

SUBJECT: THE CHOICE

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 21:18-23

From The Sermon File of Dr. Doyce H. Nolan

Introduction

When the soldiers of Napoleon's army were invading Russia, they came to a village from which all had fled except one man. The man was a Russian woodsman. He carried his ax in his leather belt. When the French Captain saw him, he ordered his immediate execution. When the soldiers leveled their rifles, the man stood firm. He was not afraid to die. He looked calmly into the eyes of the waiting soldiers. His calmness impressed the French Captain so much that he ordered his men to hold their fire. He determined that the Russian would be spared for his bravery, but that he would be branded. The iron was heated red hot and was pressed against the flesh of the woodsman's hand. Through this tremendous pain of burning flesh the woodsman did not flinch or cry out. The letter "N" was branded onto the back of his hand and it stood out in redness and throbbing pain. The Russian demanded to know the meaning of the brand; he was told, "This is the letter 'N' and stands for Napoleon; you belong to Napoleon now." **The woodsman was faced with a choice.** Would he belong to Napoleon or would he remain a loyal Russian? This is the issue facing us today.

In verses 18-19 Christ calls for Peter to follow Him and be devoted to Him, and states that his devotion to Christ would bring about his death. Peter's attitude was like many of our day. (20-22). *Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved, following; who also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, who is he that betrayeth thee? Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me."*

Illustrate:

When our four children were young, each was assigned duties around the house. When we told one of them to do something extra, their response was always the same: "*What about Joan? What is she going to do?*" Our reply: "*You don't worry about her, you just do what I told you to do*".

This is what our Lord was saying to Peter, you don't worry about Mark, what he does is none of your business! You just do what I tell you to do!" When Christ tells us to follow Him, we shouldn't worry about what someone will do, we just need to be obedient to Christ! What choice will you make? There are three positions to be considered.

1. Which Way Are You Going?
2. On Whose Side Are You?
3. To Whom Do You Belong?

I. WHICH WAY ARE YOU GOING? (Matt. 7:13-14)

Makes it very clear that there are only two ways to go in life. The broad, easy, popular way which leads to destruction and the narrow hard way that leads to life!

1. On Which Road Are You Traveling? Matt. 6:33

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. What are "all these things" that shall be added to you? This refers to the whole far reaching results of salvation! When one receives Christ as Savior, one becomes under the full care and provision of Almighty God! Where do your values, goals, desires and aspirations direct you?

Col. 3:1-2 *If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*

2. In Choosing A Direction In Life Which Are You Most Like?

- a. **The people of Judah of whom God said Jer. 8:5-6** *Why, then, is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backslidding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright; no man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Everyone turned to his own course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. are you more like ...*
- b. **The people of whom Isaiah said Is. 53:6** *All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way. Perhaps you are ...*
- c. **Like Jonah who, when God told him to go to Nineveh Jonah 1:3** *Rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Perhaps like **John Mark Acts 13:13** who turned away from Paul and the others on the mission trip to go his own way when things got too hard.*

Hopefully you are going the way Paul choose Phil. 3:13-14 *Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Which way are you going? The way of your own desires? Or the upward way that leads to Jesus?*

Which Way Would The Russian Go? He was surrounded by his enemies. They held the power of life or death over him. His hand was branded with the letter "N" and the French Captain said that he belonged to Napoleon. The easy way would be that of submission to the enemy; the courageous way would be to remain a patriot of Russia. **The Russian had to make a choice, he had to make a decision; and so do you!**

II. ON WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU? (Lk. 11:23)

Jesus said, *He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.* Are you with Christ or against Him?

Illustration:

Someone asked Abe Lincoln during the Civil War, "Do you think God is on our side?" Mr. Lincoln replied, "*I know that God is always on the side of right. I am not nearly as worried about God being on our side as I am about us being on God's side.*"

1. The Choice to You is a Clear-cut Josh. 24:14-15

Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua stands before the people in the leadership roll that God assigns the husband and makes the decision for his family that they will serve the Lord.

Elijah said to the people 1 Kings 18:21 *How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.*

2. Its time you made a decision!

On whose side do you take your stand? Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve Him? Who will leave the world's side?

The Russian woodsman had always been a loyal Russian. But now the fiery, burning "N" claimed him as the possession of Napoleon. But his heart had always belonged to Russia. What would he do? Today your loyalty is tested. The world lays claim on you against the claims of heaven; what will you do? What choice will you make? Where will you stand?

III. TO WHOM DO YOU BELONG?

The Bible makes it very clear. If you are a Christian, you belong to Christ.

I Cor. 3:23 *You belong to Christ and Christ belongs to you.*

I Cor. 6:19-20 *What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who is in you, whom you have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are Gods.*

1. When We Buy Something We Usually Mark It.

The first thing I do when I purchase a bible is to have my name printed on it as an identifying mark that the bible belongs to me, it is my property. The identifying mark that a Christian belongs to Christ is Obedience:

Paul says Romans 6:16 *Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"*

2. In Spite Of This Many Continue to Wrongly Assume ...

- a. "It's my body! I can do what I want!"
- b. "It's my money! I can spend anyway I choose."
- c. "It's my time! I will use it the way I want!"
- d. "I'm my own person!"

But Jesus cautions Matt. 6:24 *No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (money).*

Conclusion

To Whom Do You Really Belong? What Authority Do You Recognize And Serve As Master?

There was no doubt about it for the Russian woodsman. His pain was intense. The letter "N" indicated that he belonged to Napoleon. He had always been loyal and patriotic. **He must now make a choice!** He placed his burned, lacking hand against a tree stump, took out his ax and swinging it high, brought it down with such force that he severed his branded hand with one blow. Then said, *"There, the hand may belong to Napoleon, but I am a Russian. If I must die, I will die a Russian!"*

How about you? What choice will you make this day? Have you determined that no matter what the cost, you will be loyal and faithful to Jesus? Will you take a stand for Him though you may have to stand alone?