

The One Reason People Choose Not to Follow Jesus

My primary texts today are found in Matthew 11, then I'll be in John Chapter 3 and Mark Chapter 10. Let's look at Matthew 11:25-30:

*25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**" (Matthew 11:25-30, ESV)*

Among the most comforting words ever spoken are these by Jesus in which he is giving a call to all who would come.

He can issue this universal invitation because the Father God, of whom Jesus has perfect knowledge and with whom Jesus has perfect fellowship, *this* Father God has given to Jesus all things. Everything. The entire created cosmos. Including people. Including you and me and everyone we've ever known and seen.

So, Jesus has ownership and authority over the entire human race, and He invites us humans to come to Him. If we come, He will welcome us into that perfect fellowship He has with the Father. And in this awesome relationship we will find rest. This is an offer too good to refuse!

But, it is obvious as we look around and we walk through this life that not all have come to Jesus. Not everyone has or will draw near to the throne of grace. Even though He promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light, many will refuse to take on His yoke.

They choose to carry their burdens that are, always, heavier than the burdens Jesus would have us carry.

Why is this? Jesus has given us the answer. Let's turn to John 3, starting in verse 16.

As you are turning, the title of this message is "The One Reason People Choose Not to Follow Jesus." Now you may be thinking "One reason?? There are lots of reasons why people may not become a Christian." And I understand why you might feel that way. You may have family members or friends who have given multiple excuses as to why they do not agree with Christianity or with the claims of Jesus.

But Jesus himself said that, when you boil it all down, there really is only one reason why people reject His call to come and draw near to Him. We will discover that reason and explore it more deeply through the encounters Jesus had with two people who sought out Jesus in order to ask him some important questions.

Perhaps the most famous conversation in the Bible is the one Jesus had with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, as recorded here by the Apostle John in John Chapter 3. We can assume that John witnessed this exchange, and he recorded it exactly as it happened.

Nicodemus was a teacher of the law and a respected scholar. John said this discussion happened at night, probably because Nicodemus had his reputation to protect since Jesus was a controversial figure among the Jewish leaders.

Even so, Nicodemus came to Jesus to listen and to learn.

The key passage here I want to consider starts with the verse that almost everyone can quote, John 3:16. But it's important to read and evaluate this verse in a more complete context. Jesus said:

*16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 **And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.** (John 3:16–21, ESV)*

Allow me to extract from Christ's words above these important points:

- There are two groups of people in the world...those who will perish and those who will have eternal life. It's one or the other. There is no third rail.
- Paul taught in Romans that all, *a double L all*, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Jesus says here that everyone is under condemnation, they are "condemned already" ...unless a person believes.
- Believing in Jesus is the factor that makes the difference. Jesus came into the world to save those who would believe in Him. Believe in Jesus and gain eternal life. Reject Jesus and perish.
- What does it mean to "believe" in Him? To believe in Jesus is to agree that He is the "light," that He is "*the way, and the truth, and the life.*" (John 14:6, ESV) Those who believe in Jesus demonstrate their belief by hating wickedness and striving to follow Jesus' commands.
- You can't love wickedness yet claim that you believe in Jesus. The two are not compatible. Jesus said that people "love the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil." If you delight in the things of darkness, you aren't truly a believer.
- To believe is to follow. To believe is to choose light over darkness. Or, referencing the earlier verses we read in Matthew 11, to believe is to come to Him, to put off your yoke, and to put on His.

So, there it is. If you don't remember anything else from this sermon remember this. **The one reason people choose not to follow Jesus is because they love the darkness rather than the light.** They do not agree with Jesus' standards. They look at the commands of God, and they judge their standards to be higher or more important, or more compassionate, or more fulfilling than God's standards as taught by Jesus and His Apostles.

I'll say it another way: The one and only reason people choose not to follow Jesus because they prefer their lifestyle over the lifestyle Jesus taught and exemplified. They prefer darkness over light. They prefer the yoke of sin to the yoke Jesus offers.

It really is that simple. Tragically simple. This may seem harsh. But the same Jesus who said "I am gentle and lowly in heart" also said that rejecting the light is paramount to wickedness.

By the way, there is some solid scriptural evidence that Nicodemus did choose to take on the yoke Jesus offered to Him instead of continuing the Pharisaical yoke he had inherited. The Apostle John tells us in his gospel that Nicodemus, after Christ's death on the cross, teamed up with a fellow named Joseph of Arimathea to receive the body of Jesus and to prepare it for burial by wrapping it in linen and the spices that Nicodemus provided. So Nicodemus is an example from the New Testament of someone who did come to Jesus, and who chose to follow. Nicodemus traded yokes.

