

THE NEED FOR DETERMINATION

Luke 9:23

INTRODUCTION:

During the 2010 Wimbledon tennis tournament, John Isner of the United States and Nicolas Mahut of France played the longest tennis match in history. The Match That Would Not End finally did, at 70-68 in the fifth set, after a record 11 hours, 5 minutes spread over three days from June 22 through June 24.

Obviously, the two players were evenly matched. Clearly, neither player was willing to give up. It is evident that both players demonstrated great determination in pursuit of a Wimbledon victory.

It takes determination to be a winning athlete. It takes determination to be an accomplished musician. Peyton and Paige just played their horns for us. They could not do that the first time they picked up their instruments. They had to practice. No one learns to play a musical instrument without determination. Practice is not always fun. Playing scales is not very enjoyable. Wrong notes, though inevitable, are embarrassing. It takes determination to learn to make music.

If any of us intend to be "Fit For Life", we must demonstrate determination, too. If we want to be physically fit, we must establish a lifestyle that will support physical fitness and then stick to that with great resolve. And if we want to be spiritually fit, we must also establish a lifestyle that will support spiritual fitness and we must stick to that with similar dogged determination.

Jesus said that his disciples must show great determination, too. To illustrate the great determination that discipleship requires, Jesus said "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Please pay attention to what that means:

I. **"If ANYONE would come after me..." NO EXCEPTIONS**

The two-word phrase "if anyone" appears over 100 times in the NIV translation of the Bible...always with the same meaning.

- Solomon wrote, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the Law, even his prayers are detestable."
- Jesus said, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."
- Paul said, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."
- John wrote, "If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him."
- In the book of Revelation we read, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire"

- And in our text for this morning, “If anyone would come after me...”

“Anyone” means everyone. “Anyone” means me. Anyone means you. The word “anyone” means that there are no exceptions to the rule that Jesus is laying down. Not everyone will be a follower of Jesus but anyone who wants to must come to him the same way.

We live in a time when people think that following Jesus is like a buffet and they can select their favorite things and skip the things they don’t like. They like the parts about “love one another” and “lo, I’ll be with you always” but they want to skip the part about “no one comes to the Father but by me.” We like “neither do I condemn thee” but we often stop before the “go and sin no more” phrase. And they certainly want to take a pass on the teaching about taking up a cross and following Jesus.

Our generation has been so influenced by Burger King that people think they can have it their way. They want to follow Jesus but on their terms. They want him to walk with them where they intend to go but they don’t actually want to follow him where he leads. They want to have Jesus and they want to have him their way.

But Jesus said that if anyone would come after him there are some things he must do. There are no exceptions.

- If you are 8, 18 or 80 – if anyone would come after Jesus, there are no exceptions.
- If you are male or female – if anyone would come after Jesus, there are no exceptions.
- If you were raised in a Christian home, a Muslim home, an agnostic or an atheist home – if anyone would come after Jesus, there are no exceptions.

If anyone would come after Jesus he must follow him...no exceptions.

II. “If anyone WOULD come after me...” No Reservations

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me.” The Greek word for “would” is THELOH and it means to purpose or to decide. The point is that people must decide to come after Jesus if they are going to be followers of him.

On December 10, 1949, I became a citizen of the United States. It was not a decision I made. I was not presented with a list of alternatives from which I could choose. I had no choice in the matter. My mother went into labor, she was taken to a hospital in Keokuk, IA and I was born...an American citizen. I did not decide to be an American, it just happened to me.

But no one becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven by accident...or as a consequence of the place of their birth...or because of a decision made by parents, grandparents or godparents. People become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven when they purpose to be citizens of the Kingdom...when they decide to follow Jesus...when they make a commitment with no reservations. As the familiar song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."

If anyone is going to be a disciple of Jesus, he must commit with no reservations.

I've never ever performed a wedding for a couple when one, the other or both parties said, "We aren't sure if this is going to be until death us do part. It might be but it might not be. We've decided to give it a try but if it doesn't work out, we can always un-commit to one another." I know that divorce happens. I am well aware that some people decide to give up on their marriage and give up on each other, but I've never known of a couple to walk down the aisle with one eye on the exit door.

But people do that to Jesus. I've known people to say, "I'm not sure about this business of following Jesus but I'm going to give it a try. If my life isn't better in 30 days; or 90 days; or six months or a year, then I reserve the right to drop out and go back to living for myself and doing things my way." They may not say it to me; they may say it to friends or family. Or they may just say it to themselves. But I've known people to say it.

No one actually follows Jesus without deciding to and making a whole-soul commitment to follow Jesus with no turning back no matter what.

III. "If anyone would COME AFTER ME..." No Substitutions

In our pluralistic society, we seem to prize tolerance over truth. We've tried to convince ourselves that there is no black; there is no white; there are only shades of gray. We have been brainwashed into believing that there are no absolutes so there is nothing that is absolutely wrong and nothing that is absolutely right. It all just depends on how you feel about the different choices that people make.

And we are being pressured to believe that Jesus is a perfectly acceptable choice of someone to follow but he's not the only way to get to the Father, to get to heaven and to get to our eternal home.

In the year 1175, the French theologian and poet Alain deLille, in his work, *Liber Parabolarum*, coined the term, "*Mille viae ducunt homines per saecula Romam*". Literally, that translates to "A thousand roads lead men forever to Rome". More recently, that has been rephrased, "All roads lead to Rome."

They don't, you know. You can get on the Dietrich blacktop and drive to Rome, Italy. That road will not get you there. Nor will highway 50. Or I-70. Or any road in the United States. I don't know how many roads lead to Rome but I studied a map and it doesn't look like that many to me.

Not all roads lead to Rome and not all ways will lead you to heaven. Jesus is the only person who lived on earth, left earth and went to heaven and then came to tell us how to get there and he said that he was the way the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through him. Why would I wish to bet my life on someone else's theory, speculation or best guess about how to get to heaven? Why not follow the only one who has been there and come back to lead us there?

We must accept no substitutions. Just Jesus: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

"If anyone would come after me..." There are no alternatives and no substitutions: we must come after Jesus and follow him.

CONCLUSION:

If we want to be fit for life, we must stretch ourselves in our determination. We must follow Jesus. There are no exceptions; we must have no reservations and make no substitutions and we must determine to follow him no matter what.

President of Wheaton (Ill.) College, Dr. V. Raymond Edman, used to remind his students, "It's always too soon to quit." And when it comes to being a follower of Jesus, it is always too soon to quit because the consequences of dropping out are too serious to incur and the rewards for faithfulness are too fabulous to miss.

Your eternal destiny is not determined by your circumstances...it is determined by your determination.

INVITATION: *#602 – "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus"*