

Barriers to True Discipleship

Scripture: Luke 9:57-62

Code: 42-133

We have finally come in our study of the gospel of Luke, to the last section of chapter 9. As you know by now, the chapters in the gospel of Luke are long. This one is no exception, having 62 verses. The final section flows from verse 57 through 62. I want to read that to you and then open up its marvelous and helpful truth.

Beginning in Luke 9:57, "And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go.' Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' And He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Permit me first to go and bury My father.' 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.' And another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God.'"

Three would-be disciples and the subject is, "Following Jesus." The first man says I will follow, to the second man Jesus says, "Follow Me." The third man says, "I will follow." Follow is the operative word here. It's about following Jesus. That's the subject. It's about the high cost of following Jesus. It's about what hinders people from following Jesus. Right at the core it's about following Jesus.

And though that is a very familiar word in the gospels, Jesus many times called people to follow Him. He called Matthew to follow Him. He called the rich young ruler to follow Him. He called Philip to follow Him. He called Peter to follow Him. He called all of the Twelve to follow Him at some point and He called many others to follow Him. And always when He did that He used the same word, *akoloutheo*, and He used it in the present imperative which implied an ongoing command. Following in itself implies a future, implies continuity. It implies something beyond the moment. And in the present tense, that implication becomes explicit. Keep on following Me. You might even say, "From now on in your life, follow Me."

That really is not typical of the modern style of calling people to discipleship or evangelism. Modern evangelism would lead us to believe that becoming a Christian is a matter of a moment, not a lifetime. It's a matter of an accepting of Christ. It's a matter of emotional experience to which you were led by fiery preaching or heart rending stories or music. Whatever might be used to induce a person to a

moment of emotional breakdown where they will pray a prayer, make a decision, accept Christ, that seems to be the direction of modern evangelical evangelism. All they have to do is grab that moment, say that prayer. And if they don't know what it should be, we'll give them a formula to pray. And that's all it takes to become a Christian.

It's obvious that Jesus didn't do that. He never tried to quote, "Get people saved by moving them emotionally to a moment of crisis, or a moment of decision, or a moment of acceptance of Himself." He never brought anybody that I know of in the New Testament to a place where they were supposed to pray a prayer. Never did He do that and never did the Apostles do that. None of them ever moved toward some crisis event in which supposedly the sinner was redeemed from sin and death and hell. And yet the call to Christ, the call to salvation is typically viewed in our world as an event, as a response to an emotional moment. Not so in the words of Jesus. When Jesus invited someone to come into His Kingdom, when Jesus invited someone to receive His forgiveness and salvation, He asked that person for the rest of his life. He didn't want a moment. He didn't want the emotion of a moment. He wanted a carefully thought out understood commitment of a lifetime. Repentance from sin, confession of Jesus as Lord, obedience from the heart to the Word and the Spirit was for life. And there was always that emphasis in the ministry of Jesus. He disdained the short-term disciple. He made things so difficult for many would-be disciples that, for example, in the sixth chapter of John it says, "Many of His disciples walked no more with Him." The standard was just too high. What was required was too demanding.

Now in the text before us we have three illustrations of following Christ. The word "follow" appears in each one. Two times would-be disciples come up and declare that they will follow and the middle one, Jesus asks one to follow. Again as always in the present imperative He's asking for the rest of his life calling for the fullest devotion, for permanent following, it's not an event, it is the rest of your life. And that's consistent with what Jesus said back in verse 33 of this chapter. Do you remember our very important study of chapter 9 verse 23? He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself." Denying yourself and following Christ, that's what Jesus said in His true invitation into the Kingdom. When we call people into salvation, we are calling them to self-denial. I love that Greek verb.

I was working on a chapter for the book that I'm finishing that will come out in the fall called Hard To Believe, and I was reminded again of the word used here for deny. It is a word that means to refuse to associate with. And Jesus is saying, "If you want to come after Me, you have to come to the point where you refuse to associate any longer with the person that you are." Luther in the fourth of his Ninety-Five Thesis pinned on the church door at Wittenberg called it self-hate which is essentially said to entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. And once you've gone through self-denial, or self-hate, or self-loathing because you no longer want to associate with the sinner you are, you're that desperate. At that point when Jesus says to you, "I'm asking for a whole life commitment," you're in the position to make the response because you've just abandoned yourself completely, that's the first

half. And now you're ready to embrace the lordship of Christ with unswerving loyalty and unhindered devotion.

