

**When All Else Fails**

**SIX**

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

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*Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."  
Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.*

Matthew 4:18-20

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*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN  
ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.*

Matthew 16:24-27

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**O**n Saturday morning, husbands check their to-do lists. It often includes the projects an appreciative spouse would like completed that day. After studying the list, sorting the items, and determining the priority of each project, you are off for materials to get the job done. Home Depot is most likely the first stop. Returning home you are ready to get started.

During the conversation between Jesus and the rich young ruler, a to-do list is given to the young man. No sorting of priorities is required. Jesus expects the five projects on the list to be completed. Let's see whether the rich ruler accomplishes his task or not.

### “Go, Sell, Give; Come, Follow Me”

#### Major Issue #7

Jesus' instructions:

One-directional for salvation or One-directional for discipleship or Two-directional for salvation and then discipleship

After going through the checkoff list of the Law's demands, the rich ruler said, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” (Matt. 19:20). He apparently continued to miss what God recognized as true goodness and man's inability to achieve it. Jesus said, “If you wish to be complete [perfect or mature],<sup>1</sup> go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in

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heaven; and come, follow Me” (v. 21). Christ not only addressed the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet,” but also the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The rich ruler’s attitude toward wealth was the problem, and trust was the root of the issue. He had to pick one of two masters. The text tells us he made the wrong choice and he left in sadness (v. 22).

Any interpreter of this passage likewise has two choices. Whether “go, sell, give; come, follow Me” refers to a continuous, sequential flow of required actions or a two-step set of instructions.<sup>2</sup>

### Choice Number One

*Choice number one* is a set of progressive, linear actions. Once accomplished, the person is complete, perfect, mature. Since “follow Me” is a lifelong process, final perfection or full maturity is evidenced

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at the end of that journey. As such, this first option has two alternatives. The *first alternative* is that the rich ruler, if an *unbeliever*, must continue to persevere in accomplishing the list in order to assure his eternal destiny. “Complete” would then be understood as “final perfection.” In the *second alternative* the rich ruler,

if a *believer*, must likewise continue in these actions to obtain rewards. “Complete” then would correspond to “be fully mature.”

Both of these divergent alternatives turn to the same texts for support (i.e., Matt. 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26; Luke 14:26-33, etc.), which include the following terms—“come after Me,” “deny himself,” “give up all his possessions,” “take up his cross daily,” and “follow Me.” The *first alternative* views these conditions as necessary for salvation. Saving faith demands good works. On the other hand, the *second alternative* sees these same demands in the same

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passages to support an idea of a growing intimate fellowship with Christ in order to obtain rewards in the coming kingdom. While the former alternative requires proof of eternal life, the second alternative involves evidence of growing intimacy with Christ. The former relates to one's position in Christ, while the latter pertains to one's maturity in Christ.

### Choice Number Two

*Choice number two* takes a two-directional approach to Jesus' instructions, with an assumed pause in between. The words "go" and "come," as well as the semi-colon separating the imperatives captures the intent of the verse and gives credence to this option. Inherent in the word "go" is the idea of motion in a direction away from some other person or thing. The word "come" in this text is used only one other time in the Gospels outside the rich-ruler passages.<sup>3</sup> In the only other reference, Christ instructed Lazarus to "Come forth" (John 11:43), indicating an exit from the grave and toward Jesus. Putting together these movements, it would seem that Jesus instructed the rich ruler first to go accomplish one series of tasks and then to return or come back to accomplish the other set. In fact the inserted grammatical pause lends its support to this two-pronged approach.

*Choice number  
two takes a  
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instructions.*

#### *Two-Directional Instruction Set*

The *going* activity, including selling and giving, would relate to a trust transfer from the ruler's own wealth to God. Believers'

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baptism is illustrative of the result of a trust transfer. Baptism is an outward evidence of an inward reality.<sup>4</sup> It does not establish a relationship with God; rather it is a reflection of an already established relationship. The “selling” of possessions and “giving” to the poor is likewise an outward evidence of an inward trust shift. Therefore the first-directional activities—go, sell, give—correspond to establishing a relationship with Christ through faith. On the other hand, the second-directional *coming* activity, which includes following, corresponds to growing intimacy by believers in fellowship with Christ, resulting in growth in spiritual maturity. This activity would relate to the discipleship texts (Matt. 16; Luke 9; Luke 14, etc.) previously discussed.

### *Supporting Texts*

Two additional passages (Matt. 4:18-20 and 16:24-27) lend further credence to the two-directional understanding. *First*, most scholars place the “follow Me” event of Matthew 4:18-20 some months after Peter and Andrew had first met Jesus in John 1:40-42.<sup>5</sup> Then, two days later in Cana, Peter and Andrew observed Jesus’ first miracle (John 2:1-11). “This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and his disciples believed in him” (v. 11). John 2:11 makes two points. First, the miracle of turning water into wine was the beginning of Christ’s signs that authenticated His person and message. John 20:30-31 states that the seven selected miracles in the Book of John including this first one was provided so that people would believe in Christ as their Savior. Second, belief in Jesus as Savior, “the Lamb of God” (1:36), by Peter and Andrew occurred at that very first miracle. The text indicates that as a result of the miracle “his disciples [including Peter and Andrew] believed in Him” (2:11).

Months later, Jesus went to Peter and Andrew, who already were believers and were in their boats fishing, and said, “Follow [come

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after] Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). And “immediately they left the nets and followed Him” (v. 20). While the NASB translates “*come after Me*” with the word “*follow Me,*” this word for “come” is a derivative of and interchangeable with the same word Jesus used in His instruction to the rich ruler—“Come” (19:21).<sup>6</sup> Jesus instructed Peter and Andrew to “come after Me” and in response they “came” and then “*followed Him*” (4:20), which is the identical word used in His instruction to the rich ruler—“*follow Me*” (19:21).<sup>7</sup> On both occasions Jesus asked individuals to “come and follow” Him. Since Peter and Andrew were already believers when Jesus called them at their boats to “come after Him,” would not that support the case that the rich ruler was also to “come after Him” as a believer following a trust transfer and to “follow Him”?

