

“CONFRONTING CHRIST IN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE”

Deuteronomy 29:9-18, Hebrews 8:8-10, John 6:60-71

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“A man was flying from Atlanta to Dallas and had to catch flight number 74. There is a famous soul food place in Atlanta called Pascal’s, and this place is famous for its fried chicken. Pascal’s has many booths in the Atlanta airport. As the man was at the airport waiting on his flight, the smell from Pascal’s was calling his name. So he went over and ordered two thighs and a biscuit. However, just as he sat down to eat his chicken and biscuit, he heard the last call for his flight, flight number 74 to Dallas.

“This guy was on the horns of a dilemma. Piping-hot chicken was calling his name. Flight number 74 was calling his name. Both of them were screaming in his ears. He had to decide if he would risk missing his flight to eat his chicken, or if he would leave his too-hot-to-eat chicken and catch his flight. Well, fortunately he decided to take his chicken on the flight.

“God is not asking us to give up the “chicken” of religion. He’s asking us **to not miss** the flight of our first love for Him. God’s asking us to not let what we do for God get in the way of our **relationship** with God. Don’t mix, or miss, the connection,”<sup>1</sup> or else we may end up losing everything.

That’s what Moses was telling the people of Israel as they were preparing to go into the Promised Land. The people of Israel also had two things screaming in their ears - they could adopt and follow the ways of the Egyptians and the other peoples whose land they had passed through on the way to get to the point of crossing the Jordan River to live in the land that God had promised to them. Or they could follow the commands of the Lord God, who was the very One who had led them out of slavery in the land of Egypt and had brought them to that very place on the east side of the Jordan River. They could either choose the ways of the world and follow man-made rules and religions, or they could choose the ways of the Lord God Almighty, and follow the One God of the universe. They had a decision to make.

However, God was not inviting them to take the religions of Egypt along with them into the

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 105-106)

Promised Land, but to solely put their confidence and faith in the Lord their God. The covenant that God was preparing for them was one that would guarantee that He would guide them and protect them and connect them with Him so that He could be their God. God was asking them to love Him more than anything else in this world so that they would not lose out on their love for Him. God was asking the people to stay connected to Him, to be in relationship with Him, to make Him their God, so that He could receive them as His children, and love them forever. God was asking the people to make Him their first and only love so that they didn't miss out on, or mix, the connection with Him.

So Moses tells the people, *“Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do...You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on the way here. You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison”* (Deuteronomy 29:9, 16-18).

You see, our God is a jealous God, and He demands that we have Him as the only god in our lives. We are to seek Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength so that He might lead us and bless us as His people, a people who have become His children because they make Him their God.

That demand goes out to all of us, to every person in the world. However we are so easily enticed away from the Lord God Almighty to worship the things of this world, so when we come to church, we have these two dynamic entities screaming our names, wanting us to follow along. Sadly, so often, we are led away from the true source of life and hope and peace and prosperity, to settle for temporary pleasures or indulgences. We run after the things that glitter, and sparkle, and appease the senses, rather than staying true to the God of the Universe who created all of them.

And that puts us in a conundrum, for we cannot seek both the things of the world and the things of God (Luke 16:13). It has to be one or the other. This choice has been put before us since our birth, and it is ours to make, each and every day of our lives = who will be the Lord of us.

As it turned out, the people decided to follow the Lord God Almighty at that time, trusting in His guidance and direction in order to receive the land that He had promised Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. But it was not long before they were chasing after other gods, and angering God because of their faithlessness. They broke the covenant with God and sought out their own man-made gods, and they ended up losing their first love and finding themselves as captives under oppressive foreign powers.

It is a lesson that we need desperately to learn in our own day, too, as we are rapidly approaching the same dilemma. While many are striving to seek after the Lord God Almighty, there are so many more who are calling us to abandon the ways of God and seek the glories, and riches and power of the things of this world. DON'T DO IT, FOLKS! Don't give up your faith in the Lord our God. Don't lose your first love and chase after lesser gods of this world. Don't become blinded from the things of God by the things of this world. For once you leave the Lord your God, it is so very difficult, if not impossible, to return to Him.

Realizing that the people had lost their love for Him, God decided to make a new covenant with His people through the giving of His Son, Jesus. The Son of God came to earth to invite us to come back to the Lord. Jesus lived among us, taught us about the Father, and then made the ultimate sacrifice in order for us to return to the Lord God Almighty. But His sacrifice was conditional only upon the fact that we have to choose Him as our Savior in order to receive the gift of Salvation from the ways of death. Though Jesus died for all people, it is dependent upon each person making up their own mind to choose Jesus as the Lord of their life and follow Him and obey all of His commands. Only then can we find the promise of eternal life.

