

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Cost of Following Jesus

Luke 9:57-62

Rev. Freddy Fritz

June 29, 2014

The Cost of Following Jesus

Scripture

In the first nine chapters of *The Gospel of Luke* we have been introduced to the *identity* of Jesus as the Messiah sent by God to seek and to save the lost. From Luke 9:51 onwards Luke introduces us to Jesus' teaching on *discipleship*.

Let's read about discipleship in Luke 9:57-62:

⁵⁷ 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." (Luke 9:57-62)

Introduction

Every January, millions of Americans, brimming with optimism and a little extra belly from the holidays, commemorate the New Year by making an unfamiliar urban trek. They go to the gym. One in eight new members join their fitness club in January, and many gyms see a traffic surge of 30 to 50 percent in the first few weeks of the year. Stop by your local gym soon after January 1, and the ellipticals will be flush with new faces. But next thing you know, it will be April, our gym cards will be mocking us from our wallets, and our tummies will have sprouted, on cue with the spring buds.

Gym clubs make most of their money from two sorts of people: (1) absentee members and (2) super-users who pay not only the monthly fee but also for the add-ons, like trainers, classes, and even for the whey smoothies.

Unfortunately, most of us fall into the absentee member category. In January, our cup of willpower overflows. But by June, the odds that we have kept our New Year's resolutions fall to under 40 percent.¹

Some people want to follow Jesus. You go to church and often even join the church. But, when it comes to following Jesus, are you an absentee member? Have you started with Jesus but slacked off?

Jesus is very clear that his followers cannot be absentee members. While the gift of eternal is absolutely free, following Jesus nevertheless costs everything a person is and has.

Lesson

The analysis of the concept of discipleship in Luke 9:57-62 teaches us about the cost of following Jesus.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Disciple of Jesus Must Count the Cost (9:57-58)
2. A Disciple of Jesus Must Follow Immediately (9:59-60)
3. A Disciple of Jesus Must Not Look Back (9:61-62)

I. A Disciple of Jesus Must Count the Cost (9:57-58)

First, a disciple of Jesus must count the cost.

Luke said that **as Jesus and his disciples were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go"** (9:57).

A man wanted to become a follower of Jesus, a disciple.

¹ Derek Thompson, "This Is Why Don't Go to the Gym," *The Atlantic* (January 2014).

So, he went to Jesus and made a remarkable promise, **“I will follow you wherever you go.”**

Why did the man make such a promise? Perhaps for the same reasons that many want to follow Jesus:

- He appreciated the good that Jesus did.
- He enjoyed the teaching of Jesus.
- He liked being with Jesus and his disciples.
- He wanted the blessings of following Jesus.

Whatever his reasons for wanting to follow Jesus, the reply of Jesus was pointed. **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” (9:58).**

What was Jesus saying to the man? Jesus was saying that a disciple of Jesus must count the cost of following him. Jesus had nothing. He had no material comfort. He had no place to call home. He literally had only the clothes he wore. So, a follower of Jesus must be willing to give up everything, even personal comfort, in order to follow Jesus. Following Jesus involves self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Jesus, of course, was the prime example of self-denial and self-sacrifice. He had nothing, and even gave himself on the cross to pay for the sins of his followers.

Jesus insists that every disciple must count the cost of following him. A mere profession of faith in Jesus is not enough. A willingness to follow Jesus, like this man, is not enough. Remember, Jesus had already taught earlier in Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Jesus knew that he was heading to the cross. He knew that he was going to experience suffering, rejection, and death. He promises his followers the same. And unless his would-be followers are willing to die, they cannot become his followers. In other words, a follower of Jesus must sacrifice everything, even his life, in order to follow Jesus.

C. S. Lewis writes in his excellent book, *Mere Christianity*:

Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think are innocent as well as the ones you think are wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours."²

So, following Jesus involves giving up everything for the sake of Jesus. But the beauty of the gospel is that self-denial for the sake of following Jesus results in true joy. The British journalist and writer, Malcolm Muggeridge, became a follower of Jesus late in his life. He said, "I can say that I never knew what joy was like until I gave up pursuing happiness, or cared to live until I chose to die. For these two discoveries I am beholden to Jesus."³

In order to experience true joy and blessing, one must die to self and follow Christ. There is no other way.

So, first, a disciple of Jesus must count the cost.

