

Who are you following? - 13/03/2016

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (Jn.14:6)

Beloved in The Lord,

Who are you following? Where do you seek advice? Where do you find answers for the questions in your life? What guides your life? These are very important questions.

Before we go deeper with this thought, we need to make sure that we are clear what our goal in life is. If our goal is not clear, then we stumble through life and not much good comes from it.

Writing about his own life, the Apostle Paul wrote:

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil.3:14)

Paul's goal in life was to attain to the resurrection from the dead, to live forever in Heaven, to take his place in the Father's House. Paul clearly knew where he was heading and his life was tailored to attain to that goal. He did not simply drift through life, he said that he pressed on toward the goal. His eye was on Heaven. He wrote a little further on in the same letter:

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." (Phil.3:20-21)

If we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, then our citizenship is in Heaven, not here on this earth. As Christians we need to keep this in the forefront of our thinking – we are not of this world. When our goal is clear, when our citizenship is clear, then like Paul, we tailor our life accordingly.

The road to achieving eternal life in Heaven is Jesus Christ. Jesus said that He is the way, the truth and the life and that no-one comes to the Father apart from Him. Very simply, that means that if we are to live in Heaven forever with Christ, in The Father's House, then we must be in Christ Jesus. There is no other way to Heaven.

If we trust or follow any other person, or god, or ideal or philosophy, we will not reach the goal. That is why I posed the question at the outset: "Who are you following?"

The Bible warns us that we need to test what we believe, and who we follow.

We read: ***"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1.John 4:1)***

Notice that John writes that “many” false prophets are in the world. There are many false teachers and pastors who lead people astray, who are having people follow them and not The Lord Jesus Christ.

It is of utmost importance that we test and know who we are trusting, who we are following. Not everything that looks and sounds good is truth.

Earlier this year Linda and I were in the city and we were using public transport. We caught the train home as far as Strathfield station and then we were going to catch a bus that would take us home. The 483 stops on the corner of our street. While we were waiting for the 483 a 464 bus arrived at the stop up from where we were. Linda said “let's get on that one, it will be quicker.” I thought ok. We ran for the bus and got on. After all, the 464 also goes to Enfield. I followed Linda. The bus headed off and suddenly instead of going up the Boulevard toward Enfield it turned left onto Morwick St, toward Burwood. We realised that we were on the wrong bus. Although it was a 464 it was heading in a different direction. We suddenly realised that the same bus numbers follow different routes. As we were boarding the bus, I had a feeling something wasn't quite right, but I thought – Linda is usually right so I followed her. We relied on the number without checking the destination.

Why am I telling you this story? To simply illustrate how easily we can take the wrong path. If we blindly follow someone and don't listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit, and don't check closely, we can easily go wrong.

Many people blindly follow a teaching of a church or ministry or pastor, never questioning, never testing what is being taught. Latvians have a tendency to say: “He is the pastor so he knows what he is saying.” This problem is not however confined to Latvians. There are whole denominations and Churches that do not encourage people to test the message but encourage blind obedience. An example is the Roman Catholic Church, that actively discourages people from personal Bible reading and says that the priest will interpret and explain for them what they need to know. My friends that is both wrong and dangerous.

God has given us His Word, and it is our duty to study it, to read it and obey it. God has also given us His abiding presence in the form of The Holy Spirit, who leads us, guides us, gives us understanding if we let Him and trust in Him.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that you shouldn't listen to your Pastor, but I am encouraging you to test what is being taught against God's Word. If I teach anything contradicting God's Word, you need to tell me.

It is good for our spiritual health to do regular checkups. To examine your beliefs and ask yourself why you believe what you believe. To check who you are following. What is influencing you and your decisions. Is your belief system in concord with God's Word. Is your life obeying God's Word.

You can only do this by regularly reading and studying God's Word. The more you read and study, the more your understanding grows and you become much sharper in your discernment. You can quickly tell if something is true or not.

If you do not regularly read the Bible how will you know what is the truth? So many people believe that it doesn't matter what you believe. It does matter. Your eternal existence is dependent upon your beliefs and who you are following.

An illustration found in both the Old and New Testaments is the Shepherd and the sheep. People are likened to sheep in the Bible. Sheep are not terribly smart and they tend to follow the crowd. Without a shepherd to lead and guide them they easily stray and become easy prey for the wolf, who is a type of Satan. If we are not following the Good Shepherd, The Lord Jesus Christ, then we are easy prey for the Devil. How many people has he led astray? How many have bought into Satan's lies and deceptions only to discover the truth of Jesus' statement: ***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10)**

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and if we follow Him, and Him alone, then we will never go astray and we are protected from the Devil. We are not his prey. Problems arise when we stray from the Shepherd and we go it alone or follow someone else. This happens so easily and so quickly.

The world is constantly pressing in on us from all sides. People try to manipulate our thinking and press us to conform to their ideas. Often our own feelings betray us and lead us away.

We need to keep all this opposition at bay, and we need to have God's Word front and centre at all times. We need to say: "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it." When we take this stand then we can be sure that we will reach our goal.

Understand that we have been given a "Good Shepherd" who loves us so very much. He Himself said: ***"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."* (Jn.10:11)**

Jesus laid down His life in order that we may follow Him. He did it simply because He loved us so very much. Let us be clear on this one. May we never doubt it.

May we commit here and now, to hold fast to Jesus, to follow Him alone, to live for Him alone and to serve Him alone. Let us hold fast to Him and to His Word and we will reach our goal. Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.***