

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

Luke 9:57-62

Luke 9:51 says, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” When Jesus would finally arrive at Jerusalem, it would begin the final week of his life, which would culminate with his death on the cross. The disciples of Jesus are following him to Jerusalem. And various tagalongs would appear and disappear along the way. In our text – **Luke 9:57-62** – we meet three anonymous men who show up out of nowhere but then leave just as quickly as they had come. Luke, a physician by vocation, typically writes with an eye for detail. But here he simply gives us snapshots of these would-be disciples who register to follow Jesus and then immediately drop out. These men did not make it to the first day of class after Jesus issued to them the course requirements. They came to Jesus and then went right back home when they were confronted with the cost of following Jesus.

What does it cost to follow Jesus? It will cost you everything. In **Luke 9:23**, Jesus declares, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” This is what it costs to follow Jesus. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, **DIETRICH BONHOEFFER** – the German theologian and activists – wrote: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” For **BONHOEFFER**, the call to follow Jesus literally cost him his life in martyrdom. Christ’s call to you and I today may not cost us our physical lives. But the cost is no less expensive. It will cost you everything to follow Jesus.

On April 21, 1519, Cortez and his small army landed on what is now Vera Cruz, Mexico. His mission was to conquer the mighty Aztec empire and claim the land and its abundant treasures for Spain. Upon their arrival, the men unloaded their horses, cannons, and other supplies from the ships. Then, to their astonishment, Cortez had the fleet of 11 ships set aflame and burned. It was a dramatic statement to his grossly outnumbered army that there would be no turning back. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction in which to move – forward inland to meet whatever might come their way.

Are there any ships docked at the shore of your life to give you a means of escape from the demands of Christian discipleship? I stand to tell you that if you are going to follow Jesus to victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil, you must burn your ships! It will cost you everything to follow Jesus. The three snapshots of would-be disciples in **Luke 9:57-62** specifically teach us that following Jesus will cost you a change of values, a change of priorities, and a change of focus.

I. FOLLOWING JESUS WILL COST YOU A CHANGE OF VALUES.

Luke 9:57 says, "As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." We do not know who this person was or where he came from. But his reason for coming to Jesus was very clear. He wanted to be a follower of Jesus. And his profession of faith was an airtight statement of true discipleship: "I will follow you wherever you go." He went to the right person: Jesus. He came with the right purpose: "I will follow you." And he set the right parameters: "I will follow you wherever you go." This statement of total commitment is reminiscent to the words of the vow Ruth made to Naomi, when her mother-in-law tried to send her home after her husband's death. In **Ruth 1:16-17**, Ruth says, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." With the same sense of devotion, this would-be disciple said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus looked at him and saw through him. Then he looked down and said, "Do you see that fox scurrying after food. When it gets dark tonight, that fox has a hole to go home to." Then he looked up and said, "Do you see that bird dancing in the air? When the day is over, that bird has a nest in some tree to go home to. But I, the Son of Man, have no place to lay my head." This was not a proverbial statement. It was literally true. In **Luke 9:52-53**, Jesus sent messengers ahead of him to make preparations for him to stay the night in a Samaritan village. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. Jesus created the foxes of the field and the birds of the air. But unlike them, Jesus had no place to lay his head. So he says to this would-be disciple, "Sure, follow me. But know that I do not have anywhere to sleep tonight." This awkward response Jesus gave this would-be disciple was not a rebuke or a rejection. It was a loving warning of the cost of following Jesus. This man was eager to follow Jesus. But apparently Jesus found him to be too eager. As a speed bump slows the careless driver, Jesus confronts this man with the fact that following him will cost a change of values.

This encounter is also recorded in **Matthew 8:19-20**. There we are told that this would be disciple was a scribe. Scribes were Jewish religious experts who studied the Scriptures and served as copyists, editors, and teachers. As a group, these scholars were opposed to the message and ministry of this upstart rabbi from the ghetto called Nazareth. So why did this scribe come to follow Jesus? I have a theory. According to **Matthew 7:27-28**, when Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, the people were astonished, because he taught as one who had authority, not as their scribes. This was the beginning of the tension between Jesus and the scribes. Jesus exposed the emptiness of their teachings and the hypocrisy of their hearts. But as most of the scribes detested the popularity of Jesus, this one decides to cash in on it. He takes the pulse of popular opinion and decides that it is more lucrative to follow Jesus. But Jesus stops him dead in his

tracks and makes it clear that to follow him will not guarantee you personal success, material wealth, of social prominence.

There are many who would have you to believe that following Jesus will inevitably lead to health and wealth. But Jesus says, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." In other words, following Jesus is just as likely to cost you material wealth as it is to produce it. In **Matthew 19:16-21**, Jesus commands the Rich Young Ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor and follow him. But in **Luke 19:1-10**, Jesus declares Zacchaeus to be saved, even though he only vowed to give away half of his ill-gotten fortune. **Matthew 6:24** says, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Jesus wants to be your Master, not your meal ticket. To follow him will cost you a change of values. **R. KENT HUGHES** comments: "No one who commits to following Jesus Christ, lives a life of ease. No one. If your Christianity has not brought you discomfort in your life, something is wrong. A committed heart knows the discomfort of loving difficult people, the discomfort of giving until it hurts, the discomfort of putting oneself out for the ministry of Christ and the church, the discomfort of a life out of step with modern culture, the discomfort of being disliked, the occasional sense of having nowhere to lay your head. But Christ's rewards far out-value anything lost by following him."

