

Luke 9 (Part 5): 57-62 • Putting Jesus First

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Luke chapter 9. If you'll open your Bible there, please. Luke chapter 9.

We're completing this chapter in our study through the Gospel of Luke today, and we're picking up just the last several verses, from verse 57 on down through the end. So, follow along as I read.

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’”⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’”⁵⁹ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’”⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’”⁶¹ Yet another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’”⁶² Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Let's stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, help us to have a heart of understanding today. Help us to lay hold of the things that we're looking at here and to listen for Your voice. We pray for understanding. We pray for insight. We pray for direction. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen.

This is admittedly a challenging set of verses. We so often talk about salvation as a free gift that I think we come to verses like this, and they seem somehow out of place, because suddenly we're talking about costs. We're talking about things that cost, and we're so accustomed to talking about things that are free.

Salvation is free. You come to Christ; you accept what He did on the cross. That's a free gift. The salvation that you receive is a free gift. But the verses that we're looking at here this morning remind us not everything is without cost. There is a cost to following Jesus. You want to be saved and that's it? No problem. No cost. You want to follow Him? Different story altogether.

Today we're going to be talking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and the costs that are associated with that. This is Discipleship 101. It's actually the second major treatment of discipleship in the Gospel of Luke. It's very important for us to understand.

You'll notice here that it comes in the form of three conversations that Jesus has with some individuals who spoke to Him along the way. It begins with the first conversation in verse 57, so I'll have you look at it again with me.

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

So, this is an unsolicited offer on the part of this individual. Jesus didn't say to this individual, follow me, as he does with the second. This person just comes up to Him and expresses a readiness to follow Jesus wherever He might go. It's pretty bold sort of a thing.

Now, unbeknownst to this man that wherever He is right now, He's on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. There He will be ultimately arrested and crucified. Of course, that man doesn't know that, but the promise that this man is making to Jesus is pretty bold, and in fact, is strikingly familiar, maybe even troublingly familiar, to a statement that Peter would later make at the Last Supper.

You'll remember how that whole thing went when Peter was told that they would all fall away that very night. Peter said, I won't fall away. No, Peter, you'll actually do worse. You'll deny that you know Me three times. I'm ready to go to my death, Peter said. I'm ready to die with You tonight, if that is the case.

Well, we all know how that all played out. Peter was unable to follow through on his bold promise. And it's probably the same with this guy who's talking to Jesus right now because it's often the case with us as human beings. We find it pretty easy to make boasts and throw out some pretty grand promises when things are going okay, or when things look like they're going okay. But we discover along the way that it's somewhat harder to keep those promises down the road, especially when life throws us a curve.

And of course, Jesus knows that. In fact, He knows everything about us. There's nothing that you and I can say, no promise that we can make, that Jesus can't see through from the standpoint of seeing our heart and what motivates our heart, and so forth.

I want you to notice a statement. I'll put this on the screen. The Book of John, the Gospel of John chapter 2 tells us that:

John 2:23-25 (NIV84)

...while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs that he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus wouldn't entrust himself to them for he knew all men. He didn't need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

...while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs that He was doing and believed in His name. (But I want you to notice what the second part of this thing says; it says,) But Jesus wouldn't entrust himself to them, (why?) for He knew all men. He didn't need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

There's no problem for Jesus to understand what is behind the fanciful and boastful things that we say from time to time. Basically, this passage here in John 2 is a nice way of saying, you can't pull one over on Jesus. He understands what's going on in our hearts, even if we don't. And because He understands, He knows when to push back and how hard to push.

As you read this passage, you can tell Jesus is pushing back. I mean, right about the time that you and I— if somebody were to come to one of us and say, I'm willing to follow you. Or let's put it maybe in more difficult or different terms, somebody might come here to Calvary Chapel and say, this is my church, this is my home church, I am home.

I've had people say that to me and then never see them again—and about the time you and I want to pull out the visitor card, and get them to fill out all the information, and put all their contact— oh, hey, just put your name right here and stuff like that about that—Jesus is actually challenging them to see if they really mean what they say. He's actually challenging them, and it looks like He's putting up roadblocks.

But what might sound to you and I like an unnecessarily harsh response from Jesus to this man, who I believe was genuine in his desire to say, I'll go wherever you want me to go, I'll go wherever you go, still, Jesus says what He says to this man from a standpoint of insight that you and I have a difficult time recognizing or seeing at all.

You'll notice here in this exchange that Jesus didn't say to the man, no, you can't follow Me. He actually said that, you'll remember, to the demoniac that He

delivered over in the region of the Gadarenes. That man begged to come along with Jesus. Jesus said, no, you stay home; tell people what God has done for you.

Now, you'll notice Jesus doesn't say that to this man. He doesn't say, you can't come. What He says is, listen, it's not going to be glamorous. That's what He's doing here. He's essentially telling the truth without painting this glamorized picture of what it means to follow Him. Because all the people have been seeing up to this point are miracles, and people being fed, and delightful things like healings, and deliverances, and all the other stuff, and they're seeing all this stuff, and the people praising the Lord. I can imagine somebody wouldn't have any trouble walking up to Jesus and saying, man, I'm on your side. This is great. I will follow You wherever.