So the writer of Hebrews clearly states the situation; *“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said, ‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people...I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people...For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’* (Heb. 8:7-8, 10, 12).

This “new covenant” is through Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, for all people to claim for themselves as they make Jesus their Messiah and lift Him up as their Christ, their King, and their Lord. It is through the crucified body of Jesus Christ that we find our own sinfulness paid for. It is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ that we find redemption and restoration to the Lord God Almighty. It is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we find the hope for eternal life. As we claim Jesus Christ as God’s Son, our Savior, our Master, and our Lord, we are given the forgiveness of our sins, and the love of God fills our hearts and minds so that we can begin to hear Him speak to us once again of all of His ways. We can then become His servants, ministering to one another right where we are so that all those around us might come to know the Lord Jesus as their own Savior.

But to some, even those who started out following Jesus, find this too difficult to understand. And because they do not comprehend who Jesus is and what His purpose was for us, they turn away and no longer follow Him. They turn aside to other ways and become lost to the things of this world. And they become the most miserable people in the world. They listened to the wrong voice and have followed the false gods of this world, and have become lost to any hope for real life.

As Jesus was explaining this to His followers. He put it like this: *“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever”* (John 6:53-58).

Now, that’s quite a statement for anyone to hear, but for the Jews, to literally eat the flesh of a human, and to drink the blood of another was detestable. God had even said so and had commanded them never to do it. And many, upon hearing this statement by Jesus, thought He was talking about His physical flesh and blood. So they questioned terribly the validity of Jesus’ statement.

But Jesus was not talking about physically eating Him and physically drinking His blood. He was referring to us loving Him so much that we welcome Him into our lives completely so that through His broken body and His shed blood, we might find the release of the bondage of our sins, and find eternal life

But listen to what happened as a result of this discussion. This is John 6:60-71. (READ John 6:60-71).

So the followers of Jesus had two voices screaming in their ears. They were so encouraged at hearing Jesus' words and seeing His miracles, and they wanted to follow Him as their Messiah. But they had the old covenant screaming in their ears that it is not right to eat human flesh or drink human blood. Their minds were conflicted enough that they began to listen to the old covenant and they jettisoned any hope of Jesus being the new covenant of God. Their limited minds restrained them from comprehending Jesus' words, and rather than praying about it and seeking God's direction in it, they turned away from Jesus and no longer followed Him. They refused to let Jesus become the Messiah, and they closed their minds to anything new that God could do through Him.

They were listening to the wrong voice, and they decided to follow the old covenant instead of listening to the new covenant. Even though the people had violated and ruined the old covenant, God was establishing a new way for the people to regain a right relationship with Him. But the old law had become so ingrained in their minds that they were unable to hear the new. And they closed their minds and hearts off from Jesus because He challenged them to think differently.

We also find ourselves confronted with the reality of Jesus as our Christ from time to time as well. As we read the Gospels, there are things that Jesus says that either offends us or confuses us, so they are hard for us to hear, too. Sometimes we can hear a message that challenges us to choose which voice we'll hear in our own ears, too, and it is difficult to make the choice as to which voice to hear. We are constantly surrounded by different voices that can easily lead us in a variety of directions, most of which are away from the Lord Jesus. So we must be careful about which voices we listen to.

Listening to the wrong voice can get us sidetracked and waylaid so quickly. If we keep listening to the voices of the world, it is easy for us to become convinced of what we are hearing as being true. When we hear the voices of those against the ways of God tell us over and over and over again that what they are saying is true, we can find ourselves moving way outside of God's ways, and soon not even the still small voice of God can convince us that it isn't true. Then, the only thing that God can do is to let us go our own way, and follow the other voices, and many times we have to get so low that all we can do is to look up before we see the way back to Him.

But Jesus invites us to so put our eyes on Him, and listen solely to His voice so that we don't go off to our own destruction, but find the way to life. He says, "*The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life*" (John 6:63). There is no deception in His words. There is no trickery in Him trying to guide us away from the Lord our God. Everything that Jesus does is to bring us back into a relationship with God the Father, so we have to be careful to listen intently to His voice and He will lead us straight and true into God's presence. If we listen to Jesus and give Him our hearts and minds, He will never lead us astray, but will guide us to victory in life.

