

Message #45

Luke 9:57-62

There are a great number of people who view a commitment to Jesus Christ as a “fly-by-night” matter. If the feelings are right and if the mood is right, then following Christ is a good thing. But if things aren’t going too well, then the idea is back off. The problem is when it comes to a commitment to Jesus Christ, there are always things that don’t seem to be going well. In this life there is no such thing as a Garden of Eden existence for the believer.

If Jesus Christ was rejected, then it stands to reason that those who commit themselves to Him and His Word will also be rejected. If Jesus Christ was at odds with the world, then those who are dedicated to Him and His Word will also find themselves at odds with this world.

That point is exactly what Jesus Christ wanted His disciples to understand. When Jesus Christ was here on earth, many people were “following” Him. In fact, that is what starts this very section of Scripture. **Verse 57** says that someone came to Christ and said, “I will follow you wherever You go.”

It is clear from just looking at these verses that “following” Christ was the key point. The repetition of the verb “follow” is significant. The word is used three times in these six verses- **9:57, 59, 61**. In fact, in this text there are three potential applicant disciples who appeared to be interested in following Him. They were apparently toying with the idea.

The verb “follow” (ακολουθεω) has much more in view than just geographical accompaniment. Gerhard Kittel, in his massive study of Greek words, says that this word specifically indicates a high level of internal attachment and a deeply spiritual and emphatic dedication to Jesus Christ. This is much more than just dogging someone or tracking them; it is a high level of commitment to the Person and everything about Him (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, pp. 210-213).

The critical question at stake here is what is the commitment level that it takes to follow Jesus Christ in order to be classified by Him as a true disciple? At this point lots of people were physically following Him, but not too many of them would Christ classify as being a true disciple.

So what Jesus does here is discuss what it takes to be a true disciple and what He specifically says is this:

IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE MY DISCIPLE WHO FOLLOWS ME, YOU MUST MAKE ME YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY IN LIFE OVER EVERY OTHER THING AND OVER EVERY OTHER PERSON.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He never said that discipleship would be easy.

He never gave any false, pretensive ideas as to what it took to be a disciple. When it came to following Him, “the stakes were too high.” The demands were difficult but if one were willing to do it, the rewards would be great.

Now it would be one thing for a person to follow Christ and say I am His disciple. It would be something else for Jesus Christ to look at one and say he is My disciple.

In this text Jesus Christ specifically presents three areas of precedence that one must have if He classifies them as His disciple:

AREA OF PRECEDENCE #1 – To be a disciple demands that Jesus Christ takes precedence over every earthly and worldly security. **9:57-58**

As we mentioned, as they were traveling someone came to Jesus Christ and said, “I want you to know that I will follow You.” Now the text says “someone” said to Him. Matthew tells us that the someone was a “scribe” (Matt. 8:19). So a scholarly religious scribe comes to Christ and claims he will follow Him. It is interesting that the scribe identifies Jesus as a “Teacher.” He does not identify Him as the God/Savior/Messiah/King. The scribe recognized that this is the greatest teacher I have ever heard and I want to follow Him, and he is willing to commit himself to Christ as His student. For a Scribe to do this at this time was rare.

- 1) Most scribes hated Jesus Christ. Luke 6:7; 9:22; 11:53-54; 19:47
- 2) Most scribes loved money. Luke 19:45-47; 20:46-47

For a scribe to come to Christ and say he wanted to follow Christ was a very unusual moment. You would think that Jesus would have jumped at this offer and pulled out a contract and said sign this guy up. You would think He would have said this is great; we are finally beginning to tap into the big names of the religious world. This will really enhance our team if we land this guy. But that is not how Christ responds and that is not what Luke records. In fact, Luke doesn't even mention that it is a scribe; he just takes it to any who want to follow Christ.

In **verse 58**, Christ uses the animal world to illustrate the type of commitment that one must have in order to have Him classify him as a disciple.