I want you to notice what Jesus did say to the man. He said, *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”* And that wasn't meant to shut the door in this man's face, or from him becoming a disciple. Jesus simply wanted him to understand that there is a cost connected to being a disciple. There's a cost.

And so, this first man, this first conversation, represents for you and I all who would come to Christ with a genuine excitement but are unmindful of the costs associated with belonging to Jesus. They really don't understand that whole idea. To them, it's just a good deal.

Honestly, there's a lot of times when we share the Gospel with people and we didn't even talk about a cost. They get hit with it later on when they realize that they can't bring their sinful past into a relationship with Jesus Christ and walk down the road successfully with all that. I think we probably do people a disservice when we don't talk about the cost.

You mean I can't keep doing all the stuff that I've been doing and still be saved? Well, you didn't tell me that. Good grief. What are you trying to do? Deceive me? No, nobody's trying to deceive anybody. We just forget. We just forget sometimes. Salvation is free. Discipleship is not. There is a cost.

Second conversation. Verse 59 goes like this:

“To another he said, “Follow me.””

Notice the difference there. Jesus extends the invitation. Listen to the man's response:

“But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.””

Jesus calls this man, unlike the first one, this man responds by saying, let me first go and bury my father. Now, there are some people who read this passage and they think that Jesus is being overly harsh by essentially forbidding this man to go home and bury his dad. But they're making the mistake of interpreting this conversation through the lens of their own culture, where there may be a period of days, or lately, even months between a time someone dies and that person is buried. We do that today.

But there's no way that this man's father had already died because in Jewish culture they buried people the same day. They didn't wait overnight; they buried them the same day. Unless this dad is out, or this guy is out following and listening to Jesus on the day his dad died, which I highly doubt, then what we see in this is that this man's father was very much alive when this conversation took place.

What he's asking to do is to put off following Jesus until his father has passed away. Why would he want to wait? I mean, why wait? Why not just go now? Well, again, you've got to know the culture. In that culture, it was when the father passed away that the inheritance passed on to the son.

Essentially what this man is saying is, Lord, I have every intention of following you, but I want to wait until I come into my inheritance first. Because let me tell you something, it's going to be so much better once I have my inheritance. All kinds of money to spend, and I'll be able to help You, Jesus. See, that's the deal.

That's why I want to wait. I need to let this thing play out, you see, because if I leave home, I'm going to put this whole inheritance at risk. You wouldn't want that to happen, would You, Jesus? I mean, I thought I heard somewhere You wanted us to be healthy and wealthy. I think I read a pamphlet somewhere saying that's what You wanted. So, I can't imagine that You would have any problem with this.

I want you to look again at Jesus's response. Verse 60, He said:

“Leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

In other words, this is a way of saying, listen, there's work to be done, because He goes on to say:

“But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Let them do that, you go proclaim the kingdom.

There's work to be done, people. Do you understand the work of the kingdom is the work of life? It's the work of life. The kingdom is a kingdom of life. When you and I share the Word of God with other people, and we speak about the kingdom to other people, it's a message of life, not death. Jesus is saying, listen, let the people who are dead deal with death. You go deal with life. You go talk to people about living what it is to be alive in Jesus Christ. You go tell them that; let the people who are dead deal with dead things; you go deal with life things.

You have to understand that as followers of Jesus. You and I are purveyors of life. You ever think about that? We are purveyors of life. We're giving the life we're talking about, the life of Christ, to whoever will listen. It's eternal life through Him. That's our message. That's what we're offering. That's what we're laying out before people. And that life, that message of life, takes precedence over every other activity of earthly origin that is passing away, every other earthly pursuit. Lord, I just want to wait till I get this money. That's what this guy's saying.

I was listening to a story by Damien Kyle, pastor of Calvary Chapel Modesto, California. He was telling about how, when he received a call from the Lord to go to Modesto and start the church there, he was working for the telephone company at the time, and he had put in nine-and-a-half years with the phone company when he received that call from the Lord to basically uproot his family and go to Modesto.

Here's the deal: He knew that he was six months away from his 10th year anniversary, at which time he would have earned the ability to have a pension that he would begin to—he was in his 30s at the time, but he would start receiving this pension at age 55. And he said it was a pretty decent pension at that, but he's 6 months away.

So, he was faced with a similar situation. Do I just say, well, Lord, I'll follow you, but just give me six months because I'm going to have this pension in the bag, and then I'll be able to do so much more? I can go to Modesto and I don't need to worry about getting an extra job. I can just start serving You right away because there's going to be income down the road, whatever the thing might be.

Damien decided that the call of God was more important than the pension. And so, he went to Modesto and started the church and decided just to entrust his future to the hands of his Lord.

That's what discipleship is. It's looking at all those things that you and I see in the world, those cushions, those buffers, those things that make us feel more comfortable about life instead laying them down to serve God.

