

# **FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY**

**SERMON: 17-10-21**

**Preacher: Lynda Rose**

**Genesis 1:26-31**

**John 14: 9-27**

Who was Jesus? A good man and teacher? An example ... a prophet? Jesus asked the disciples that question, 'Who do men say that I am?' And he got the answer, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' (Mt 16:14). But then he asked, 'Who do you say that I am?' And Peter replied, 'You are the Messiah. The Son of the Living God.'

I suspect even Peter didn't really know what he was saying at that moment, because he couldn't until after the resurrection, when Jesus began to explain fully who he really was and what the Father had done, and they received the baptism of the Spirit. The truth is, Jesus is phenomenal. From the beginning of creation there has never been and never will be anyone like him, because Jesus – though a man – is God incarnate; God made flesh. And He came not because God felt it might be a nice idea for men and women to get a glimpse of who He was and what He's really like, but He came to set us free from bondage to sin and death – to the devil. Because only Jesus could do that.

Okay, let's backtrack ... to Eden.

When God created the Earth and all that was in it, He made humankind in His own image, as spiritual beings in physical bodies, to have dominion over the rest of creation and to care for it. **Genesis 1:26**, "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all wild animals of the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'" And then God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it...'

And the Bible tells us that God delighted in His creation, and so that Adam, the first man, wouldn't be alone but would have a fitting and proper companion, God caused him to fall into a deep sleep, and He took one of Adam's ribs and out of that fashioned Eve. So that from the beginning the man and the woman were a part of, and completed, each other, and together and jointly they were made in the image of God – spiritual beings in physical bodies. And we read in Genesis that God, in those first days of creation, would meet with Adam and Eve face to face in the garden and walk with them. So the amazing truth is that He made men and women, from the beginning, to live in direct relationship with Himself.

Sounds wonderful. But from Genesis we know too that right from the beginning evil was there in the garden as well, in the person of the snake. We don't know why, but we do know that evil was jealous: of God, of His creation, and of Adam and Eve's

relationship with God. He wanted to destroy it all, and hijack for himself the worship that belonged to God. So what did he do? Well, again from Genesis, we know that he tempted first the woman and then the man to disobey God by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, from which God had forbidden them to eat because, He said, the knowledge would cause them to die.

But that's rubbish, the serpent whispered (**Genesis 3:4**) '... the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ..."'

As simple as that. 'God lied to you ... you don't need Him. All you need is knowledge, and then you'll be the same as Him. You'll be in control!' And from the moment Eve took a bite, the relationship with God, for which we'd been created, was destroyed. Even in our own lives, we know how easy it is to harm or destroy a relationship, don't we? Something said in anger, or maybe inappropriate behaviour, perhaps almost immediately bitterly regretted, but by then it's too late. The damage has been done.

And that's what happened in Eden – only far, far worse than anything we can imagine, because when Adam and Eve listened to the snake and betrayed God, there wasn't any way back, and from that moment they were tied to their seducer. Which meant they came under the devil's control and found themselves in bondage to sin and death.

After that, all God could do was expel the pair from the garden – and with them the whole of humanity. By their own, misguided, choice, mankind had put themselves under a curse, but the truth is, God never gave up on us, or stopped loving us. And from that moment, we know from the Bible that He started to work out how to save us and get us back. As mankind had to face and negotiate life separated from God, He revealed Himself to certain individuals, through them guiding and teaching others how to live. Then He selected Israel as His chosen people, bringing them out of slavery in Egypt with a series of mighty signs, so that they'd really know He was who He said He was, and welding them into a nation fit to carry the promise. He gave them the Law, and when the people rebelled or went astray, He brought them back ... all the time setting in place His greater plan to break Satan's hold, and win us back. And at the right time, to implement that plan, He sent His own Son, *the Word made flesh*.

From the moment Adam and Eve succumbed, both God and the devil knew that we had no way back by ourselves. People could try and live 'good' lives and follow God's commands, but something inside us had been ruptured, damaged, and we were in bondage to sin. There was no way we could get free by ourselves.

When I was a child, I was always puzzled by what Jesus meant at the start of his ministry when he said, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.' (Mt 3:2). What on earth was this kingdom? What did he mean? And then as I came to know God more fully over the years, and as I realised the depths of His love, I began to understand ... both what the kingdom was - as present reality - and what Christ had done to get us back.

With Jesus, the light literally came into the world. He was a man, yes, because that was the only way the battle could be fought that would ensure our salvation; but He was also

God - because *only* God could fight and win that battle. No one else on earth has ever even come close to what Jesus was and is. He is truly, as He said, the Way, the Truth, and the Life – the Saviour. Only in Him can we be set free, healed, and restored to life, in both this world, *now*, and the world to come.

And this is why we must never betray Christ's sacrifice, by changing or watering down our faith to make it more acceptable to the world. We must never compromise with sin, not because we're narrow-minded bigots who resent people having fun, but because God takes sin so seriously, and Christ gave his life to set us free.

Today, we're seeing the Church, of all denominations, betraying that calling, telling their congregations that as Christians we have to be tolerant and non-judgmental. Not all churches and fellowships, of course – some are doing a splendid job. But many now are redefining sin so as to avoid upsetting modern sensibilities, because that's the only way, they say, we can stay relevant.

The devil must be overjoyed. Our calling, as Christians, isn't to keep people 'happy', but, in obedience to Christ, to rescue them from sin, so that they might have life. And that, in a nutshell, is what's at stake: life or death; heaven or hell.

Followers of the Way is a fellowship for those who feel betrayed by a Church that has lost its way. We proclaim that Christ, and Christ alone, is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and we stand on that truth as revealed in the Bible. In humility and love, but without compromise.

So the question for all us today is, whose kingdom do you choose? And we welcome all who say... Christ's. Christ's kingdom. I acknowledge Him as my Lord and Saviour, and will serve Him to the end.