Obviously then the request in Matthew 4 was to those who already possessed a saving relationship with God, to come and follow Jesus in intimate fellowship in order to begin to prepare for their future ministry. Jesus did not say, “*I have made you fishers of men.*” Instead He said, “*I will make you fishers of men.*” This was based on their proper response in following Christ. A process is in view. While some indicate that the phrase “come after Me” or “follow Me” is the gospel according to Jesus,<sup>8</sup> its use in Matthew 4 had nothing to do with the offer of the gospel leading to salvation. Rather, it pertained to believers in the pursuit of discipleship. If a two-directional idea is present in Christ’s words to the rich ruler, the second set of instructions (“come, follow Me”) would refer to discipleship.

*Second,* Matthew 16:24-27, which is one of the discipleship

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passages previously discussed, begins, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (v. 24). As this text concludes, Jesus told those listening what will be the end result on His return for any believer who follows Him as a committed disciple. “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then repay every man according to his deeds” (v. 27).

The words “come after Me” in Matthew 16:24 means the same as “come after Me” in 4:19.<sup>9</sup> As with Peter and Andrew, Jesus explained that to “come after Him” involved denying oneself, taking up his cross, and following Him.

*Believers' works  
will be evaluated  
at the Judgment  
Seat of Christ.*

Again some argue that the phrase “come after Me” or “follow Me,” is the gospel according to Jesus.<sup>10</sup> If so, this passage calls for and requires commitment and submission in obedience to His lordship at salvation. Actions, not just simple faith, then become a requirement for securing

eternal life.<sup>11</sup> This takes us back to the issue of working to merit salvation as discussed in chapter 2.

In Matthew 16:27 Jesus stated that there will be a judgment of believers' works when He return, “For the Son of Man...will then repay every man according to his deeds.” As indicated previously, believers' works, whether good or bad, will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment in Matthew 16:27 better fits the context of believers following Christ in fellowship as His disciples, resulting in the gain or loss of rewards. If the judgment in verse 27 relates to the gospel or salvation, the only judgment in view would be the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). There works will evidence that nothing a person does can earn God's acceptance. Fitting the Great White Throne Judgment into the context of Matthew 16 is quite difficult. Fellow-



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ship and rewards, not salvation, are the emphasis in the “come and follow Me” contexts (Matt. 16 and 19).

### When All Else Fails, Read the Directions

When God gives a command, it is imperative for those to whom it is given that they understand what He means. Obedience is expected to follow. These directives for the rich ruler can be understood as either one-directional or two-directional. How you put these pieces together is key to differentiating saving faith from fellowship.

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### *Chapter 6, NOTES*

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1. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Volume 2:9:51-24:53 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1480.
2. The two options are a continuous linear approach, leading to either salvation or rewards, or an interrupted approach.

#### *Linear Approach:*

Representing a linear flow *leading only to salvation* is John MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 78-79; James Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 105-107; and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 77-86.

Representing a linear flow *leading only to rewards* is Gary T. Whipple, *Shock and Surprise Beyond the Rapture* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 87-90; and Curtis H. Tucker, *Majestic Destiny* (Redmond, OR: Last Chapter, 2011), 270, 275-76.

#### *Interrupted Approach:*

While not necessarily agreeing with the author's two-directional approach, authors who understand that these texts address *both salvation and rewards* are Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 181-190; Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 64-67; and Hal Haller, "Did the Rich Young Ruler hear the Gospel According to Jesus?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 13 (Autumn 2000), 1-11.

3. The Greek word used is *deuro*, which is found only in Matthew 19:21; Luke 18:22; and John 11:43.
4. One may argue that believer's baptism is an illustration of faith causing action/works and therefore is identical to the teaching of lordship salvation and faith works from James 2. However, to do so is to misunderstand that *faith is passive. Faith never, ever causes and therefore never, ever results in action/works.* Works, however, *reveal one's motivation* rather than one's faith (see Ken Neff, "Myth 2: Faith is Active" and "Myth 11: Works Required" in *Hold Fast* (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2010), 33-41; 141-52.

The Reformed view argues that since faith causes action/works, if there are no works, then there must be no faith. If indeed faith causes

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actions, those assumptions would be true. If incorrect, as this author contends, works reveal/evidence one's motivation, which is the cause of action/works. Based on faith in the promise of God, believers are motivated to be baptized in order to identify with Christ. A desire to obey God is the motivation. So what if a believer is not baptized? The Reformed view would say, "That one never was saved, since his faith has no works! His practice reveals/evidences he has no position in Christ." On the other hand, the Free Grace view would respond by saying, "That one is inconsistent with his true seed within and he is not maturing in Christ. His practice does not reveal/evidence his actual possessed position in Christ." This is an important distinction!

5. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), xxiii; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 17; W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1973), 68-81; and Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 1925-1932.
6. *Deute* is a derivative of *deuro* used in Matthew 19:21. Italics added.
7. Italics added.
8. MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus*, 21.
9. The word used for "come" in Matthew 16:24 is *erchomai*, the most frequent verb used in the New Testament for "come," and *deute*, another word for "come," is used in Matthew 4:19. Even though different words are used in these instances, the phrases have equivalent meanings.
10. MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus*, 21.
11. See Neff, "Myth 3: Faith Is a Tricky Word" in *Hold Fast*, 43-53.