A fox has a hole in the ground that he can call home. A bird has a nest in a tree that he can call home. However, Christ didn't have any place on earth that He could call His permanent home. Notice Jesus identifies Himself as “the Son of man,” which is the Daniel term for the Ancient of Days who will one day come from heaven and rule the world (Dan. 7:13-14). His permanent home was in heaven.

While He was here on earth, He was like a “street person” and so were those who followed Him. He and His disciples wandered from place to place. Oh they might stay in some spot for a period of time, but eventually Christ and His disciples would move on to some other place. **Those disciples who were following Christ could never say with certainty, this is my permanent place of residency.**

Undoubtedly, this scribe had a big, beautiful, secure home. Scribes made big money. So what Christ says to this scribe is if you want to literally follow Me while I am here on earth, you will have to be willing to give up the security of your earthly place of residency. You will have to be willing to travel with Me and go wherever I go.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer said that the first abandonment that is required of Christ's true disciples is an abandonment from "the attachments of this world" (*Cost of Discipleship*, p. 99). One must be willing to walk away from the security of a job and home and must be willing to go wherever Christ leads if one is to be a true disciple.

Now Jesus Christ is not physically here on earth and therefore, people cannot physically follow Him. In fact, when Christ addressed the seven churches in Revelation, not one time did He challenge the people to move away from their place of residency. When the Apostle Paul wrote his letters to different churches in different locations, he did not tell the people that they needed to sell everything and go travel around to various places.

However, we are called to live a sacrificial lifestyle. Sometimes a commitment to Jesus Christ and the Word of God does mean relocation from the security of our own comfort zone. Would you be willing to relocate if God made it clear that was what He wanted you to do?

So the issue today is not so much what we do physically, but spiritually. Are you willing to give up some earthly and worldly security for Jesus Christ? It takes real "resolve" to be one who loves the Lord and applies the Word in this world. That is exactly what a commitment to Christ demands to be His disciple.

AREA OF PRECEDENCE #2 – To be a disciple demands that Jesus Christ takes precedence over every earthly and worldly event. **9:59-60**

The second area that Christ addresses is the area of putting some worldly event above Him. Jesus said to "another of a different kind" (ετερον) "follow me." This man must not have been a Scribe.

Jesus invited this different man to follow Him. The man addresses Jesus as "Lord," which means he did believe He was the sovereign Lord and Master over everything. When Christ asked the man to follow Him, he requested that he first be permitted to attend a very important earthly event, the burial of his father.

Now some have said that the father wasn't actually dead yet so the man is saying he wanted to wait around until his father died. Others suggest the father was dead and he is requesting a leave of absence to attend the funeral. This is what I think is the true situation.

This man was literally asking Jesus Christ for permission to first go to this funeral. In fact, in the next verses (**9:61-62**), just enough time to say goodbye is addressed, so I don't think this man is requesting that he wait around for years until his father died.

The word “bury,” when used by Luke, speaks of someone who was actually dead (Luke 16:22; Acts 2:29; 5:6, 9, 10). When Luke uses this word, it certainly seems that he is saying that the man was requesting that he be allowed to attend the funeral of his dead father.

Now we need to realize that most funerals in Christ’s day were long, drawn out and noisy affairs (Matt. 9:18, 23). Many did not embalm bodies, but some did and if one did embalm, the period could last a month to forty days (Gen. 50:3). A mourning period could last for 70 days (Gen. 50:3). When Moses died the children of Israel mourned for 30 days (Deut. 34:8). Just the travel days could be numerous. At this point in time Christ was on His way to the cross (9:51). It was literally impossible for a disciple to take 30-70 days leave of absence and still be a disciple.

The disciples needed to learn and they needed to “preach and proclaim” the kingdom of God (9:60). This was an extremely critical moment in the timing and plan of God. This was a time of active work (10:1). When Elijah chose Elisha, Elisha asked him if he could go and kiss his parents goodbye (I Kings 19:19-21). Elijah let him do that. But Jesus is not Elijah, He is God. He is way above and beyond Elijah and when you have God on earth, this is a critical time in history.

