

SHARING LIFE AT FIRST ON AUGUST 25, 2019 BY PASTOR BOB BENDER
“CHOOSING THE JESUS WAY” FROM JOHN 6:60-71

Today we begin a miniseries on choices as we continue to journey through John’s gospel and John’s gospel journeys through us. Earlier in John 6 two weeks ago, we considered Jesus choosing us. Now it’s our turn to choose Jesus. Life is full of choices. To live is to choose. Someone has said, “Everything in your life is a reflection of the choices you have made. If you want different results, start making different choices.” Some are insignificant choices—white or wheat/Chevy or Ford. Others are life-changing—to decide to marry this person or to take the next step toward Jesus. Regarding the major choices, sooner or later you will wind up where you have been going all along—choice by choice.

We can all look back and see some good choices we made and some bad ones. Today I’m going to give you an opportunity to make choices that will dramatically change the direction of your life. I remember the day when and where I made the choices I’m asking you to make today. I had already chosen Jesus, but I had not fully chosen the Jesus way.

As Jesus continues to reveal what it meant to follow Him, the crowd had a choice to make. Some chose well and we know how they turned out. Some did not choose so well. While they disappeared from the pages of the Bible, we can safely assume they did not turn out like the ones who made the right choice. This incident in the life of Jesus is recorded for us in John 6:60–71 as I share today on choosing the Jesus way <read>.

Here’s the deal: when Jesus’ hearers realize that He is not after church consumers but after kingdom investors, many of His followers walked with Him no more (v. 66). As long as Jesus was distributing free bread, they were following Him. But when He said they must partake of Him the bread of life, buying into His lifestyle, they bailed. Jesus turns to His apostles and gave them the opportunity to go away also. Simon Peter speaks for them saying those powerful words, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”

Now what about those disciples who fall away (v. 66)? These disciples or followers of Jesus were obviously disciples in training and had chosen to follow Jesus to one degree or another. We are hearing of people today who are deciding to no longer follow Jesus. What is our response? It is fourfold: 1) 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 1 Timothy 4:1 tell us that in the last days— even before Jesus’ return— there will be an apostasy or falling away from the faith. Perhaps we are seeing that. 2) 1 John 2:19 tells us that the fact that they departed from us is evidence that they were really never with us. In other words, they never were saved. They were false prophets or inoculated Christians that Jesus refers to in Matthew 7:21ff. 3) Some of those who fall away only do so for a temporary time due to life experiences or the negative influence of someone else. Some come back to Jesus. 4) Should our belief determine our behavior, or our behavior determine our belief? Obviously, belief determines behavior or doctrine determines practice. But what some people do is they change their belief to match their behavior. Rather than repenting and changing their lives to line up with God’s standard, they merely move God’s standard over to their experience.

However, today I’m more concerned about you and me as I cannot control others’ choices. As Jesus is giving you that same opportunity to choose the next step with Him and I know you will affirm with Simon Peter that when we consider our options, we’re going to stick with Jesus because only Jesus has the words of life. Pray with me that His words give life today.

Let’s suppose you had a business and you were asked what your product was. If you were in the computer business or the insurance business, your answer would be simple: computers or insurance. What kind of business are we in here at FBC? What’s our “product?” Jesus said simply to make disciples. So as in the case of Jesus, we are in the business of making disciples, or kingdom investors. So, what is a disciple? A disciple is a fully surrendered follower and learner of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to follow Him and come and learn of Him. So today we are going to gain more insight into what it means to follow Jesus and learn of Him.

Five times Jesus unpacks this definition of a disciple by giving us specific conditions to discipleship. Each time He challenges us to choose the Jesus way.

/CHOOSE TO LOVE GOD’S SON RADICALLY (LUKE 14:25-26)

One layperson lamented, “We can get decisions, but we can’t get disciples.” How do we bridge the gap between decision and disciple? As Jesus’ “year of popularity” nears its end and He makes His way toward Jerusalem, He turns to the “mooring herd” following Him and once again begins to thin it out by telling them in essence, “I don’t want decisions; I want disciples. I don’t want fans; I want followers.”

