

The Challenge of Discipleship

Luke 9:57-62

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Joshua Koura

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.com

The Gospel of Luke, chapter number 9, and I'd like us to look together at verses 57 to 62. Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." 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." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Let us pray.

Father, we ask now that You would send the Holy Spirit to enable us to hear the word, to respond well to the word, to hunger for the word. I pray that Lord God, that You would send Him to empower me to speak Your word in such a way that would magnify Christ and not cause confusion to Your people, but rather that Lord would turn Your people's eyes to You. So Lord, we pray that we would worship You even now as we look at Your word, that we would praise You for its truths, that we would submit to its instruction, and that we would follow in its way. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

In this passage of Scripture, the Lord Jesus shows us three men that He encountered who were considering discipleship. Some considered because Christ asked them; others approached Christ and asked Him that they would like to be His disciple and follow Him. But one thing that comes through this passage that is important for our attention and our consideration is that in this text of Scripture, we see that discipleship is a call which challenges the soul. That the call to discipleship, or the reality of being one who is a follower of Jesus Christ, confronts the human soul with a challenge. In each of the cases that are presented here, each one of these people were challenged. They were challenged by the cost of following Jesus Christ, and there is a sort of conflict that happens in their soul. Now, this is true of every decision that is of significant value. If you are considering moving state, or getting married, or whatever, changing jobs, immediately

there is a sort of confrontation and conflict in your soul. Questions begin to arise. The soul is flooded with questions that you desire answers for. That the decision that you make doesn't guarantee the answer. For example, if I follow Jesus Christ, what will that mean for my relationship to my friends? How would that place me in relationship to my unbelieving family? How would they feel about having a son, or a brother, or a father, or a mother, or a sister whose one consuming passion is the Lord Jesus Christ? What may it mean for my work? How will it change the way that I interact with others, my speech, the things that I love to do, the things that I usually talk about? How would it affect that? And in this passage of Scripture, we see, although we don't see the questions, we know that those questions are going through the minds of these people. We can tell by the response of Jesus, by their word to Him, and His word to them, and the obvious awkward silence that follows each of the cases. We hope that they followed in the right way and made the right decision when confronted by the word of Christ. But nonetheless, what is true of discipleship is that it is a challenge. There is confrontation of a challenge to the soul of men to depart from sin, to no longer serve two masters, but to follow after Christ.

And it seems to me, from examination of Christianity today in modern Christendom, is that we have sort of defined and designed Christianity as a safe thing. What I mean by that is that we have made Christianity, our Christianity, has become a kind of Christianity that has this massive protective bubble that serves us good at very little cost, that gives us the things that we desire and need, but doesn't demand anything from us. And I think the Christianity that exists today in a lot of modern Christendom is simply a Christianity that has no room for the totalitarian demands of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We want God, yes, but we don't want to be disturbed. We want Christ as King, yes, but we want to limit His authority in our lives. We are happy, in one sense, to go with Him to Bethany, where we hear the cries of "Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest," but we do not wish to follow Him all the way to Calvary and there be crucified with Him. And I think the call to discipleship really brings that angle on Christianity that must be present in our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. That when we are confronted with Christ, we are confronted with a call that demands things that are very dear to us, a surrender of the things that are dear, the things that we perhaps love most.

And in this passage, we have three cases of consideration where there are conflicted souls that have been challenged by the call of Jesus Christ. The first one in the text is found in verse number 57. This man was very confident, but let us say too comfortable. Very confident, too confident, yet too comfortable. He says, "Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.'" You can just imagine it, Jesus walking down the road with His disciples, and a man

