

Series: Learning to Follow Jesus
Sermon: Unlearning (Luke 9:51-62)

About four or five years ago I thought I was texting my brother Mikey a quote from the Godfather. I had come across that quote and thought he need to be reminded of it. But somehow I texted that quote to a young man who attended Faith when he was at K-State. Out of the blue Xavier got a text from Pastor Steve that said, “Luca Brasi sleeps with the fishes.” I explained what had happened, and we had a good laugh.

After my errant text, we started texting each other random movie quotes to see if the other person can guess what movie it’s from. We do this 8 or 10 or 15 times a year. For example, about a year ago I sent him this quote:

“Yours was the face I saw above my cradle. The only mother I've ever known.
Wherever I am led and whatever I must do, I will always love you.”

My friend’s guess was *Superman 2*, but it was actually *The Ten Commandments*. If you’ve seen *The Ten Commandments* twelve or fifteen times, you probably know that Moses spoke these words to his Hebrew mother whom he hadn’t seen since he was a baby. He’s expressing to her his love for her and his devotion to her. It’s very powerful. You can take my word for it, but if you’ve never seen *The Ten Commandments*, those words are just a quote from a movie that you’ve never seen.

The same dynamic is at play when it comes to Scripture. Unless we immerse ourselves in Scripture, individual verses and stories will be like a quote from a movie that we’ve never seen. An explanation might be helpful. But there is no substitute for reading and re-reading and thinking deeply about verses and chapters and books of the Bible. When you immerse yourself in Scripture, you can have a deep, nuanced understanding of biblical truths. In a sense, you treasure up those Scriptures in your heart - the deepest part of your being.

Consider an example from the book of Luke, which we’ll be studying the next six weeks during our Season of Seeking. In Luke 9:23 Jesus made this statement:

23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

As a free-standing quote the idea of “following Jesus” is rather bland and nondescript. But if we look at the immediate context and at the broader context of Luke’s gospel, “following Jesus” has a rich, nuanced, and compelling meaning.

In the immediate context, we read in the preceding verse, Luke 9:22, that Jesus had told his disciples of his destination, where he was going. If you’re going to follow Jesus, you have to know where you’re following him.

22 . . . “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Jesus had told them, “I am going to Jerusalem to die on a cross”; seven more times Luke would record Jesus telling his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem to be crucified. Therefore, Jesus said in verse 23, since I’m going to the cross, if you want to follow me, you too must “deny yourself and take up **your cross** and follow me.” The immediate context tells us that following Jesus means being willing to suffer as he suffered.

The larger context adds something else to the idea of following Jesus that changes everything. Something emphasized repeatedly in Luke 9 through 24 is that Jesus wasn’t merely going to Jerusalem and to the cross; he was going **back to his Father in heaven**. For example, in the next paragraph Luke records that Jesus was praying on top of a mountain with Peter, James, and John. We read this in verses 29-31:

29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. 30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of **his departure**, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about “his departure” (Greek = exodus) which he “was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die on the cross; but after his resurrection, he would return to his Father in heaven (which is recorded at the very end of Luke 24). His final destination was heaven with his Father.

Luke makes clear throughout his gospel that **following Jesus not only means taking up your cross in this life; it also means following Jesus to your Father in heaven**. Much of Luke 13 through 19 explains how those who follow Jesus in this life should think and live so that we arrive at our heavenly destination fully prepared and with no regrets. That’s the context of following Jesus.

Our desire is that between now and Easter that you immerse yourself in the gospel of Luke and become fascinated with the teachings and the person of Jesus himself. It maybe the the idea of following Jesus is like a quote from a movie you’ve never seen; you’re heard other people talk about it, but there’s nothing very compelling about following Jesus for you. If that where you are, there is no shame in that; we all start in different places. We want you to know that if you immerse yourself in the Scriptures you can gain a deep, intuitive, nuanced understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. When that happens your faith becomes your own and the sky is the limit in terms of seeking and finding God.