Here He is saying that we cannot be His disciples unless we hate. What does Jesus mean here? Because the Bible doesn’t mean what it says as much as it means what it means. He is saying that any relationship compared to our love relationship with Jesus ought to be as hate in comparison. Our love for Jesus ought to trump any other love. Psalm 97:10 says, “Hate evil you who love the Lord.”

If we are not completely devoted to Jesus, we will be to someone or something else. That’s the way God made us. Notice the beginning of David’s downfall in 2 Samuel 11:1, “In the spring of the year when kings normally go to war, David stayed in Jerusalem...” Christianity is simply falling in love with Jesus. Remember the greatest commandment (Mark 12:30). It is interesting that Satan strikes in this all-important area (2 Cor. 11:3). Both Jesus and the devil go straight for your heart.

How do you know you love someone? You tell them you love them. You think about them. You talk to them and about them. You spend time with them. You have strong feelings about them. It hurts you when people say bad things about them. You are proud to be known by them. If they write you, you take in every word. You make sacrifices for them. You hate anything that would compete with that love. You take them with you most wherever you go.

We have a word for a spouse who loves someone else more than they do their husband or wife—adulterer or adulteress (James 4:4). Jesus asks us the same question he asked Simon Peter, “Do you love Me?” three times and chastises the Ephesian church for leaving their first love, Jesus (Rev. 2:4). Have you left your first love, Jesus, for another lover? One way to love Jesus more is to show up in His house more or to start your day off by spending some time with Him.

//CHOOSE TO FOLLOW GOD’S SON FULLY (LUKE 14:27, 33)

We need to count the cost to following Jesus as one would do so financially before building a building or assessing your army’s strength before going to war (vv. 28-32). Jesus does not call us to pray a cute little prayer and go our own way. He simply says, “Follow Me.” What does it cost to follow Jesus? The same thing it cost Jesus to follow God (the cross). The cross is the same for all of us yet different as Jesus commands us here to take up our own cross. We each have our own unique cross to bear that God is using in our lives to bring us to the end of ourselves so we can follow Him fully. The cross is a symbol of costly sacrifice—even death. You cannot live for God unless you die to yourself.

What is Jesus calling you to die to? Persons (v. 26) Pleasures (v. 27) Possessions (v. 33). If Jesus is not your number one person, some other person will usurp Him. If Jesus is not your number one pleasure, then another pleasure will usurp Him. If Jesus is not your number one possession, then another possession will usurp Him. Follow Jesus fully.

What do you need to give up or die to for Jesus that you might gain greater influence in this life—time, money, energy, a relationship that is dragging you down, or that attitude including a “spirit of religion?”

It costs to follow Jesus. In fact, it is going to cost you your life. It costs you more not to follow Jesus as that too will cost you greatly. Is it worth it NOT to follow Jesus? Ask the rich young ruler. Ask Ananias

and Sapphira. Ask Adam and Eve. Ask Solomon (read Ecclesiastes). Ask Bill Cosby, Bernie Madoff, or Jeff Epstein. You can die in order to live or you can live for yourself and die a slow painful death in this life. Join me in following Jesus fully by giving Jesus all your possessions, personal relationships, and pleasures.

///CHOOSE TO ABIDE IN GOD’S WORD CONTINUALLY (JOHN 8:31-32)

The first thing Jesus said to these new believers was to continue in His word. Here “word” is singular, not plural because Jesus’ word is a package deal. We don’t get to pick and choose which words to continue in. If we are to follow, learn, and obey His word, then we would be His true disciples. The result of abiding in the word will be knowing the truth and that truth frees us.

What is this freedom Jesus promises? Freedom is not the right to do what you want to do; real freedom is the power to do what you ought to do. That kind of freedom simply comes from continuing in Jesus’ word. The word “continue” here is from the Greek word *meno*, meaning to stay, abide, or remain. The Christian life isn’t complicated; it’s simple: do what Jesus is telling you to do. I didn’t say it was easy, I just said it’s simple. Get with Jesus daily and get your marching orders from His word and get to work! “Eat this book!” (Jer. 15:26).