We need to be calling sinners to follow Jesus as a way of life. Now last Sunday we had a lot of people come here who show up on Easter and Christmas and maybe come for a concert or two during the year, and I suppose if we asked those people, they would say they believe in Jesus. Many of them might even say they made a decision for Jesus, or they prayed a prayer. But coming on an Easter Sunday or a Christmas Sunday or to a concert doesn't constitute a life following Jesus. And then there are other more regular people, like some of you who are here today, and you get beyond just the concerts and the seasonal events and you come many Sundays to the church, but for you it's just a Sunday experience. The rest of the time you follow your own desires, your own ambitions, your own goals and objectives. True Christians, these people are not. True Christianity is not seasonal, it's not even Sunday, it's a way of life. It is following Jesus all the time in joyous self-denial. It is that willingness to deny yourself, take up your cross, that is deny yourself to the degree it might cost you your life, and follow Me. And you welcome the opportunity to do that because you know how bankrupt you are, you've already past the Rubicon, as it were, in self-denial. Now following Christ brings the only hope and the only joy and the supreme joy available to you. The conditions of salvation are set by our Lord Himself.

In fact, it's always amazed me how many people Jesus had a conversation with and He put a barrier up between them and salvation. It wasn't easy to get saved if you were talking to Jesus. He never led anybody to a superficial response to Him whatsoever, even people who believed in Him. He always raised the barrier of sin and self-denial and taking up a cross and hating family and being willing to give up everything you have. I mean, how important is this to you, is really the issue. It isn't that He'll necessarily ask for all of that, but if Jesus Christ is important enough to you, then you would be happy to receive Jesus Christ under any conditions that He might ask for. I've subtitled that book, Hard To Believe, The high cost and infinite value of following Jesus. And the reason you're willing to pay the high cost is because of the infinite value. Jesus continually set the standard so high and here in the passage I just read to you, which has a parallel in the eighth chapter of Matthew, chapter 8 verses 19 to 22, Jesus is confronted by these three would-be disciples. And in each of these cases there is a barrier that He puts up. And the end of the story is obviously that the person went away. None of these people are said to have affirmed their commitment. None of them responded positively to what Jesus said. So here you might say that Jesus had three evangelistic prospects and He set conditions that caused each of them to walk away without eternal life.

Now we already know from Luke 9:23 that the standard for coming after Jesus is self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-submission. You're at the end of yourself, you have a beatitude-attitude, you are mourning over your sinfulness, you are meek and humble because you understand the bankruptcy of

your heart. You hunger and thirst after righteousness to such a degree that you have no clinging to material things, whether they are material comforts, material possessions, or material relationships. It's that level of desperation that says I have come to the end of myself, I no longer want to associate with myself, it's beating on my breast that I cry out to God to be merciful to me, a sinner, and to give me Christ as my Lord and my Savior, whom I will joyfully follow for the infinite value that comes to me.

Now as we come to this text, just a note about chronology, though the chronology here is not clear, Luke just kind of throws this little account in here. It is clear in Matthew. And it is clear in Matthew that this event actually happened in the ministry in Galilee around the town of Capernaum which is the headquarters for Jesus' ministry. In Luke's flow we are outside Galilee now, moving outside Galilee. The Galilean ministry is over. You remember back in verse 51 that Jesus had resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. So He's on the way now to Jerusalem. There's a number of months, less than a year now until His death. And as He moves toward Jerusalem, He goes to various places, moving about. But the primary goal is the training of the Twelve, to prepare them for the ministry that awaits them after He is gone. Matthew tells us this was during the Galilean ministry. Luke includes it here because it's part of the training of the Twelve. In chapter 9 verse 46 He gave them a lesson on humility. In verse 51 and following He gave them a lesson on mercy. And here He gives them a lesson on discipleship. This is all part of how He's preparing them and us for this responsibility.

And there were, of course, many who were following Jesus. When it says in verse 57, "As they were going along the road," that they could be very expansive. Obviously it involves Jesus, it involves the Twelve, and it involves whoever else was going along as we find out in chapter 10 verse 1, He appoints 70 others and sends them out two by two. So there have to be at least 83 of them and then we can assume there are many others as well because Jesus was followed by a large crowd. Matthew tells us that when this incident happened, Jesus had been doing many powerful miracles. So whenever that happened, there was a swelling of the crowd.

We can assume this is a huge crowd of people. They followed because of His power over demons, His power over disease, His power over death, His power over nature. They followed because of the astonishing character of His teaching, because of the amazing authority that He possessed because of His compassionate, loving character, for all of the...all of the reasons that were inimitable to Jesus Christ as the most attractive person who ever walked upon the earth, the crowd was there. They had ample evidence that He was the Messiah fulfilling the Old Testament promise, that He was the Savior, the Son of God. They had ample evidence for that in what He said and what He did. And yet the crowd was a spectrum all the way from those who were there to find a way to kill Him, to those who were already affirming that He was the Son of God and believing in Him. And everything in the middle and the middle is what we would call the disciples, the *mathetes*, the students, the learners at

all levels of commitment.

In fact, in Matthew's account, one of these men is even called a disciple. But don't confuse him with an Apostle and being a disciple didn't mean that you had finally come to saving faith. As I said, in John 6 many of His disciples went away and left Him and walked no more with Him. It simply means they were there as learners. But these three had come to the point where they moved across the spectrum pretty close to the right end and they were convinced that Jesus was the spokesman for God. They were convinced that there was no one like Him. They obviously were convinced of His miracle powers, He had done literally thousands of miracles. The reputation of Jesus was never even brought into question, nor were any of His miracles questioned even by the people who hated Him most. They knew this was a man from God. They were convinced perhaps that He was even the Son of God, the Messiah. They get all the way up to that point and they affirm they're ready to follow. You might call them the hottest prospects for the Kingdom of God. And yet when Jesus is through with them, they turn and go away. Here are three of those most interested, three closest to the right side of that spectrum to real salvation. And our Lord confronts them with the necessity of absolute self-denial.

The first would-be follower of Jesus was hindered by the desire for personal comfort. Verse 57, "As they were going along the road," and that is non-specific, we don't know what road. As I said, it was in Galilee somewhere near Capernaum. "Someone," Matthew helps us with someone, a scribe. Not just someone, but a certain scribe said to Jesus, "I will follow You wherever You go." This is a moment of emotion. You know, this is kind of where you want to get everybody, and this is where you want to bring them to some high point of emotion and devotion. And this man is there. He is very, very eager. He has been seeing all the miracles. By the way, if you want to know what they were, they are recorded in Matthew 8 verses 5 to 18 prior to the passage that's parallel to this. He had seen all of that, been a part of the crowd and had firsthand experience, he is astounded, he is attracted to Jesus. He reaches the highest level of devotion that he knows and he says, "I will follow You wherever you go. I'm done with what my past has been. I'm going to leave my career as a scribe."

And by the way, scribes were very esteemed people in Jewish life. Scribes were the experts of the Law. They were the lawyers, the religious lawyers who interpreted the Law the way that lawyers interpret the law of the land today. They interpreted the law of the rabbis and the Law of Scripture. They were qualified and authorized by Jewish authorities, highly educated and loyal to the Jewish system. Scribes were generally hostile to Jesus. They joined with the Pharisees, the chief priests to seek Jesus' death. Though it's a sort of a bran snatch from the burning kind of thing when you think about a scribe affirming that he wants to follow Jesus wherever He goes. In a sense, he was saying something that was very culturally familiar. Rabbis traveled in those days. They walked and they had

little flocks of students that followed them. It was very common in the ancient world, not just in Israel but in the Greek world as well, for an esteemed teacher to have a little bevy of disciples who followed him around while he walked them through life and taught them. And here is a scribe who by some standard might himself be a rabbi and a teacher saying, "From now on I want to join Your group, You are my Rabbi." For Matthew says he said to Him before he said I'll follow You wherever You go, he said to Him, *didaskalos*, or teacher, or rabbi. He was literally saying I want to join the group, I think You're the teacher, You're the teacher. He was then offering himself as a willing pupil of the miracle worker from Nazareth. What better offer could Jesus have than to pick off a scribe? And then He could have that scribe give testimony to how he had turned from the legalism of his past to the grace that was found in Jesus Christ. What a wonderful testimony that would be. He could headline his meetings, "Hear converted scribe give testimony," you know.

"I will follow You wherever You go," implies some permanence. It implies more than a momentary decision. It implies more than a moment of emotion. Look, there may be emotion, but I'm laying this out, I'll go where You go. Jesus was surely the greatest teacher he had ever heard. Most riveting personality he had ever met. And he knew that Jesus stood for the destruction of the narrow legalism that the scribes stood for. But Jesus was still compelling to him, overwhelming. And he thought he was giving Him the fullest commitment when he said, "I'll follow You wherever You go."

But Jesus had seen this before. Jesus knew what was in this man. John chapter 2 verse 23 tells us that Jesus could read minds, which we, of course, know. When He was in Jerusalem at the very beginning of His ministry, "During the feast many believed in His name, beholding His signs which he was doing but Jesus on His part was not entrusting Himself to them for He knew all men." Boy, they were believing in Him, affirming Him, He didn't make any commitment to them because He knew what was in their heart. He had no faith in their faith. It was not a saving faith. It was not a full-enough commitment. Jesus refuses always to cash in on a moment of emotion. He refuses to do that. And He refuses to do it here. He knows human nature. He knows it's emotional instability. He knows it's fickleness. He knows it's self-centeredness. He knows it's hankerings and it's hungerings, and it's longings and it's loves. The scribe saw the crowds, he saw the miracles, he heard the teaching. He wanted to be associated with Jesus because there was no one like Him.

This offer was very complete on the part of the scribe, and yet on the part of Jesus it wasn't complete enough. It's really amazing. If anybody came today and said, "I want to follow Jesus wherever He leads," the average evangelical Christian is going to say, "Pray this prayer, sign this card, start into followup."

Jesus doesn't do that. He says the most amazing thing to him. "You want to follow Me? We're not going to the Ritz Carlton. Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has

nowhere to lay His head." I just want you to know something, Jesus knew this man's mind cause He's omniscient as God. And He knew this man had a desire for comfort, personal comfort, personal ease. And so He went right to the issue. Foxes were everywhere in Israel in those days and in more ancient days. You remember Samson when he tied all their tails together, remember that, and sent them through a field burning. Foxes common to the people and they had their burrows and they had their places to go and rest and eat. And birds, birds were certainly everywhere. At some season there are more birds, you know this, in the land of Israel than any place on the planet. At migrating season half a billion birds migrate from Europe down into Africa and they all migrate through Israel. That's a strange phenomenon isn't it? Not so strange when you read the book of Revelation at the end time after the battle of Armageddon, God's going to need all those birds to eat the carrion that's left from the judgment that comes at the return of Christ. Everybody knew birds had nests. Everybody knew foxes have holes. That's just basic stuff. And as common as that is and normal for animals, I don't even have that...the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. At least 80 times Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, it's His favorite title for Himself. It marks out not only that He is the Messiah because it's a messianic title taken from Daniel 7:13, but it also emphasizes the fact of His humanness. And in His humiliation as the Son of Man, He says, "I have nowhere to lay My head. All I can promise you, My friend, is that if you follow Me it might mean you're homeless. Don't expect comfort. Don't expect ease."

Why does He make an issue out of this? Because it was an issue with the man in his heart. Self-denial, right? "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself." What does it come down to? For some people it comes down to what's in it for me? That's the wrong way to proclaim the gospel. It's not about self-satisfaction, it's about self-denial. It's not about what do I get when I get Jesus, it's about what am I willing to give up. It's about the level of desperation that says, "Look, I don't make any bargains at this point, my condition is so desperate I want forgiveness and I want grace and I want heaven and I put no conditions on it."