Today we’re going to see in Luke 9:51-62 that **learning to follow Jesus will require unlearning many things** (*assumptions, prejudices, and some types of logic*). In rapid-fire succession, Jesus confronts the wrong thinking of his disciples as well as potential disciples. If we are going to learn to follow Jesus, we also need to allow Jesus to confront our wrong assumptions; we will need to be open to the possibility that we (myself included) initially get almost everything wrong about following Jesus. Learning to follow Jesus will require unlearning many things.

With all of that in mind, let's be open to the possibility that we need to unlearn some significant things about the destination, the opposition, and the cost of following Jesus.

Destination. (Luke 9:51) Notice how verse 51 talks about Jesus' destination:

51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

The term "taken up" refers to Jesus' ascension when he was "taken up to heaven" (NIV). This is what Moses and Elijah were talking about on the Mount of Transfiguration. At the end of Luke 24 we will read that after Jesus "blessed" his disciples that he "was carried up into heaven" (see also Acts 1:2, 11, 22).

Luke tells us that "when the days drew near" for Jesus to return to his Father, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus would go to Jerusalem to suffer and die; but after his resurrection, he would be taken up to heaven. Suffering would precede glory.

That same pattern is true for everyone who follows Jesus, including you and me. We need to be willing to suffer in this life, but we also need to know that our ultimate destination is with our Father in heaven (or in the new heaven and earth).

Between now and Easter, our study of Luke will prompt us to think quite a bit about our heavenly destination. A lot of talk about heaven can be cliches and platitudes - not unlike quotes from a movie you've never seen. But Luke will challenge us to think deeply about the reality of our heavenly destination and how suffering precedes glory.

Verses 52-55 introduce the topic of opposition to following Jesus.

Opposition. (Luke 9:52-55) Being more than a dozen people, Jesus and his disciples depended upon the hospitality of people in each village. Therefore, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus sent messengers ahead of him to find a place to stay. Significantly, Jesus decides to travel through Samaria. There was great animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews. The Samaritans were related to the Jews, but they rejected Jerusalem as the place where God should be worshiped. We read this in verses 52-53:

52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. 53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

The Samaritans in this village basically stereotyped Jesus. He was one more Jewish rabbi going to Jerusalem. Without knowing anything about him, they wanted nothing to do with him. Of course, they couldn't have understood that Jesus would be going to Jerusalem to die for their sins. Acts 8 records that years later many the gospel was preached in many villages in Samaria. And many believed. We see in verse 54 that James and John had the same animosity toward the Samaritans that they had toward them.

54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

James and John had the attitude, “One strike and you’re out.” They apparently thought that if you aren’t immediately receptive to Jesus and the kingdom he is establishing, you deserve a swift and brutal punishment. This visceral attitude to the opposition/rejection of the Samaritans was something they would need to unlearn. In response to their suggestion, Luke simply records:

55 But he turned and rebuked them.

If you keep reading the gospel of Luke it will become apparent that when Jesus took on flesh and blood, he didn’t come to judge the world. He came to seek and save those who were lost - even those who were initially hostile toward him. Chapter 10 records Jesus’ instructions to his disciples when people do not receive them. It’s fascinating because Jesus says that a day of judgment is coming when it will be more tolerable for Sodom (which did get fire from heaven) than for those who reject him. There will be a day of judgment; but this is not that day. This is a day in which Jesus’ followers hold out the offer of salvation at great personal cost if necessary.

In learning to follow Jesus, the disciples needed to unlearn some attitudes toward those who oppose or mock or reject Jesus. It’s possible that you and I need to unlearn some attitudes. In the Season of Seeking Reading Guide, on Day 1 of this week, one of the questions you’ll be asked is, “Can you think of a time when you’ve wanted God to send fire from heaven on someone’?” Can you think of a time when you murdered someone in your heart? We want you to enter into the gospel of Luke and let it diagnose wrong thinking and attitudes in your heart/life.

Verses 56-62 discuss the cost of following Jesus.

Cost. (Luke 9:56-62) Having been rejected by one Samaritan village, we read in verse 56 that Jesus and his disciples went to another.