Are you continuing in Jesus’ word? What does that look like? Do you read it, study it, relish it, memorize it, meditate on it, and most importantly, obey and apply it? Is it your “soul food?” How you live declares what you believe; all the rest is just religious talk and deception. Begin this week by opening up God’s word daily so that if someone asked you what God said to you recently, you would have an answer. It’s not called the word of God for nothing.

///CHOOSE TO LOVE GOD’S CHILDREN SUPERNATURALLY (JOHN 13:34-35)

Now we go from preaching to meddling! What is “new” and supernatural about this old command to love others? The newness is the phrase “even as I have loved you.” Jesus obviously has just washed His disciples’ feet as an example of His love. His love is a pattern for our love. How does Jesus love us? Unselfishly, unendingly, sacrificially, forgivingly, unconditionally, and understandingly to name a few. I use the term supernaturally because we need God’s love in us before we can love others. We love some devotedly, we love others dutifully, and we love still others by faith.

Now what does this kind of love look like? It is a love that covers a multitude of sins (1 Pt. 4:8). It is a love in action (1 Jn. 3:18 TLB). It is a love controlled by God’s Spirit (Rom. 5:5). We need the Holy Spirit’s continual filling; otherwise in the words of one child reporting to his mother on his dad’s actions, “Mom, dad said something in cursive in the car at another driver!” It is a love from pure hearts (1 Pt. 1:22). It is a love that makes it right when we offend others or others have offended us (Mt. 5 and 18).

What does the world see when they look at us? Judgmentalism, impatience, gossip, infighting, intolerance, a critical spirit, anger, unforgiveness, or grudge bearing? Do you have your brother or sister’s back or are you stabbing them in the back? When you speak against a fellow follower of Jesus, you are lining up with the devil—the accuser of Christians. Who specifically do you need to work on loving more?

///CHOOSE TO BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD’S GLORY LIBERALLY (JOHN 15:8)

Christianity is simply Jesus received, realized, and reproduced. This verse is obviously in the context of abiding in Jesus (the way we bear fruit) —maintaining and developing an already existing relationship with Jesus. The fruit Jesus refers to here is others’ lives changed because of you—life on life; making a difference

one by one. Nothing glorifies God more than a changed life because of you. The fruit of a Christian is another Christian touched by your life. Friend, you can make a difference in someone else's life by your witness!

Jesus is asking "Where's the fruit?" or those who have come to Jesus through your life? God is glorified or His name is made great when people come to Jesus because of you. Two things last for eternity: people's souls and God's Word—let's invest in eternity! Ask the Holy Spirit to impress upon you someone you could engage with this week in a spiritual conversation. Make a prayer list of those without Jesus in your circle of influence. Sow a good word about Jesus to someone this week.

Yose ben Yoezer was one of the earliest members of the rabbinic movement—rabbis teaching students—about two centuries before Jesus. He wrote, "Sit in the very dust of their (the Rabbis') feet" (Mishnah, *Avot* 1:4). The idea here is to sit on the floor midst the dust of your teacher's sandaled feet who would sit in a chair. Mary did so at Jesus' feet and Paul sat at the feet of his teacher, Gamaliel. This saying also meant to follow the rabbi or teacher of your choice as you walk down life's road with him.

The phrase then generally became, "Covered in the dust of your rabbi" or "walking in your teacher's dust." The scene of a teacher or Rabbi walking in front of his students was a common one—even of our Lord Jesus and the 12. As learners, we are to sit humbly at the feet of our Master. As followers, we are to follow in the footsteps of our Master so closely that we are covered in His dust. As we walk closely with Jesus, we have something to share with those who follow in our footsteps. Paul states, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). How close are you to Jesus? What kind of dust are you kicking up as a result? "If every church member was just like me, what kind of church would my church be?"

"Everything in your life is a reflection of the choices you have made. If you want different results, start making different choices." As you review these five components of being a disciple, which one is the Spirit of God putting His finger on in your life? I, with Joshua, challenge you to "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Don't continue to be haunted by bad choices. Make good ones today and be blessed. Deuteronomy 30:19 says "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants."