

“FOR OR AGAINST”  
Joshua 24:14-24, Luke 11:21-28, Mark 9:38-41  
March 15 & 16, 2025

“On Sunday, February 18, 2001, NASCAR lost one of its greatest drivers. Dale Earnhardt Sr., also known as "The Intimidator," was in third place on the last lap of the Daytona 500 when his car was tapped from behind and sent head-on into the wall at 180 mph.

“In a matter of moments it was evident something was terribly wrong. Dale Earnhardt died in the crash. On the following Monday an autopsy report revealed he had died of blunt force trauma to the head.

“Some have suggested that if Earnhardt had been wearing the HANS (Head and Neck Safety Device) he would have survived the crash. Although this device was available, Earnhardt, like many other drivers that day, neglected to use it. His neglect of this safety device may have cost him his life.

“The Bible tells us that every individual is on a collision course with God's judgment. God, too, has provided a safety device--one designed to keep people from suffering eternal death and separation from God. But like Dale Earnhardt and the other drivers in the race that day, each of us must decide whether to accept or neglect this offer.”<sup>1</sup> Will we let Jesus become the Savior and Lord of our lives as God's safety device? Or will we live life all on our own and reject God's life-saving help and end up crashing and burning to utter destruction?

Many times in our lives, the decisions we make determine the outcome of our life. We are the end results of our own decisions made throughout the short life-span we have here on earth. The choice we make about having Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord makes all the difference in our lives - here in this life, and in the life to come. And that choice is made each

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 4-5)

and every day, for we choose moment by moment if we are for or against Jesus, and that decision drives our actions. What we do with Jesus determines what happens in our lives.

And while that is true, we need to be careful not to become nonchalant about our decision of following Jesus. If we make a statement of faith about having Jesus as our Savior, every part of our lives needs to fall in line with all the teachings of Jesus so that our words and our actions are in line with each other. In too many people's lives, it is easy to say we are a follower of Jesus, but the lifestyle that is demonstrated by the daily living of that person, must conform to their words, or else they fall into the horribly judgmental moniker of "hypocrite." Our words and our actions must align with our statement of faith in Jesus.

In our Old Testament lesson of Joshua 24, we heard Joshua calling all the people of Israel to stay true in their faith and obedience to the Lord God Almighty who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and who had led them in occupying the Promised Land as God gave it to them. During the years of Joshua's life, God had invited them to follow Him, and as the people obeyed God's commands, the people of the land were conquered so that the nation of Israel was established, on both sides of the Jordan River.

But as Joshua nears the end of his life, he desperately wants the people to remember all that God had done for them so that they would remain faithful to His commands. He reminds them of the miraculous way that God released them from slavery in Egypt. He reminds them of the provision God made for them in the wilderness. He reminds them of the armies that God wiped out all along the way as the people trusted in Him. He reminded them of the cities and peoples they had conquered through God's deliverance. He wanted them to remember the benefit of having God on their side, based upon their obedience to Him.

So Joshua assembled all the people and he boldly told them, "*Now fear the Lord and*

*serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:14-15).*

And there in Joshua’s presence the people lifted up the Lord God Almighty as their God, and they vowed to follow Him only. But sadly in the years to follow Joshua’s death, the people found themselves drawn away from the Lord God and they went back to worshiping the pagan gods of the surrounding peoples. While their leader sought after the Lord God Almighty, they also followed. But when other leaders came, directing the people toward other deities, their loyalty to the Lord God disappeared.

Well, the same call is given to us today, to choose for ourselves THIS DAY whom we will serve - whether it be the gods of the world around us, or be it the Lord God Almighty. It is either one or the other, for we cannot give lip service to one while following another. We cannot proclaim loyalty to one and then live under the guidance of another. We must make our choice - one or the other. We cannot serve both!

In Luke’s Gospel the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons (Luke 11:14-16). And so Jesus confronted their inaccurate judgement by saying, *“Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a home divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (11:17-20).*

“...Jesus was speaking of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the forces of evil. This is a conflict in which no one should be neutral. Since Jesus is the divinely appointed agent for leading the battle against the forces of evil, those who wish to see the triumph of God’s cause must follow Him. If they do not, then whatever they may think of themselves, they are effectively on the enemy’s side.”<sup>2</sup>

And this is the reason for Jesus’ “hard saying” for us today. Jesus clearly identifies the option we have. He says “*Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*” (Luke 11:23). We must make the choice to either be for Jesus or against Jesus - there is no middle ground, no gray area, and no fence sitting. We are either with Jesus or against Jesus. Black or white, one or the other. We are either working for Jesus, or we are working for Satan. If we are not working to gather the people of the world to Jesus, we are working against Jesus and working for Satan.

So with regard to “the added words about gathering and scattering, gathering is the work of God, while scattering is the work of Satan. God is the God of peace; Satan is the author of strife. The Kingdom of God is the one constructive unifying redemptive power in a distracted world; and every man (and woman) has to choose whether he or she will take sides with it or against it.”<sup>3</sup>

So if we choose to be a follower of Jesus, we must put aside all the forces of evil in this world and we must follow HIM only. It can’t be one hour or one day following Jesus and the next following the evil forces of this world. If we choose Jesus, we have to be ALL IN with regard to our commitment to Him OR ELSE we will be counted as being against Him. One side or the other, not a flip-flopping back and forth. We are either with Jesus or we are against Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> (F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983] pg. 157)

<sup>3</sup> (F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, pg. 157)

Plain and simple. We are either working to bring people into the kingdom of God, or we are working to keep them away from God. Our decision determines if we end up winning or losing.