would have spotted Him over there who knew Him. "Oh, that's the great teacher, that's the great miracle worker, that's the great one that has done many things in the communities roundabout. I'm gonna go after Him. I'd like to follow Him." And so he leaves his post, perhaps, and he runs over to Christ and says, "Lord, I want to follow You, and you know what? I'll go wherever You go." What an ambitious, bold assertion from this man. And Jesus replies with a reply that silences him. And Jesus says to him in verse number 58, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Jesus says to him something that is quite striking. He says, "You see the animals, the foxes, the birds, they go about their day. They either go hunting or they go finding some food, and after a long day of work, they come back to the same place that they slept last night. They go out, they do their thing, they come back, they rest. Same nest, same hole." He says, "But I don't have such a dwelling place that I can guarantee for you. If you're going to come and follow Me, I cannot guarantee the security of having the same place to reside in all the time, all your life." The animals have a consistency that is probably more secure to them than it is for Me because I'm going about doing My Father's business, and My mission is to preach the gospel and to make Myself known to the world. And so, Jesus confronts this man with such a response.

You see, the man didn't understand or perhaps register that the person that he was asking was one that was born in Bethlehem in an inn because there was no room for Him in the inn. He was born in Bethlehem in a manger, in a stable, because there was no room for Him in the inn. The man perhaps didn't consider that this one that he wanted to follow went to his own town, Nazareth, but was rejected and had to leave. This man perhaps didn't recognize and understand that this very one that he so long and was so ambitious to follow was one who cleansed and delivered the demoniacs at Gadara, thinking that he would receive a warm welcome from the people, but rather got kicked off the shores. This man perhaps didn't realize that the one that he was asking to follow him, that "I want to follow You," was one that died, or would die, outside of the city. He was one that would be laid in a borrowed tomb. This man didn't realize and understand that the one that he was desirous to follow was one that would demand his entire life in such a way that there would be no guarantee that he would lay his head on the same pillow every night. And this man was silenced by such a challenge. "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, the Son of Man, the Messiah, nowhere to lay His head."

Yes. As one man said, this is a kind of implication or indication, an allusion, should I say, to the incarnation. That the Lord Jesus Christ left His home, left the glory of heaven, to come on earth as a man. And as He calls men to come unto Him, they're following the one who has been incarnated,

the one that has left to come to save. And so that the followers also, in one sense, must leave, must come, must reach those to whom He came to save. But this man is told that it seems that he was too comfortable, and we do not know what happened with him, but it is likely that this man, who first presented with a bold, ambitious assertion that he wanted to follow Jesus, perhaps walked away thinking, "This is too much; this is too hard."

Jesus is looking for followers that are described as those who are described in Revelation: The 144,000 sealed by God. The Bible teaches that these are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. They're not just those who say, "I'll follow You," but they are those that follow. Not "I'll just follow You wherever," but they do follow Him wherever He may be. We sing songs like, "If Jesus goes with me, I'll go anywhere. 'Tis heaven to me, wherever I be, if He is there. I count it a privilege here, His cross to bear. If Jesus goes with me, I'll go anywhere." I pray that is true of us. But what the songwriter is saying in that song is something that's very important. "'Tis heaven to me, wherever I be," listen, "if He is there." You see, the problem with this man is that he thought his comfort was more important than the comfort that he would have by being with Christ. You know, all true people of God understand that to have Jesus is to have everything. They understand that the presence of the Lord is the most comfortable, joyous, secure place to be. Whether in the face of death, whether in the face of sorrow, whether in the face of persecution, if the Lord is there with them, they have security.

Do you remember what happened to Moses when he was there and the people of Israel sinned in Exodus chapter 33 and the golden calf in chapter 32? God says to Moses, "I will send My angel before you, and he will lead you to go up into the promised land." But He goes, "But I will not go up with you." And Moses says, "Lord, if You don't go up with me, I'm not going. I'm not going." To him, the comfort and the assurance, not of the angel of the Lord, but of the presence of the Almighty God Himself, was sufficient to go anywhere. But without Him, "I will not go. I must have Him." And this man felt that his comfort was not in the Lord, was not in Christ, but seemed to be in his own preparations that he has made for his own future security. But Jesus silences his bold assertion by saying, "Come, follow Me." Now He says to him, "If you want to follow Me, this is what it may look like." And the man, as far as we know, we assume, walked away sorrowful.

