

## Am I Willing to Follow?

*Luke 9:57-62*

A couple of years ago at our annual district conference there was a night where they were highlighting the work of church planting by the Free church. Concurrent with the district conference there was a church planters boot camp going on. One of the things they did on this particular night was to have this group of men and couples going through the boot camp training simply say their name and where they were church planting.

In this group there were your typical, fresh out of seminary, high adventure, young pastors. But the group I was most struck by were the men who were my age and older. For many of them, I have no doubt that they left churches that were safe, stable, comfortable situations to go try to plant a new church. They were going into situations that would be unstable and uncomfortable; in which they might have to work another job just to make ends meet. Probably some of them had kids in college. They were taking a risk of faith to do what Jesus was calling them to do.

In my heart I was confronted with the question, "Am I still willing to follow Jesus wherever and whenever He calls?" I'd made that commitment when I was in college, but would I be willing to go into such situations that these men were, if Jesus called? Am I willing to follow?

This is a question for all of us. Are you willing to follow Jesus wherever and whenever He calls?

Today, as we continue our look at discipleship, we are going to be looking at Luke 9:57-62. In this passage Jesus encounters three would be disciples. In Jesus' interactions with these men this question of following Jesus is front and center. It's a great passage to help us think about our own choices about following Jesus.

So, let's look at the **first would be disciple**. Verse 57,

*57 And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."*

This phrase, *going along a road*, sound innocuous enough, but this is not just any road. Luke has made it clear that this is a journey with a purpose. Back in verse 51, it says,

*51 And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem;*

The road that Jesus is on is a journey to Jerusalem. It is a road that will result in his death on the cross and ultimately His resurrection and ascension back to heaven. While on THIS journey, *someone* makes what seems to be a wonderful commitment to Jesus. A man says, "*I will follow you wherever you go.*" This man is speaking the

language of discipleship. He is committing to follow Jesus *wherever [Jesus] goes*. It is a wonderful commitment IF the person means it.

*58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"*

At first Jesus' response seems a bit strange. Where is the expression of appreciation for this man's commitment? But I think we simply must trust that Jesus knows the heart of man. Back in verse 47, in an interaction with His disciples, it says that Jesus knew "*what they were thinking in their heart*." He knows what is truly in this man's heart. Jesus know that this man simply has not counted the cost of following Jesus.

Jesus says that the world is more welcoming to foxes, which have holes, and to birds, which have nests, then it is to him. They have homes; he does not. I think Jesus is saying that he is a misfit in this world. Rejection is implied in what he is saying. Jesus wants this would be disciple to understand that he is about to throw in his lot with what is going to become a very unpopular cause. There will be a cost in following Jesus.

And so here is the principle for us today: **We must expect that following Jesus will at times be costly.**

The road of discipleship is not all glory and good times. Sometimes we think that if I truly follow Jesus then all will be good in my life. Sometimes when the good news of the Gospel is proclaimed it comes with this sort of message, "Believe in Jesus and your sins will be forgiven and everything will be great." Our sins are forgiven, but Jesus does not promise that all will be smooth sailing in our lives.

We do not have the full picture of discipleship if we think that following Jesus means that all of our difficulties are gone. When you look at what the New Testament teaches about this you see that the calling to a life of discipleship sometimes involves costly suffering for Christ.

Paul wrote to the Philippians in 1:29:

*29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*

The New Testament repeatedly teaches this kind of thing. Following Jesus is costly. The road we travel with Jesus is not always easy. And so we must count the cost.

What's the cost of following Jesus? Well, for many believers around the world their discipleship costs them their lives or it results in imprisonment. For us, given the religious freedoms we have in this country it doesn't reach this level, but there are costs. When we live like Jesus wants us to live and when we speak like Jesus wants us to speak, we might be made fun of or thought foolish or ostracized. The cost might be

giving up comfort. It might be allow yourself to be inconvenienced. It is certainly the cost of taking on the heart of being a servant.