56 And they went on to another village.

Along the way, they encountered three potential disciples. In each case, Jesus challenged them to count the cost of following him. These potential disciples would need to unlearn many things if there were going to learn to follow him.

As we read of these three interactions, keep in mind two things. First, in the gospels Jesus didn’t give the same instructions and warnings to every person. He sometimes gave very specific instructions to an individual that he didn’t give to others. For example, he didn’t tell everyone what he told the rich young ruler in Luke 18:22, “Sell all that you have and distribute [the proceeds] to the poor.” Other of his disciples retained their wealth and used the money for good purposes. Jesus knew the hearts of individuals and sometimes tailor made his warnings and instructions for them.

Second, that doesn't mean that his instructions to individuals are irrelevant to us; to the contrary, as we'll see, his instructions to individuals reflect perspectives and values that we need if we are going to follow Jesus.

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

This person made a very confident and unconditional commitment, "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."

This potential disciple needed to know that foxes and birds had something that Jesus didn't have: a place to return and sleep at the end of a long day. Jesus had left the relative security of his home in Nazareth for a life on the road. We saw in the previous paragraph that Jesus and his disciples were at the mercy of people who would welcome them and give them food and a place to lay their heads.

Jesus was telling this potential disciple, "If you are **actually going to follow me**, you will endure the same hardships that I do." Of course, not everyone is called to a traveling ministry without a permanent place to return each night. But on a deeper level we're called to live mindful that this world is not our home. We don't fully settle down until we are with our Father in heaven.

Jesus initiates the conversation with a second person in verse 59:

59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

This sounds like a very reasonable request to us. It even sounds like a God-honoring request since caring for one's parents is taught in Scripture. One explanation is that in that day, the process of mourning and burying a relative could take up to a year. It may have been that the man's father hadn't even died yet. If that's the case, it's as if this man was replying to Jesus, "Yes, I will follow you. . . later. . . but I have higher priorities now." Of course, if Jesus really is the Son of God, there is no higher priority than following him now.

In the same way we might tell Jesus, "Yes, Jesus, I will follow you. . . later. . . after I've sowed my wild oats, or after this semester is over, or after I graduate from college, or after my responsibilities at work slow down, or after my kids get older, or after I retire, or after I die." Delayed discipleship isn't really discipleship.

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 tells this potential follower that spiritual dead people could bury his father. But only a spiritually alive person can “go and proclaiming the kingdom of God.” Don’t miss the point by trying to figure out how Jesus’ instructions to this man were reasonable. It may be like his instructions to the rich young ruler (nothing particularly reasonable in selling everything you have); this man needed to know that there can be no higher priority than following Jesus. And following Jesus involves telling others about him. Everyone will die; but not everyone will spend eternity with God in heaven. If you are going to follow Jesus, he has to be your highest priority.

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.”

If you’re plowing a field or driving your car or riding a bike, bad things happen when you look back. We read in verse 51 that Jesus had “set his face to go to Jerusalem”; he wasn’t looking back. Therefore, those who follow Jesus should not look back either. This man’s loyalty to his family was higher than his loyalty to Jesus. But again, if Jesus is the Son of God, our highest loyalty has to be to him.

I think we need to realize that Jesus was doing these potential disciples (and us) a favor by telling them up front that following him will be costly. Jesus didn’t use and bait and switch methods, telling people, “Follow me and you’ll have an easy life . . .” only to find out later that people would treat them the way they treated him. No, he told them straight up, “I’m going to Jerusalem to be crucified. If you want to come after me, you too will have to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me.”

We’re in many different places when it comes to following Christ. Some of you here today have a rich, nuanced, compelling understanding of what it means to follow Christ. For others of you *the idea of following Jesus is like a quote from a movie you’ve never seen*. You understand the words, but “following Jesus” doesn’t mean much to you. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, this Season of Seeking is an opportunity to learn to follow Jesus (and unlearn many things as well).

Today as we come to the Lord’s Table, consider these questions:

- * Where are you in terms of following Jesus?
- * What do you want to learn during this Season of Seeking?
- * What do you need to unlearn?