Here, this second man here, represents those who express a desire to follow Jesus, but there are worldly pursuits that keep them from moving forward. And frankly, this man and his actions bear a strong resemblance to the person Jesus spoke of in the Parable of the Sower when He described what happens when the Word of God is sown among weeds. Remember? Let me put it on the screen here for you. Matthew 13:

Matthew 13:22 (ESV)

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

So, I'll follow You, Lord, there's just things I got to do. First, there's money I need to make. Got to make my first million.

And then the third conversation, verse 61:

“Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.””

And you'll notice here that this third man, like the first, offers his life to the Lord, but you'll also notice that it was an offer with a condition. Did you catch that? He said, I'll follow You, but first, let me go and say goodbye to my family. And once again, you look at the response of Jesus, and you think, wow, did You have to be so harsh?

Verse 62:

“Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.””

That sounds a little bit harsh, but you know what Jesus is doing in this response is He's uncovering what is really going on in the heart of this guy and what goes on in so many other hearts. And that is— He's basically saying this: You can't move forward while you're looking backward. And to illustrate that, Jesus, you'll notice, looked at, used a picture of a farmer who started to plow but who's looking back.

That doesn't work, I know. We have all kinds of tech today to help farmers plow a straight line while they're playing video games. I get it. But that wasn't possible in Jesus' day. The way they would plow a straight line after they got the oxen moving and the plow digging through the dirt was to look at some point in the distance and to maintain that view all along the field until they got to the other end of the field. That's the way they plowed a straight line. No farmer ever plowed a straight line by looking back over his shoulder. It's just not possible.

And so, the point that Jesus is making here is living for Him, serving Him, can't be done by looking back. Again, the response He gives to this man sounds harsh. This man represents those who come to the Lord, offer themselves to Him with conditions. I'll serve you if. I'll serve you if— here's the deal, I want to see if we can cut a deal, Lord, because I think I could be fairly useful to You in the kingdom of God.

I think I'm a pretty good candidate and someone You probably want on Your team. So let's negotiate. Here are my conditions. This is what I want. That's inconsistent with what it means to be a disciple. You know what I mean? The whole concept of being a disciple is one who follows.

There's another thing I want to show you here about this last man's statement. Let me actually put it up on the screen for you because here's what he says:

I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.

I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.

You know what's interesting about that? If you highlight just a few of those words, it ends up like this:

I will follow you, Lord, **but** let **me first** say farewell to those at my home.

I will follow you, Lord, **but** let **me first** say farewell to those at my home.

But me first. And basically, that's what our Lord is hearing in this man's statement: I'm going to follow You, but me first.

And see, the reason that the responses of Jesus sound a little harsh to you and I is we're used to me first. We're totally accustomed to that. I mean, this whole language that is me-first language, that's our language. This is what we grow up speaking.

And it's not like they didn't in that time, too. They did. But it has become even more glorified and exalted in our culture. I mean, you and I have been taught, even though all human beings have a gravitational pull to put ourselves first, we've been taught it's best.

We've even been told you can't put other people first until you put yourself first. We weren't even just told to do it; we were given justification for doing it. Here's the reason why this is a good idea to put yourself first. You can't put others first until you put yourself first. That's ridiculous language. If you're first, everybody comes after that, including Jesus, right?

We got to hear what's really being said here, and we have to hear it apart from the cultural mindset that is so ingrained in our American hearts, which is me first. We have to recognize that gravitational pull to consider our own needs as the chief focus of our lives. The Lord— it seems like the Lord is constantly reminding me of that very thing, that I am all about me. And the Lord keeps putting things in my way that help remind me of that— that it's just so easy for me to think of myself first.

Each of the men who approached Jesus on His way to Jerusalem, they had no idea that He was on His way to lay down His life. They didn't know that. We do. He knew it. They didn't know it. But it provides a backdrop for you and I to better understand what He's actually doing by going to Jerusalem. Because He's modeling the very thing He's talking about. Because Jesus came to walk in obedience to His Father's will and He's basically talking about discipleship as walking in obedience at all costs, even when it gets uncomfortable, even when it gets painful. And so, the fact that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem provides this incredible model of everything that He's saying to these men.

And I want to end with a final passage from the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians that I think ties this thing all up neatly. Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (ESV)

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

For the love of Christ controls us (and that's our devotion to the Lord), because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Boy, I'll just tell you right now, that's a powerful passage. Okay? That's not a passage for just a quick glance on our part, as far as laying hold of it and understanding it. This is a passage for the mature. But the essence of it is that Jesus came in and exemplified for you and I the willingness to walk in obedience at all costs, to be obedient to do the will of the Father.

And because we have come and embraced what He did for us, we, too, have experienced it. I mean, it's a death to self, but it's a death we have to refresh ourselves and remind ourselves about every day. Every single day. I have to die to myself, to my wants, to the gravitational pull in my life that wants to get me to focus on my needs, my concerns, my plans as paramount. Because if I do that, my response to Jesus is going to be, I'll follow You, but me first, then You.

Jesus is very gently directing you and I back to Him first. Jesus first— putting Him first in our lives.