The emotion of the moment for this man may not have betrayed his true attitude to the rest who were standing there, but Jesus saw his heart so He knew exactly what he was thinking. And He said, "I just want to let you know that I'm not sure I'm ever going to find a place to lay My head." And connecting with the prior passage, do you remember that? Back in verse 51, He was going down to Jerusalem and sent messengers on ahead of Him and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans. And He sent them into the village of the Samaritans to make arrangements so that He could sleep. And they didn't receive Him. The Samaritans wouldn't even let Him stay in their village. They wouldn't let Him sleep there. James and John were so mad they asked Him if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven and burn them all up. Gadara didn't want Him even though He had cast the demons out of the maniac that terrorized the whole area, cast the demons out of that man, you remember, and they went into the pigs and went off the cliff and the whole countryside ran Him out. Nazareth didn't want Him, they tried to throw Him off a cliff in His own hometown. Capernaum didn't

want Him even after all the works He had done there. Jerusalem wasn't going to want Him either. They were going to scream for His blood and demand the Romans nail Him to a cross. He's saying, "If you're expecting comfort out of this, if you're jumping into this deal because you think we're going into the Kingdom, and you're going to be living in a palace and ease, got it wrong. I can't promise you that. In fact, I can promise you other than that."

And He certainly could at that time. In the tenth chapter of Matthew verse 16, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, be as shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves, beware of men, they'll deliver you up to the courts, scourge you in their synagogues. You'll even be brought before governors and kings for My sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. And when they deliver you up, don't become anxious about how or what you'll speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it's not you who speak, it's the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. And brother will deliver up brother to death, the father his child, children will rise up against parents, cause them to be put to death and you'll be hated by all on account of My name. But it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." It's those people who prove they're genuine believers by following all the way to the end through the persecution, the hatred and the animosity. Jesus said, "I think you need to know that if you follow Me there is a crown at the end, but there's a cross on the way. It's the way of persecution. It's the way of suffering." And this guy was stony ground. You remember the seed went into the stony ground and it grew up for a little while but when tribulation and pressure came, the sun burned it, it scorched and it never had any fruit and it died? That's the sort of would-be short-term, "I'll go anywhere You want me to go" disciple who has no root, no depth. He wanted to add Jesus to his life. He wanted the excitement of following Jesus. But he wanted a life without the sacrifices. And it isn't that necessarily He's going to take everything away from him, it is that Jesus wants to see him at a point where he doesn't hold any of that because if that's still a barrier, then the devotion to Jesus is not complete, it's not saving faith. We do Jesus a grave disservice if we ever lead people to believe that the Christian way is an easy way. It's not.

The second man, and I believe that these happened in the same context at the same time, had probably been listening. Jesus turns to him and He said to another, "Follow Me." Having been disappointed by number one in that sense that I think Jesus dissuaded him easily when He unmasked his desire for personal comfort, He then turns to another and says, "Follow Me." Well he's hearing the conversation, but what he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." Now you might think that his father's body is lying at the house. That isn't the case. And it does seem reasonable, it really does, to go bury your father and the Jews had 30 days of mourning, you know, to take a month and go and do that if your father had just died is reasonable. According to Jewish custom, burial took place immediately after death. They didn't embalm, they just wrapped bodies and put them immediately in the grave. And there was a 30-day time of mourning. It would have been appropriate for the son to be there. It was honorable to give burial to the dead and particularly a son's

responsibility to make sure that his father was cared for in death. The only way to avoid that, the only way a son could get out of caring for the funeral of his father was if he was high priest and then, of course, he couldn't touch a dead body, according to Leviticus 21, or according to Numbers 6 if he took a Nazarite vow, temporary Nazarite vow and couldn't touch a dead body. There's no indication that he had done either, of course. He wanted to go home and bury his father. If you weren't the High Priest and you hadn't taken a Nazarite vow, that was the honorable and the right thing to do. The final act of devotion to his father seems pretty reasonable.

On the surface it says some good things about the man, says some necessary things about the man. This man, however, knows that the Lord is moving away from the area. He just said He didn't have anywhere to lay His head. He's itinerant, He's on the move, He's on the road, as verse 57 says. Where's He going to be in a month? Where's He going to be in two months? Where's He going to be in whatever amount of time is involved here? And to just make this story very clear, the point here is his father wasn't dead. He's not saying the body is laying at the house waiting to be buried. He wouldn't be there if that were the case because they buried them immediately. He's saying, "Look, I've lived too long to leave now without my inheritance. I'll follow You but I was just listening to the conversation You had with that guy and You said that You don't have anywhere to lay Your head, the resources are meager here, You can't promise us anything, no prosperity gospel here, so I think it would be better for me if I just hung around and I waited till I got what I have been waiting for all these years. I'll pad my own pockets and I'm in a good fall back position, you know, if things don't work out."