There's an old fable about a poor man who begged for food all of his life. One day he found out that the king was coming to town. He decided to go out early, get a good place by the side of the road, meet him when he arrived, and ask the king for a gift. He found a perfect place for the confrontation and began to wait. In his pouch the poor man had some fruit, a sandwich, a piece of meat, and a few coins. The day wore on, and no king. Finally the king came down the road. The poor man got to his feet and got a good spot. He called out to the king, "Good sir, I am one of your poor servants. Take mercy on me and give me a coin." But the king looked down at him and said, "You give me a gift!" The poor man was stunned. Angrily, he reached into his pouch and searched. He pushed aside the sandwich and the fruit. Then he pushed aside the coins. Finally, he found three crumbs in the bottom of the pouch. These he gave to the king. The king went on his way, and the beggar went to his hovel and cried. But that night, when he dumped out the contents of his pouch, he discovered that there were three gold pieces where the three crumbs were, shaped exactly to the size of the former crumbs, "Why," he moaned, "Did I not give the king my best?"

II. FOLLOWING JESUS WILL COST YOU A CHANGE OF PRIORITIES.

In verse 57, the first would-be disciple volunteers discipleship. But the second would-be disciple was drafted. Verse 59 says, To another he said, "Follow me." Jesus commanded him, "Follow me." Luke uses these words to describe the Lord's call to his first disciples. Jesus told Simon (Peter), "Do not be afraid, from

now on you will be catching men.” And **Luke 5:11** says that Peter, James and John left everything and followed him. And in **Luke 5:27**, Jesus said to Levi the tax collector, “Follow me.” And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And it is the Lord’s call to every person who would follow him: “Follow me.” This is the way the Lord called men to trust and obey him. Jesus never asked anyone to receive him into their heart as their personal savior. In concrete terms, Jesus called, “Follow me.” Jesus calls, “Follow me.”

In verse 59, this would be disciple responded to the call to discipleship by saying to Jesus, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” This request to bury his father was more than a request to attend a funeral. In the ancient Near East, honoring your father or mother involved observing an extended period of ritual mourning. Furthermore, this request does not clearly indicate that the father was already dead. It is possible that the father was low sick and his death was anticipated. And if this request actually involved a dead watch, who knows how long it would have been before this man returned to follow Jesus? Either way, when he says, “Let me first go and bury my father,” he was saying to Jesus, “Yes. I will follow you. But not now. There is something I need to do first. When I finish – whenever that is – then I will come and follow you.” The first guy was too eager. This guy was not eager enough. He had competing priorities and was convinced that there are some things that are more important than following Jesus.

Verse 60 says, Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” This statement does not mean that Jesus is against caring for your parents or attending funerals for your loved-ones. Rather, this harsh reaction was targeted against one key term in this would-be disciples request: first. How dare you respond to the call of Jesus by telling him that there is something – anything – that you have to do first! Mark it down. The Lord Jesus Christ does not take next. **Matthew 6:33** says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Luke 14:26, Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE writes: “Procrastination is the great enemy of discipleship. The one who procrastinates has heard Jesus’ call and has acknowledged the necessity of obeying it. But other obligations press forward in his or her mind and crown out obedience.”

III. FOLLOWING JESUS WILL COST YOU A CHANGE OF FOCUS.

Like the first guy, this third guy volunteered to follow Jesus. Like the second guy, this third placed something ahead of his commitment to follow

Jesus. Verse 61 says, Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." When taken at face value, this seems like a reasonable request. He was not asking for an indefinite leave to bury his father. He simply asked to go home to bid farewell to his family and friends. **1 Kings 19:19-20** tells us that when the Prophet Elijah put his cloak on Elisha, Elisha said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Elijah granted his request. This would-be disciple was no Elisha. By asking for time off as he volunteered to follow Jesus, he revealed that his heart's focus was not clear.

In 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." As the ancient farmer plowed the field, he would pay careful attention to what he was doing in order to plow a straight line. But an unfocused farmer would constantly look back to see how far he had come and look forward to see how far he had to go. Putting one's hand to the plow and looking back became a proverbial way of describing a person who was not really committed to his task. Do you get it? You cannot plow a straight line looking back. Jesus used this agricultural idiom to say to this would-be disciple that you cannot follow him with your feet in one direction and your face in another. Like a farmer plowing his field, a follower of Jesus must only look ahead. Lot's wife looked back and was turned to a pillar of salt. After being delivered from the bondage of Egypt, the children of Israel grumbled against God and desired to go back to Egypt, and an entire generation missed the opportunity to enter the Promised Land. And no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

He is worthy.