Jonah learned this hard lesson, didn't he? He ran away from the presence of the Lord but later perhaps realized that the best place to be is in the presence of the Lord, in the will of God, doing the things that God has asked us to do. Even Hebrews 13:5 talks about this. He talks about the fact that we should be careful of covetousness, and that we should let our conversation, or let our manner of life and conduct, be without covetousness. And it says this, "For He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake

you." Not because He said, "I promised you cars, houses, I promised you so many goods, so you always be comfortable." No, He's simply saying, "You be careful of covetousness because you have a promise, and that promise, that conduct that you should live, should be without covetousness because there's a promise, and the promise is that He will not just give you things, but He will give you Himself." Therefore, we realize that our comfort does truly come from Him, and therefore our confidence should also be in Him, and not in our comforts.

The second person in the passage here is seen in verses 59 to 60, and here Jesus disregards the person that delays. In verse number 59, "Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'" Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." This man is confronted by Christ, and Christ is the one that says to him, "Follow Me." And what happens very soon out of the words of this man is a sort of delay or an excuse. "I would like to come, Lord, but hang on, I've got to do something first; let me go do something first," and there's a little delay that the Bible introduces to us here, a delay in the man's obedience.

Now understand this for a moment. Jesus is journeying on His way. Jesus is saying to him, "Come, follow Me." Jesus is saying, "I'm moving in this direction, come follow Me." "Well, wait, Lord, let me go bury my father first, then I'll come follow You." Jesus says, "Let the dead bury the dead; you go preach the kingdom of God."

Now, immediately, the reason for his delay seems to us is quite reasonable, does it not? "Let me go first and bury my father," this is a reasonable request we would say. He's not asking for anything that is, we could say, selfish, whatever it may be, but the truth is, when we look a little bit deeper into the manners and customs of things, we see two possible things that could be resulting in this passage. Firstly, this man could actually be saying that his father is not yet dead, so what he's simply saying is, "Let me first go bury my father." I could be indicating that my father is very old, about to die; let me wait for him to die, get the inheritance, bury him, sort out all these things, and then I'll come follow You. That is one option that is considered by many commentators.

The second one is this, that his father did actually die, was actually dead; however, among the Jews, there was many tedious and long funeral type processions that could last weeks of intense mourning and then potentially even a whole year of a light mourning, and in some cases, at the end of the year, they would go back to the tomb and take out the body and, you know, do and then put it in another box and etc., and lay it in the sepulchre in a corner of the sepulchre, whatever it may be.

Two things we also must consider and understand it is this: first, the person who is asking him to follow Him, you have to understand this, that Jesus is the one making the call. Jesus is the one saying, "Follow Me." And I would submit to you, if this was just a mere man, we might charge that man as being a sort of cult leader, but I tell you, if Jesus says, "Follow Me," it is not a mere man saying, "Follow Me," and if He says, "Follow Me now," it is not a mere man that He's saying, "Follow Me," but God Himself, who knows all things, and in His wisdom, knows what is best for your particular case and cause. And so, no matter what, who is speaking here, the Creator of heaven and earth, who owns all things, who is ruler and king over all, who has the crown rights to the souls of all men, who has power over all creation, who upholds all things by the word of His power, so when He says, "Come, follow Me," no matter what, we must come and follow Him.

The second thing we need to understand is that the applications in Scripture may vary, but the principle always remains. What I mean by this is this, that if Jesus confronted you, He may not have put it in the exact same words to you. He may have said something else in your case, that moment, but one thing that wouldn't change is the call to follow Him and the fact that there should be no delay. The principle is unchanging. What Jesus is saying here to His disciples, or to this man, is this, that there is no limits to My lordship, there is no jurisdiction in our relationship. I can ask anything of you, whenever I want it from you, and I deserve to have it because I am your God, and no matter what it may cost you, whatever you have is from My hand, and it belongs to Me. Your breath belongs to Me.

And the principle that we learn from this text is that there is no limitations to the lordship of Christ, and therefore, as people that have been called to follow Christ, we should never find these two words or these two statements found in the same sentence. Look with me in verse number 59, "Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said," listen to these words, "Lord, let me first." You see the problem? "Lord" and "let me first" cannot live in the same sentence. If He is Lord, it is Him first. If He is Lord, it is not "let me first." If He is Lord, it is "Lord, now, yes, I will not question the wisdom of Your ways," even though it touches the most dearest area of my life, even though it relates to family, even though it touches the burial of my own father. "Lord, You are Lord of all. If You say go, I go. If You say stay, I will stay, because I will not question the wisdom of Your ways."

And what Jesus says to this man is quite interesting in verse number 60. He says, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." Jesus says to this man, "Let those that are spiritually dead go bury and take care of the matters that relate to their physical dead father, but you, being alive, being one of My disciples, you go and preach

the kingdom of God." Jesus confronts him with the priority of the proclamation of the kingdom of God above his earthly relationships. What He's simply saying is this, that I have called you to come follow Me and to go preach My gospel. The dead, spiritually, can't preach My gospel; they don't know My gospel. They can look after the things that pertain to the dead, but you, called by My name, you raised from the dead, you a follower of Me, yours is the proclamation of the kingdom of God. So come, follow Me.

The priority of the proclamation of the kingdom of God is what Jesus said to this man. Essentially, what He said to this man is what we read in Matthew 6:33, "Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Now, listen to this, you can be sure that Jesus will never give you a contradictory command. You can be sure that He will never tell you to not love your wife so you can preach the kingdom of God. You can be sure of that. But think about this case, there are the dead that can bury the dead and take after those matters, you go preach the kingdom of God. And another thing is, Jesus' calls never contradicts the other commandments that He also gives in His word, so that if He says for you to go preach the kingdom of God, then it is possible to live a life whereby you preach the kingdom of God and still fulfill your duties in all the areas it is called you to do.

And this is what we see in this passage, the primacy of the proclamation and the need for no delay to the call of Jesus Christ to follow after Him. Then lastly, we see in verses 61 and 62 is a man that is doubting and divided. In verse 61 and 62, he says, "And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.'" But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Seems reasonable, all a man wants is a farewell party. "Let me go home, let me just go home and whatever is," but Jesus knew exactly what was in that man's heart. Jesus knew if that man went home and said farewell, and those Jews, as they do, the Arabs, put on that great celebration of the farewell and persuade their son to stay, "Please, son, don't go. Mum's crying, brother's over here holding him back," you know, setting up a trap perhaps so he doesn't get out of there. You know how it is if you're from a Middle Eastern culture, farewell doesn't just say goodbye and out, it's more than that. And more than that, Jesus knows that this man has a divided heart, that his primary concern was, "I have to say farewell to my family. I have things there that are important to me, more important than Jesus." And he says the same thing as the last man, "Let me go first, Lord," and falls into the same trap and the same snare in that way.

You know what Jesus says to him? "Give me an undivided heart." He uses an illustration to show that. It says, "No man who plows a field and seeks

to make a straight furrow in the ground for planting, no man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back as he puts his hand to the plow is fit for the kingdom of God." In other words, no man that is looking back, he's divided, he's moving, wanting to move forward, but his heart and affections and mind is back. No man who's trying to plow a straight furrow in his farm and looking back can do such a job that is sufficient for planting. And he's simply saying, "And no man is fit for My kingdom who will not keep their eyes solely upon Me, who will not have a single focus, but rather has an undivided heart." That man, that woman, is not fit for the kingdom of God.

What Jesus is simply saying is that following Me, Christianity, being a disciple of Christ, involves concentration. It involves fervent concentration. It is a warfare and a battle whereby you cannot be lazy, you cannot be weary, you cannot be thinking about what's happening back home. You must be about the Master's business. In Deuteronomy chapter 20, it says those very things. If any man has taken a wife, or has purchased the property, or is fearful, let him stay home and not come to the battle, lest he makes his other brethren also fainthearted and also discouraged. Imagine you were trying to plow a field, and the next far over, next lane over, with this other person was that was looking back. What will happen to you? You wonder what he's looking at. You know what happens, someone looks back in church at the front row, and then everyone looks back. Concentration gets lost. As an illustration, take that in the work of the kingdom of God. Those that are fit for the kingdom of God are not those that have a divided heart, but those that have a single heart, a focused heart, a heart that is concentrated on the things that pertain to Christ and His kingdom.

Let me tell you this, God doesn't want your furrow; He wants your affection. It's not necessarily about the straightness of the furrow that is so concerning here. What is more concerning is this, why are you looking back? When God sent the angels down to Sodom and Gomorrah to retrieve Lot and his family, the angels gave a word and said to them, "Do not look back. You leave the world, you leave sin, you leave the city of destruction, you leave the place where your lusts were fulfilled, you leave the place where your soul was vexed day to day, and you come to the place that I have called you to. You come into the kingdom of God, and as you come, you do not look back." But Lot's wife, the Bible says, looked back, and she was turned into a pillar of salt and was there judged by the Lord right outside of the city of Sodom. And the same is true of all who are called to disciples, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. You cannot look back. Don't look back. You're looking forward; you're looking as Christian, that pilgrim who left the city of destruction and was set to go to the celestial city. And even on his way, when he just burst out of the gates of that city and he ran and was moving, all Mr. Obstinate came and told him of all his folly. "What are you doing, leaving your home, leaving your family? Oh, you shouldn't be changing all

the things that you're doing. Stay, stay in the city." And Christian said, "No, I cannot stay in the city. This city will be destroyed. I've been called to go. The book has told me of a place where I must go, the celestial city there, where I'll meet my master." Don't look back, Christian. Don't look back. And don't be like Pliable, whose heart is so divided, who one day says, "Oh, I want to come with Jesus. I'd like to go to the celestial city," and the next moment looks back and says, "No, it's going to be too hard."

If Jesus tells you to walk on the water, you can be sure that He will carry you along the water. You might say, "It's hard. This seems like an impossibility." And my friend, yes, it is. It's only by the grace of God that anyone sees Christ in such a manner that they long after Him in such a way that they will not look back. But understand this, that if you look back, you are not fit for the kingdom of God.

These three cases all have an untold story. We really don't know what happened to each one of these people. In chapter 10, Jesus sends out 70 disciples to go preach the gospel. I wonder if that man who was told to go preach the kingdom of God actually repented and turned and was sent by Christ in the just in the following chapter. I sure hope it was that way for him. But these people have an untold story. We don't know. There's a sort of awkward silence that leaves us in suspense, which I think is deliberate for us, and it kind of leaves us with the suspense of this question: What will you do when you are asked to follow Jesus? It sort of leaves us with an understanding and a kind of challenge to us. I wonder what happened to them. We don't really know. I wonder what I would do if I was told, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, and the Son of Man, there's nowhere to lay His head." If I was told to let the dead bury the dead and you go and preach the kingdom of God. If I was told that, "Don't look back and go and pray and go and be fit for the kingdom of God by moving forward and looking only to Jesus, how would I respond to such a call?

Well, if you profess to be a Christian, you've heard the call. You know that Jesus, who gave His life for you, demands our soul, our life, our all. If you're a Christian in Jesus Christ, you know this. But the question I ask you this: Are you conflicted? You hear the call, you consider the cost, and perhaps you're conflicted. Perhaps those questions come to your mind: What shall be of my creature comforts if Christ has full reign on my life? If I submit myself to the totalitarian demands of such a Savior, what shall be of my life? What shall be of my relationship to my family if I commit to the commands of Jesus and go preach the gospel of Jesus Christ? What shall my parents think if I say, "Mom, Dad, I believe God's calling me to another country, perhaps to another state or to another city, to serve the Lord in a particular way"? I have a burden for people.

You, as a parent, how would you respond to that? "Oh, everything's set up for you here, son, daughter, don't leave the place of comfort," or would you be like, "Son, daughter, go preach the kingdom of God. Go serve God. Go follow Him. He'll look after you. We'll do what we can to help you. We'll support you, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

Maybe you say, "Well, what if I go and preach the kingdom of God, and I don't know, maybe I won't be able to buy the house I want to buy. Maybe I won't be able to drive the car that I desire to drive. Maybe I won't be able to live in the suburb that I desire to live." And what shall it be if I, if I follow Christ in such a way that I have to then cut back on work so I can spend time, for example, with God's people, or perhaps I need to, you know, go preach the gospel and be more deliberate about sharing Christ? That might get me in odds with my certain profession or might kind of cause me to enter a bit of an unstable situation in my life. My income might be impacted.

These are thoughts we have, of course. We use wisdom in all the spheres of service God's placed us in to make Him known, but there's no guarantee that someone's not going to get offended with you for being a Christian. In fact, Jesus says that we should expect that others would be offended for us of being a Christian, and He says, "Woe unto you if all men speak well of you." And these thoughts come to our minds. Perhaps we are conflicted. Maybe we've made delays. "I will follow Jesus. I know God wants me to follow Him, but when I get my degree, when I earn this much money, when I purchase this property, when, when, when," and you know in your heart that God's saying, "Come on, now is the time. Come on, the hour is late. Come follow Me. Come serve Me."

There's a delay. "We'll serve God when the kids are over older, then we'll give more our time to the Lord." Think about what may be causing your delay. Or perhaps your heart is divided. Truly, in your heart, there's a divide in the affections, that you don't love the Lord your God or desire even to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, that you feel like you can have a kind of Christianity that looks back and moves forward, that you can have God behind you and the world in front of you, or you can have, or you can have, have it, you, whatever way you want, you can have it, you can have both.

To you, hear the word of Elijah to the children of Israel on Mount Carmel: "How long will you falter again into between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal be God, follow him." Joshua said it to the children of Israel: "Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods on the other side of the river, the Amorites, and all the gods of the world, or serve the Lord." Joshua said, "But as for me and my house, we will serve

the Lord."

You know, if some of us said, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," if some of us said that today, for example, went home, we're gonna get our house in order, we're gonna serve the Lord, some of us perhaps will be confronted with some challenges, some losses, some discomfort entering into our situation. But if Jesus goes with you, you can go anywhere. It is heaven to be wherever He is, if He is there. "I counted a privilege, He is cross to bear. If Jesus goes with me, I'll go anywhere."

Do you really think, and really suppose, that if all these people follow Jesus, do you really suppose that life would have been worse for them or better for them? Do you really think that it would have been worth it to turn away from the call of such a gracious, majestic, glorious, loving Savior? Do you think Jesus was just trying to get into their lives to ruin up their, their, their mess and to just make their life a living hell? Do you think that's what Jesus was intending to do in any way with these people? It would be foolish and absurd to think so. We know who this Savior is, and therefore we know what His call would lead to: everlasting joy, peace, true comfort, true satisfaction with Him.

And how many of us forfeit the joy of the privileges, the blessings, the fruitfulness of an obedience, committed, surrendered life to Jesus Christ because we're too afraid of what it may cost us to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ? Let else be the priority of the word of our Master, the will of our Master, and the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

I don't know how this applies to you in your particular situation, but I can tell you this: if Jesus has spoken, you may lose something here, but when you gain Him, you will gain everything. Let us pray.