In a way, we're so much like the folks in the Olympics that row boats for their competitive event. "They row their boats with their backs to the finish line. They can't see the finish line, but in the very back of the boat is the coxswain, a person with a horn. That person sits in the back of the boat, shouting instructions and guiding the boat. 'Pull, Pull! Row, Row!'"

"The rowers in the boat keep their eyes fixed on the coxswain while they row. While they can't see where they are going, the coxswain can. So, they fix their eyes on the one in the back of the boat. The coxswain gives the rowers a cadence and keeps them on track so that they can win the race.

"If you don't know where you're headed, put your eyes on Jesus because He knows where your finish line is. He knows how to get you in the start of the race and take you to the finish line."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus invites us to let Him be the one to guide our boat in life, and to give us the cadence we

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<sup>2</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, pg. 109-110)

need that will bring us home to God the Father. If we look to others to try to lead our lives, we'll be all over the place. There will be times when the cadence seems much too difficult for us to follow His orders, and we may want to get out of that boat into another one that is heading in a different direction. There may be times when what He tells us to do will be contrary to the popular opinion of those in our own boat. There may be times when we feel like we just don't understand where Jesus is taking us. But that's because we have our backs to the finish line. We can't see it because we're working hard at rowing our boat. But if we can trust that Jesus knows where He needs to take us to cross the finish line, then we can keep our eyes on Him and follow His instructions, no matter how difficult they might be, no matter how strange they might seem.

You see, when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, He has to take us from where we are to where God desires us to be. Before we claim Jesus as our Savior, Master and Friend, who knows where we might have been led by the voices of the world. So it might not make sense for Jesus to call us to do some things, but that's okay. He sees the finish line. We might not understand the places where Jesus leads us on our journey, but that's okay, because He knows where we need to end up. We might not want Jesus to take us into certain places or lead us through certain circumstances, but that's okay because if we trust Him to lead us, He will never take us to destruction, but to abundant life.

Sometimes the truth that Jesus tells us might seem confusing. It might not be what we want to hear, or it might lead us in directions that we are not yet ready to take. But we have to trust that He knows our lives, knows what must happen to bring us around to be His disciples, and He knows what He wants us to do to accomplish the purpose of God through us.

But we have the choice to make of listening to Jesus so that He can guide us back to God, or to listen to the world so that we can guide ourselves to whatever destination we want. We each have that decision to make for ourselves.

Seeing that many of His followers were leaving, Jesus turned to His 12 chosen disciples and asked them *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* Simon Peter answered Him, *'Lord, to whom shall*

*we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God*” (John 6:67-69). The disciples had been walking with Jesus long enough to know who He was. They had trusted Him enough to stay with Him, even when things got tough. Having kept their eyes upon Jesus, they decided that He was the only one that they wanted to follow. They weren’t quite sure where Jesus was leading them. They weren’t sure how it was all going to end up, but they trusted that Jesus knew, and they were willing to stick it out, follow Him and let Him lead them.

But even then, one of the disciples that day would turn away. Judas had been with the others all throughout Jesus’ ministry. He had seen the miracles of healing; he had witnessed the power of Jesus’ words to calm a storm on the Sea of Galilee and to raise the dead back to life; he had even heard Jesus correct the Scribes and Pharisees in the Temple. He had observed all of the goodness and love that Jesus had to give to the people of the world, yet in the end, he made the choice to betray Jesus.

This is not the desire of God for us, however, to turn away from Him. God wants us to follow Jesus throughout our lives so that we might not be destined to eternal death, but to have eternal life. And even when we don’t quite understand what He is doing in and through us, God delights to see us follow His Son, Jesus, every step of our journey as we trust Him as our Savior. For as we remain faithful to Jesus, as we trust Him at every step along our way, Jesus will guide us and use us and work through us to help others find their way back to God, too. He wants us to make Him our first love, and keep our eyes on Jesus so that we might find real life

So set your hearts on Jesus. Listen to His voice. Obey His commands. And follow Him. Let’s pray. Father, thank You for the voice of Jesus calling us to follow Him. Thank You that you want our very best. Give us the courage to hear You call to us so that we might make You first in our life. Give us ears to hear only the voice of our Savior, so that we do all that You call us to do. Keep us on the straight and narrow way that leads to life. Help us not to fall away, but rather to cling to You each day, trusting in Your Word, trusting in Your guidance, and trusting in Your great love for us. Where else shall we go, but into Your kingdom of life, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.