There's a cost to following Jesus. And Jesus knows that those who will truly follow Him are the ones who look at the costs and weigh them and still say, "It's still worth it, Jesus. I choose to follow you."

As we come to **would be disciples number two and three**, we see Jesus addressing another aspect of following him. Verse 59,

*59 And He said to another, "Follow Me."*

When Jesus says, *follow Me*, it is an imperative. It is a call to discipleship. It is the same call that Jesus gave to Matthew as he sat in his tax office back in chapter five (5:27-28). In response, Matthew left everything behind and began to follow Jesus as a disciple. He obeyed the call immediately. This is the call to this man. And this man says yes, BUT with a condition. He says,

*But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father."*

This seems to be a reasonable request, right? The religious, social and family expectations of the day required that a son would give his father a proper burial.

*60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."*

Jesus allows no conditions to this man's discipleship. He wants him to follow him now. How should we understand this?

Some commentators believe that this man's father was not actually dead. In fact, he might not have been near death. In this line of argument, why would this man have been with Jesus if his father had died? And so, in this view this man wants to stay at home until his father dies so that he will be in a position to gain his inheritance. This request to wait until he buries his father would be a substantial delay. And of course, Jesus is going to reject such divided loyalty.

Other commentators, however, believe that this man's father had in fact died or was at least soon to die. If this was the case, then the man's request is not so that he can ensure his rights to his inheritance, but rather he is simply asking to be allowed to take care of the normal, expected responsibilities. In this case, Jesus' rejection of the request would reveal how strong his call is for his disciples to have a radical transfer in loyalties. Jesus comes first. He comes before family. He comes before any religious, social and family duties.

In either case, what is clear is that Jesus rejects the request. He rejects conditional discipleship. If this man wants to follow Jesus, then he needs to know that Jesus

comes first in every situation. Jesus is saying, "I want you to follow me right now and to do what I am calling you to do." And what he is calling the man to do is to *proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God*. This is the work of Jesus' disciples. He feels great urgency about this as he is on this journey to Jerusalem.

Now, let me just make a comment about the statement - *allow the dead to bury their own dead*. It is difficult phrase to understand. Some commentators say that Jesus is saying that the man should allow those who are spiritually dead to bury those who are physically dead. That may well be what Jesus meant. I like how one commentator captured the idea of the thought. He says that the sense of what Jesus is saying here is, "Let other arrangements be made. You have other pressing duties." Jesus rejects conditional discipleship.

Even though I had been a believer for many years, when I went to college I began to sense this call to discipleship from Jesus. I increasingly sensed this Jesus was calling me to commit to following him fully. But for a long time, I had conditions. I didn't necessarily ever verbalize this to God, but what I was saying to Him in my heart was, "I will follow you just as long as I can keep my career plans in place." I grew up on a farm and from my earliest memories that was what I wanted to do and what I planned to do. I was saying to God, you can have my life, but I'm holding on to my career path. During the summer after my sophomore year in college, God began to pry my hands off my plans. I had no sense at that time that He was calling me to some other career path, but what I did clearly sense was that He was wanting me to hold my plans with an open hand so that He could redirect me if that was His plan. And for me, like this man, there was a family aspect to my struggle. I didn't want to disappoint my dad. Even though I knew he would support me in whatever decision I made, I knew a decision not to farm would probably bring some disappointment to him. But again, I sensed that Jesus wanted to have first allegiance in my life. He came before family. Thankfully, Jesus helped me lay down that condition so that I could follow Him fully. And you know what? I've never regretted it.

Let's look at the **third would be disciple**. It is a very similar situation to the previous one. In this case there is a man who again takes the initiative towards Jesus. Verse 61:

*61 And another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

This man says that he will follow Jesus, but he too has a condition. He wants to be able to first go home and *say good-bye to those at home*. This is not the same thing as taking care of funeral arrangements, but it is still a sensible family duty. Jesus rejects this condition. For this man to follow Jesus requires that He put Jesus before family and follow him now without delay. To not do this would be to behave like a man who puts

his hand to the plow, but then looks back. In looking back he loses the line of the furrow and plows a crooked path. This will not do for the kingdom of God, Jesus says.