Let me give you an example of this. “Roy Regals was a lineman for the University of California in 1929 when they went up against Georgia Tech at the Rose Bowl. The game was scoreless when he picked up a fumble from the other team, and headed for the end zone--the wrong end zone. A teammate chased him and tackled him with one yard to go, but on the next play, Regals' quarterback got sacked in the end zone for a two-point safety. When the game was over, his team lost by one point. Thus, Roy Regals has been known ever after as ‘Wrong Way Regals.’

“Regals later said he had heard his teammate behind him yelling, ‘You're going the wrong way,’ but thought, *What's wrong with him?*

“One author said of Regals: ‘He had instincts without direction.’

“We're all like that. Sometimes we have the right instincts, but we go in the wrong direction, and it's dangerous.”<sup>4</sup>

We each need to make up our minds as to which team we're going to work for, and then we need to diligently work to bring success to that team. We can't go off on our own, misdirected and strong willed. If we do, we may actually be working for the opposite team. We have to choose which team we will serve. If we seek the Lord Jesus, He has to be our all in all so that together we can bring about the victory for Him.

But let's listen to the way that this is recorded in Mark's Gospel, chapter 9, verses 38-41. (READ Mark 9:38-41)

Here we have a situation of one of the apostles complaining to Jesus about “*someone*

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<sup>4</sup> (PreachingToday.com, “More Perfect Illustrations, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2003] pg. 69-70)

*driving out demons in Your name...*” (Mark 9:38), but he wasn’t one of the Twelve chosen disciples of Jesus, so John told him to stop “*because he was not one of us.*”

“In other words, he was not one of the regularly recognized disciples of Jesus. But he was showing clearly which side he was on in the spiritual warfare; moreover, he was acknowledging the authority of Jesus, because it was in His Name that he was casting out demons. This was a far cry from the spirit that ascribed Jesus’ demon-expelling power to the aid of Beelzebul. By his words and actions he was showing himself to be on Jesus’ side.

“John was no doubt concerned lest his Master’s Name might be taken in vain, if it was invoked by a man who had not been authorized by Jesus to speak or act in His Name. But Jesus did not share his well-meant concern. John **has always had his successors in the Church**, who feel unhappy when things are done in Jesus’ Name by people whose authority to do them they cannot recognize. But Jesus’ reply remains sufficient to silence this attitude: ‘*No one who does a mighty work in My Name will be able soon after to speak evil of Me, for whoever is not against us is for us.*’ (Mark 9:39).<sup>5</sup>

Satan loves to divide us, so we often find ourselves in John’s shoes, complaining that others are doing the work that Jesus has specifically called us to do. We get jealous if others are doing the same work we are called to do, because WE don’t recognize them as legitimate disciples of Jesus. So we tell others to stop doing the work of Jesus unless they can specifically detail how Jesus has called them to do that particular work. We err on the side of protecting Jesus’ Name when we forget that we’re all on the same side of the spiritual battle. If we are for Jesus, we should all be working together to bring about His kingdom work here on the earth. We need not fight against each other as to who has the correct authority to do His work. **We all** have been given authority by Jesus to accomplish His kingdom work of drawing all people to Him.

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<sup>5</sup> (F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, pg. 158)

So it doesn't matter if one has credentials showing special training and another doesn't. If they are both accomplishing the will of the Lord Jesus, why fight about it? We're all in this together and we're to be working together to combat the forces of evil in our world today.

You see, there are so many people in our world today who do not yet know of Jesus, or who have not yet placed their faith and trust in Him as Savior and Lord. There's lots of work to be done to take the Good News of Jesus into the whole world, and there's far too few workers who are actually bringing in the harvest for the Lord. Jesus Himself said, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest*" (Matthew 9:37-38).

So we need not eliminate people from sharing the Good News of Jesus with those around us. In fact, each one of us is commissioned by Jesus as one of His followers to "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:19-20). It's something that we are all called to do as we put Jesus first in our lives and then live for Him every day. And we have Jesus' promise to be with us wherever we go as we faithfully follow Him.

But look at Jesus' last statement in this instruction to John; "*Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in My Name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward*" (Mark 9:41). Just giving a cup of cold water to a follower of Jesus provides us with a reward of lasting hope and life. Serving one another demonstrates the love of Jesus within us and we proclaim to the world that we are on His side. It all starts as we make the choice of who we will be following in our life, who we will allow to be our God.

One last thing to consider in this “hard saying” of Jesus. We may claim to be a follower of Jesus. We may be active in the life of the church. We may live a good life. We may be looked up to by many folks. But if we do not know Jesus, and actively obey His commands, we are actually working against Him. Becoming a follower of Jesus by claiming Him as our Savior, and then letting Him be Lord of our life, is what determines us being on His side. Unless we become one with Him, believing in Him, claiming Him, receiving Him, and then living for Him as our Savior, we are actually living against Him. There are no spectators in the life of the Church. We are all called to be active participants in making Jesus known to those around us.

Knowing **about** Jesus is not what God wants. The people of Israel knew the workings of God in their lives, but they had to make a choice of following Him before they would be rewarded with God’s blessings. They had to “*choose this day whom you will serve*” (Jos. 24:15).

Jesus calls us to make the same choice about Him, to let Him be the One our whole life revolves around. Will we serve Jesus with our whole life? Or will we stand against Him?

Let’s pray. Father God, thank You for supplying us the avenue to find life through Jesus Christ. Thank You for calling each one of us to get in the game and start working for Your kingdom. There’s plenty to do for all of us, so help us not to cast anyone away because we think they are not one of us, so they can’t work for You. Help us to choose You today, to claim Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and then to boldly live in such a way as to honor and glorify You. That may mean us stop doing some things, and to begin doing other things. It may mean we change friends, or even change churches if that is what we need to following You. Give us the courage and boldness to love You extravagantly, worship You passionately, and live for You boldly in order to help those around us to find Your life designed for each of us. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.