEW DIRECTION**. And this new devotion, desire and direction will not be fleeting. The follower will devote himself or herself to Christ and will continue to devote themselves to Christ. The follower will desire and continue to desire to take up their cross. The follower will change direction to follow and will continue in that direction. Their conversion will result in decisive actions. And those decisive actions will continue. That's why Luke adds the words "**daily**". It is a resolve that must be reiterated on a daily basis. It's a commitment that is affirmed and reaffirmed daily, if not hour by hour and moment by moment.

Have you resolved to be a follower of Christ? Your life is no longer your own. You have been bought with a price. Your devotion, your desire, and your direction must be new. If they aren't, you must examine yourself. And church, may these words from Luke's parallel passage be a warning to us all –

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Luke 9:26

It is not only possible but likely that anything short of His call to follow, His call to change our devotion, our desire, and our direction, says "I am ashamed of Him." when, in fact, our eternity rests in Him and Him alone. If we're ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. And if He's ashamed of us, we haven't a prayer before the Father.