Turn to Mark's gospel, Chapter 10 starting in verse 17, and let's look at another person who came to Jesus, but with different results.

Mark 10:17-27 says:

*17 And as he (Jesus) was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" 20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." 21 And Jesus, **looking at him, loved him**, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and **come, follow me.**" 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

Some observations:

- This young man was enthusiastic in his desire to associate with Jesus. He ran to Jesus. He knelt before Jesus. It appears that his heart was in the right place.
- The man had a reverence for the law. He knew right from wrong. By all outward appearances he was walking in the light.
- This young man was lovely. Jesus' heart went out to him. We can believe that Jesus' invitation for him to come and follow was deep and genuine.
- But Jesus perceived there was a corner of this fellow's heart that was dark. No one else could see it, but Jesus could. He put his finger on it by instructing the young man to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.
- The young man was disheartened, so disheartened that he turned away from Jesus. His true heart was exposed by Jesus.
- You may think "Is it really fair to say this guy preferred darkness to light?" You know, we have a tendency to pick and choose which sins we think are particularly heinous, or dark, or abhorrent. Most of us might want to excuse this man because he really seemed to be a good guy. And, to be honest, most of us can relate to his wealth in an accommodating way primarily because we live in relative wealth compared to the rest of the world. But recall Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6:10:

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.”

There was an unwholesome and dark craving for material wealth that this guy needed to abandon in order to move on with Jesus. Maybe Jesus was thinking about Judas when He gave his ultimatum. You know that the love of money was Judas’ undoing. It destroyed him and it resulted in his betrayal of the Lord of the Universe.

But, in regards to the rich young ruler, we don’t know for sure if he ever did trade his yoke for the one Jesus offered. And that is a tragic and sad possibility to consider.

*(As a side note, some commentators are of the opinion that this wealthy fellow was none other than the author of this gospel, the Gospel of Mark, that bears his name. I’ve included a link to an intriguing article in the sermon notes that explores this possibility more deeply).

Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, that it’s impossible to serve two masters. In that case He *was* talking about money. But many other masters reign in the darkness. For example:

- Sexual sin has many people bound up in its grips. Pornography, homosexuality, gender confusion, and extramarital relationships can drown out Jesus’ voice and cause people to turn away.
- Substance abuse is another master. A person may reject Jesus because he or she enjoys the fleeting enjoyment they get from being high, and they are unwilling to lay down a partying lifestyle.
- Bitterness, hatred, and unforgiveness are terrible masters that have blinded many people to the love of Jesus and the forgiveness He exemplified.
- Some folks are simply too proud to take on Jesus’ yoke. They have an attitude that faith is a crutch, that they can run their own lives, and they don’t need help from anyone else.

These evil works and attitudes can cause those in their grip to become disheartened and to “go away sorrowful” when Jesus comes calling.

In closing...

To believe in Jesus, to follow Jesus, is eternal life. How horrible is it that people reject Him because they love their sin, they love the darkness, to the point that they are choosing an eternity of misery for a few short years of pleasure in this life?

What’s even more tragic is the fact that, more often than not, this sin does not deliver the joy that it seems to promise. Sin is a cruel master. Dark choices in this life result in a yoke of trouble and misery now, and they will lead to an eternity of agony that goes on forever, and ever, and ever when this life is over.

Sometimes unbelievers, who do not want give up their sins of darkness, make excuses, saying “There’s no convincing proof that Jesus rose from the dead.” or “Christians can be such hypocrites.” or “I don’t want to go to church.” Those are feeble arguments to avoid making the choice to sell out and become a follower.

Making statements like this just proves they love the darkness rather than the light.

Dear one, consider your life. Does your sin really bring you that much pleasure? Is it worth the temporal and eternal suffering it brings? If you ran to Jesus like the rich young ruler, full of enthusiasm and outwardly noble intentions, what might Jesus tell you to do in order to follow Him? What sin might He insist you abandon? What yoke are you bearing that Jesus wants you to swap out for His?

Jesus offers an abundant life now, even in the midst of hardship. He said:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10, ESV)

Today, if you hear His voice, lay down your sin and become a believer. Listen one more time to His call: ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”***

Other Resources:

The Place to Begin by Ray Stedman (Was Mark the Rich Young Ruler?)

<https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-place-to-begin>

The Death Cult of Expressive Individualism by Douglas Wilson

<https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/the-death-cult-of-expressive-individualism.html>

What In Heaven’s Name is Jesus Doing Now? By Mark Thogmartin

https://medium.com/koinonia/what-in-heavens-name-is-jesus-doing-now-7b9c2c9c8b8b?source=friends_link&sk=ea838003279e0b9fc48a3679d3983967