II. A Disciple of Jesus Must Follow Immediately (9:59-60)

Second, a disciple of Jesus must follow immediately.

Luke wrote that **to another** Jesus **said, "Follow me"** (9:59a). Notice that in this instance Jesus extended the invitation. The man did not volunteer himself, but Jesus invited him to follow him.

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 196-197.

³ See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/january/2012108.html>.

But the man said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father” (9:59b). On the face of it, this seems like a reasonable request. But, knowing something of the cultural background gives us a different picture.

When we read the man’s response to Jesus’ invitation, we assume that this conversation took place sometime between the death of his father and the funeral service. “But in all likelihood,” as commentator Philip Ryken says, “his father was not yet dead.”⁴ In Jesus’ day, even as it is in some places today, Jewish people buried their dead within twenty-four hours. Moreover, family members sat with the body of the deceased person until it was buried. So, if the man’s father had already died, the man would not be talking with Jesus; he would be at home preparing for his father’s burial.

So, what should we make of the man’s request to Jesus when he said, **“Lord, let me first go and bury my father”**? The man’s father had not yet died. Perhaps he was ill, or at least in his declining years. The man wanted to take care of his father until he died. And then he would follow Jesus.

At first glance, this seems reasonable. After all, the Ten Commandments teach that we are to honor our parents, and caring for them in their declining years is one of the best ways to honor them. But Jesus discerned that this man was using his family situation as an excuse for delaying discipleship.

This man was procrastinating. He experienced Jesus’ call on his life to follow him but he did not follow immediately. He looked at his situation and hesitated. The pull of his family was stronger than the pull of following Jesus.

John MacArthur thinks that there may even be a further reason for the man’s procrastination. He says,

What this man was really saying was that he wanted to

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Vol. 1: Chapters 1-12, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 504.

delay following the Lord until his father died and he received his inheritance. He knew that Jesus was moving out of the area, and to leave now might cause him to lose out on his share of his father's estate.⁵

Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (9:60).

If Jesus' reply seems harsh, it is because we do not properly understand the cost of following Jesus. Jesus is not saying that we should be callous and uncaring about our loved ones. However, there are many things that can be done by others, by those who are spiritually dead. Caring for elderly parents is such an example – at least in that culture. But only a true follower of Jesus is able to **go and proclaim the kingdom of God**. So, Jesus' call stresses the urgency of following him.

At this past meeting of General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in Houston, TX, the Rev. Bill Sim preached on the last night. He told a story about a young missionary girl named Ruby Kendrick that I would like to share with you.

Ruby Kendrick was born to John and Kate Kendrick in Plano, Texas on January 28, 1883. She graduated from Plano High School in 1903. Interested in pursuing missionary work, she attended a number of Bible schools to acquire skills for missionary work.

In 1907 the Ladies' Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South appointed Ruby Kendrick to serve five years in Korea. She set sail on August 29, 1907. In Korea, she was a language student and Sunday school teacher. She loved the children and served selflessly so that the glorious gospel of Jesus would be proclaimed to all.

⁵ John MacArthur, *Luke 6-10* in *The New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 319.

About ten months after arriving in Korea, Ruby wrote the following letter home:

Dad, Mom!

This land, Chosun, is truly a beautiful land. They all resemble God. I see their good heart and zeal for the gospel, and I believe that in few years it will be a land overflowing with the love of Christ. I saw children walking over 10 miles on barefoot to hear the gospel and the love of God in them encourages me.

But the persecution is getting stronger. Two days ago, three or four of those who have accepted Christ less than a week have been dragged away and were martyred. Missionary Thomas and James were also martyred. There were orders from the mission board to return, but most of the missionaries are in hiding and worshiping with those whom they have shared the gospel with. It seems that they are all planning to be martyred. Tonight, I have strong desire to return home.

I remember you mom who resisted to the last moment of me leaving the port because of the stories of the hate of foreigners and opposition to the gospel.

Dad, Mom! Perhaps, this may be the last letter I will be writing. The seed that was sown in the backyard before I came out here must be filling our neighborhood with flowers. Another seed bears many flowers in the land of Chosun and they will be seeds to other nations.

I will bury my heart in this land. I realized that this passion for Chosun that I have is not mine but God's passion toward Chosun.

Mom, Dad! I love you.

