

Following At A Distance

Matt. 26:57-58

Introduction:

1. I cannot imagine the emotional intensity that Peter must have experienced during the final days of Jesus' life.
2. When Jesus was seized in the Garden of Gethsemane, moments before being taken to the house of Caiaphas, Peter had cut off Caiaphas' servant's ear with his sword (Matt. 26:51; Jn. 18:10).
3. Later he will curse and swear and deny that he even knows Jesus (Matt. 26:74).
4. The passage we have just read is sandwiched in between these events. He is following Jesus, "at a distance."
5. He wants to see what is going to happen, but he does not want to get too close. He does not want to be identified with Jesus.
6. You may find yourself in just such a circumstance on occasion in your life. Maybe you are just learning and you are not ready to commit your life to the Lord. Maybe you are a Christian, and know what Jesus teaches but find it different than what others would have you to believe and instead of launching out in full commitment--you "follow at a distance."

Discussion:

- I. There are many reasons why we might follow "at a distance."
 - A. Fear must have been a factor for Peter.
 1. Jesus had predicted His death in Jerusalem (Matt. 16:21).
 - a. Peter had said, "God forbid it! This shall never happen to you" (16:22).
 - b. But the Lord said, "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" (16:23).
 2. He had tried to prepare the disciples for what was about to occur (Jn. 14:1ff).
 3. He knew it was going to be a stressful time for them.
 4. Matt. 26:56 says after His capture "all the disciples left Him and fled."
 - B. Confusion and uncertainty must have filled their hearts.
 1. What will they do to Him?
 2. What will they do to us? "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him," Thomas had said as Jesus prepared to go to Bethany, near Jerusalem, to raise Lazarus. They knew the situation was tense.
 3. But He had stilled the storm. Could He not calm the crowd?
 - C. A lack of faith causes some of us to "follow at a distance."
 1. We want to believe in that God will not desert us, nor forsake us, but what about Heb. 11:36ff? What about Job? What about the martyrs?
 2. We want to have faith, but pray, "Help our unbelief" (Mk. 9:24).
 - D. Sometimes we are just intimidated by others.
 1. The Jews and their High Priest, Caiaphas, were powerful men.
 2. They had military guards.
 3. The disciples could lose their lives in this situation. And Peter had already been

reprimanded and told to put his sword away!

II. Following at a distance suggests . . .

A. Interest.

1. Peter was definitely interested in the Lord and what was going to happen.
2. Those who assemble with the people of God but make no commitment are interested. They may pray. They may study the Bible. They are interested.

B. Cautious hesitation.

1. Observation.
2. Consideration.
3. "Thinking about it."

C. Lack of commitment.

D. Willingness to investigate.

E. Purposefulness.

1. They are close enough to observe, but not close enough to be identified with Jesus.
2. They do not want to be clearly identified as being with the Lord.
3. John Hancock was a famous signer of the Declaration of Independence. His name stands out at the bottom of the document. He wrote his name in large print, clearly, so that it easily read. To sign that document meant treason against the English government. Death, confiscation of property, imprisonment were possible consequences. John Hancock wrote his name large. He was all in.

D. Sometimes I wonder if this is not an element of appeal for some in large churches.

1. In a small church everyone knows your name. It is more intimate.
2. In a very large church it is easier for people to follow at a distance. They can come and go as they like. They can maintain a distance that is comfortable.
3. A similar dynamic may occur in smaller churches and be evident in the level of people's involvement. Language may reveal the distance. Refer to what "we" are doing or what "they" are doing??

III. Others will observe your "following at a distance" (26:69-75).

A. They may press you.

1. Peter was pressed again and again.
2. A servant-girl said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."
3. Another servant-girl said, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."
4. The by-standers said, "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away."
5. Peter denied it all. "I don't know what you are talking about." He denied his association with Jesus with an oath. "I do not know the man." Cursing and swearing he said, "I do not know the man."

B. People have a tendency to question your allegiances when you are "following at a distance."

C. Others forcing you to come face to face with the reality of your "following at a distance" may make you angry.

D. Jesus recognizes when you are "following at a distance."

1. This crushed Peter.
2. "He went out and wept bitterly."

IV. The Lord is patient with those who "follow at a distance," but it is a "no-man's-land," a precarious circumstance.

- A. How much longer will "following at a distance be tolerated?"
- B. Commitment is called for.
- C. What do you need to do to make a full commitment?
- D. When will you make the commitment?
- E. Peter ultimately made the commitment. He wrote his name "LARGE" on the Day of Pentecost when he preached Jesus as the Christ. Later when threatened for preaching Jesus as the Christ he said, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Conclusion:

1. There is a song written by Philip P. Bliss that says, "Some more convenient day, on Thee I'll call. Almost persuaded, turn not away. Jesus invites you, angels are lingering, prayers are rising. . . almost cannot avail. Almost is but to fail. Sad, sad, that bitter wail—"Almost—but lost!"
2. How long will you follow at a distance? Will you identify yourself fully and completely with the Lord?