Now, when we look at these last two would be disciples and the conditions that Jesus rejects, we need to be careful and remember that this is what discipleship meant for them. Jesus was on this journey to Jerusalem. If they were going to follow him they needed to follow him, NOW! In the very next chapter, Jesus commissions seventy to go out and proclaim the kingdom. Jesus is not saying that if we follow Him we have to reject all normal family responsibilities. In fact, often to follow Him means to excel still more in our family responsibilities.

The principle that is revealed in these encounters is what we need to take away. Jesus calls these two would be disciples to unconditional discipleship. The principle for us is this: **We must follow Jesus without conditions.**

Do you have conditions on your discipleship? Is there any way in which you are saying to Jesus, "I will follow you, but \_\_\_\_\_?" What's in your hand? What are you clinging to?

- Is it comfort? You don't want to let go of the comfort that you love.
- Is it your own plans? You don't want to yield your career path or your standard of living.
- Is it a fear of standing up for Jesus and what that might mean?
- Is it your family or friends? You don't want to put Jesus before them.
- Is it a pet sin that you know He wants you to yield to Him, but you just don't want to.

Jesus comes before family; He comes before our plans; He comes before our longing for safe, comfortable lives. Jesus comes first and He wants us to follow Him without conditions.

In this passage there is no indication of how these men respond. They may have done exactly what Jesus asked. We don't know. That Luke does not give their responses, leaves Jesus' words ringing in our ears. Will we follow? Will that be the pattern of our lives? Will we follow regardless of the cost? Will we follow unconditionally? These are the questions that this passage leaves us with. Will we be would be disciples or will we truly be followers of Christ?

Sometimes the question is asked whether this kind of commitment to follow is an event or more of a daily process. I would say it is both. I believe it is an event in the sense that we need to fundamentally settle the question about whether we will follow Jesus completely or not. Will we choose to give Him first place in our allegiances? And I believe that is a question Jesus is asking you, "Will you follow?"

If you have not really answered this question, I would encourage you to wrestle with the question. This might take spending some extended time to read Scripture and to pray

and to reflect until you can unreservedly say, "I will follow you, Jesus, period. No conditions. I will follow you regardless of what it cost." And so in that way it is an event.

But I would also say that it is a process. Last week Steve encouraged us to pray this prayer daily:

Jesus, I want to walk as Your disciple today. Therefore, I deny myself, saying 'no' to everything that hinders my discipleship. I take up my cross, dying to self and losing 'my life' in order that I might really live. May I not be ashamed of You today. Lord, lead and teach me as I follow You.

This prayer gives expression to the reality that though we may have made this fundamental choice to follow Jesus, it is still a daily decision to follow. It is a commitment that we renew day by day. And so, as Steve challenged us last week, I would encourage you to continue to renew this commitment through praying this pray daily.

Wherever you are this morning regarding this, let me encourage you to use our time around the Lord's Table to wrestle with this choice to follow Jesus. In communion, there are many truths of which we are reminded that can help us bring us to a place of unconditional discipleship.

First, we are reminded that Jesus has the right to demand that we follow Him without conditions because He died for us. He paid a great price to set us free from the domain of darkness and sin. He gave His life that we might have life.

But secondly, we are reminded of His unbelievable love for us. Because of love, Jesus willingly gave up his life on the cross. As Romans 5:8 says, He demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

As you take first the bread, which reminds us of the broken body of Jesus, and then the cup, which reminds us of the blood that was shed for us, renew your commitment to follow Jesus unconditionally. If you are not there, use this time to confess that you are still holding onto some things. Confess those things to Jesus and ask him to move you to a place where you can release those things to Him.

## **The Lord's Table**