Before her letter arrived home, and less than a year after arriving in Korea, on June 20, 1908, Ruby Kendrick died of appendicitis at Severance Hospital in Seoul, Korea. She was just 25 years old. At her request she was buried in Korea. The words engraved on her tombstone in Korea are these, "If I had a thousand lives to give, Korea should have them all."⁶

⁶ See <http://pastorqkim.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/thinking-of-ruby-kendricks/>.

So, a disciple of Jesus must count the cost and must follow immediately.

III. A Disciple of Jesus Must No Look Back (9:61-62)

And third, a disciple of Jesus must not look back.

Yet another man said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home” (9:61). Perhaps he heard Jesus’ response to the previous man. He did not want to wait until his parents died. He simply wanted to go and **say farewell.**

Once again, this seems reasonable. If he started following Jesus immediately without telling his family where he was going, they would wonder what had happened to him. It certainly would be appropriate to let them know what he was doing.

In fact, there was even biblical precedent for saying farewell to one’s family. When Elisha answered God’s call to leave his family and follow the prophet Elijah, he was granted permission to say farewell to his family (1 Kings 19:20). Elisha went home, burned his plow, slaughtered his oxen, and held a farewell feast with his family. Jesus may have had this incident in his mind when he said to the man, **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (9:62).**

To see the connection with Elisha, we need to look at both situations carefully. When Jesus talked about putting one’s hand to the plow, Jesus was saying that the “normal courtesies of family affection must give way to the overriding demands of the kingdom of God.”⁷ The proverb that Jesus used made the point that in order to plow straight lines one needed to look ahead and not keep looking back. This was not what Elisha did. When he went back home to say farewell, he made a clear

⁷ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 118.

break with his old way of life. Elisha burned his plow and slaughtered his oxen, and so he could not go back to his old way of life. On the other hand, the man who wanted to follow Jesus may have been tempted to stay home. Somehow Jesus discerned that something else was first in his heart, and knowing this, Jesus told him not to go back, but to start following him immediately.

Many struggle with this. They want to follow Jesus but there are other things that still have first place in our hearts. But, as Bishop J. C. Ryle said, "If we are looking back to anything in this world we are not fit to be disciples."⁸

John Wesley once gave some helpful advice to those who wanted to know how to follow Jesus. He said, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."⁹ And, as Dr. Ryken says, to this helpful summary we should add the phrase, "as soon as you can."¹⁰

So, a disciple of Jesus must count the cost, must follow immediately, and must not look back.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of discipleship as set forth in Luke 9:57-62, we should give ourselves to Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly.

In February 2001, John Oros spoke to an audience at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary about his experience as a church leader in Romania during the Communist era:

⁸ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 341.

⁹ John Wesley, quoted in Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Drive Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 259.

¹⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Vol. 1: Chapters 1-12, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 507.

During communism, many of us preached and people came at the end of a service, and they said, “I have decided to become a Christian.”

We told them, “It is good that you want to become a Christian, but we would like to tell you that there is a price to be paid. Why don’t you reconsider what you want to do, because many things can happen to you. You can lose, and you can lose big.”

A high percentage of these people chose to take part in a three-month catechism class. At the end of this period, many participants declared their desire to be baptized. Typically, I would respond, “It is really nice that you want to become a Christian, but when you give your testimony there will be informers here who will jot down your name. Tomorrow the problems will start. Count the cost. Christianity is not easy. It’s not cheap. You can be demoted. You can lose your job. You can lose your friends. You can lose your neighbors. You can lose your kids who are climbing the social ladder. You can lose even your life.”

Let me tell you my joy – when we looked into their eyes, and their eyes were in tears, and they told us, “If I lose everything but my personal relationship with my Lord Jesus Christ, it is still worth it.”¹¹

There is a cost involved in following Jesus. It will cost you your whole life, you must follow immediately, and you must not look back. But, if you become a follower of Jesus, I can assure you that regardless of the self-denial, self-sacrifice, and suffering you will experience, having a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is worth it.

So, give yourself to Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly today. Amen.

¹¹ See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2003/may/14413.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred dyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred%20dyFritz)

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Father, you sent your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into this world to seek and to save the lost. Although the gift of eternal life is absolutely free, Jesus nevertheless warned would-be followers to consider the cost of following him.

O God, enable each one of us who would be followers of Jesus to count the cost, follow immediately, and not look back.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!