Christ was not unsympathetic to the needs of this man, but He was setting forth a critical principle: I am the God/man on earth for a short time and if you are going to be My disciple, you cannot take a break right now but you must follow Me right here and right now. Let the dead bury the dead while you go and preach life.

In the day in which we live, we are not asked not to go to funerals. In fact, Paul said we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). The point is the Word of God and the work of God must take precedence over earthly events.

I think one day there will be a great remorse for those churches who thought a Super bowl was more important than the Word of God. Don’t try to sell the fact that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ when a football game takes precedence over His Word.

AREA OF PRECEDENCE #3 – To be a disciple demands that Jesus Christ takes precedence over every earthly and worldly person. **9:61-62**

There was another of a different kind of person who said, “I will follow you Lord” but first let me say good-bye to my relatives. Jesus Christ is physically here on earth and time for Him is running out.

The travel time and logistics of the visitation of these relatives would have hindered an important ministry at that critical moment in the program of God. Jesus knew that to this man, his family meant more to him than a commitment to Him.

Christ uses an illustration from the agricultural world to make a point. It is the illustration of a plough. Now today's tractors have GPS systems on them that are amazing. They can tell you exactly how straight you are moving and even plant the seed. Back then they did not have that. So a farmer would plough a field using some animal as his tractor and he would keep his eyes fixed on what was in front of him so that the row would be straight. If he were to look back for just one second, he would veer off track and the row would not be straight.

Jesus is saying it is time right now to move forward for God. I am here on earth and the plan of God needs to be the focus and you do not want to be looking back at this time. In fact, if you do, you are not "fit" not only to be my disciple, you are not fit for the kingdom of God. Because Jesus is saying I am the key to fitness for the Kingdom of God. Your focus needs to be on Me.

There is no looking back and there is no going back. If one is going to be My disciple, now is the time while I am here on earth to focus on Me and My Word and if you are going to look back, you are not "fit" for the Kingdom of God.

The word "fit" (εὐθετος) is one that literally means ready for use or fit for use (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 185-186). What Jesus is saying is your focus needs to be on Me right now as I am here and if it is not your focus and you are putting someone else first, then you are not ready to be my disciple. You are not ready to be used in God's Kingdom work.

There is a major Christian movement that has somewhat troubled me. Now certainly I don't have all the answers, but this has bothered me. It is a Christian movement that has been applauded by millions of people and brought fame and fortune to its leader. The movement is one that tries to get people to "Focus on the Family." Now there are good things that this organization promotes, but there are things that don't quite square with the Word of God, which I know for a fact because I got involved in a case in which the counsel was not squaring with the Word of God. The idea gets very close to putting the family above God and Jesus said here is if you focus on your family above Me, you are not really fit to be My disciple.

Now most of the time a commitment to God will square with family life. But not always. Monica went to church week after week and her husband and her son tried to stop her. Her commitment to Christ took precedent over their whims and in the end God used her to change her husband and her famous son Augustine. Suppose your wife or your child or your husband or your father or mother said no to what you know is God's will. Would you obey God or give in to the family member?

Bob Kregel told me a story once I have never forgotten. He was in California on book business and he happened to be there over the weekend and he went to a church service that Sunday night. This particular church had used as an interim pastor a very famous Biblical counselor who was no longer there. Bob went out after the service with a board member to have a bite to eat and Bob said I said to the man, "It must have been something to have as your preacher this famous Biblical counselor."

The board member said, “The best thing that ever happened to this church was that he left it.” We were so sick of hearing about relationships and counseling and we hungered to be fed God’s Word.

Jesus said if you want to follow Me, I take precedence over every earthly relationship. You must be willing to put Me and My Word and My will first above everything and everyone.

Now the issue at stake in this context was not about getting saved. This passage is not answering the question what must I do to be saved; it was answering the question what must I do to serve and be useful in the Kingdom work. A critical issue today is getting saved. Have you believed on Jesus Christ? Have you trusted in Him as your Savior?