By the way, "I must bury my father" is a familiar Middle-Eastern statement still used. And when they use it and they say, "I must bury my father," they mean I must stay at home until he's gone so that I can bring his estate to its final point and so that I can receive my inheritance. I'll follow You some day, when my father's dead and I've gotten what I need. Oh he's attracted to Jesus, who wouldn't be? He's amazed at His power, but he loves money. He's like the weedy soil in the parables of the Kingdom. You know, it says that the seed went into soil that was full of weeds and the weeds choked it out and Jesus explained that as the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches which choked the seed. So here's another guy with a response. Something pops up, looks like life, but the love of the things of this world, the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches choke out the life. He said I've waited too long not to cash in. I want what my father has and what's coming to me.

And Jesus said to him, it's a rebuke, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the Kingdom of God." This reveals less than good intentions. This is not honorable. This is not honorable. If you had a decaying body sitting at the house, Jesus wouldn't have said this. His intentions weren't good. Jesus said, "Let the spiritually dead..." what He means by that is the unconverted people, let the people in this world who are outside the Kingdom of God

take care of the dead. Leave temporal things to temporal people. Leave the matters of the temporal kingdom to the people who live in that kingdom. You are called to come into the Kingdom of God and for the rest of your life to go and proclaim the glories of that Kingdom. Let go of the kingdom of this world even its good elements, even its noble responsibilities. I mean, that is clearly again an indication that Jesus knew what was in the man's heart. And it wasn't something He had to read, He heard it out of his mouth. I want to wait till my father dies. And Jesus would be long gone by then, who knows years maybe. You don't get the picture here. Your priorities are messed up. Secular matters belong to secular people. You're telling Me you want to follow Me, you want to follow Me into the Kingdom of God, then forget the secular world and do what relates to the Kingdom. What's that? Go and proclaim the Kingdom of God. What does that mean? Go and preach the gospel because proclaiming the Kingdom of God is simply telling people how they can enter the Kingdom of God, and that's the gospel. This man is committed to personal riches. He's like the rich young ruler back in Matthew 19, remember the rich young ruler who said, "How do I receive eternal life?" You know, "What do I do, good Master, to receive eternal life?" And Jesus said, "Well before we talk about eternal life, let's talk about the Law, let's talk about the Law, let's talk about the Ten Commandments."

"Oh, I've kept the Ten Commandments. I'm not a sinner."

That's a problem. That's a problem.

"And then let's talk about submission and self-denial. Take everything you have, sell it and give all the proceeds to the poor."

And he went away, that's not what he was willing to do. There was no self-denial there. He wouldn't deny his own self-righteousness and he wouldn't deny his own possessions. And so he went away. Tragic figure.

Jesus put the barriers up at the appropriate time to make sure that the devotion was complete and consummate. And here was a man who was asked to follow, said I'll do it some time in the future after I've been taken care of with my inheritance. Jesus said, "You don't understand. You come into My Kingdom, you let go of the kingdom of this world. Friendship with the world is enmity with the God." If you love the world or the things that are in the world, the love of the Father is not in you.

One more brief encounter. "And another also said," and he's probably following up on the prior discussion. "I will follow You, Lord. I'm not going to be like that guy. I'll follow You and I won't wait till my father's dead, I just want to go home and say goodbye. I just want...permit me to say goodbye to those at home. I want to follow You."

This guy had long apron strings. "I just want to go home." Well that sounds like of reasonable. I figure he's thinking to himself, and this is speculation, you know, I don't need to wait till my father dies to get all the money, I'll just go home and raise some support for my mission adventure. I'll just go home and have a big farewell party. And, you know, I'll cash in on that and that will give me a little to follow, Jesus is worth following, Jesus is exciting, this is phenomenal stuff. I'll just make a short trip home, be back in a week or so and I'll have collected something from everybody for the journey." Or it may have been that in his heart was this hold with the family that he couldn't let go of and you do remember, don't you, how absolutely adamant Jesus was and said what is so hard to hear, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, or a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Jesus said, "Look, if you're going to follow Me, you have to say goodbye to your family. You have to be willing to cut the cord with your family." He was going to go back to a family who would never understand this, who would prey on him, who would ply him not to do this and dissuade him. In the twenty-fifth verse of Luke 14, "Multitudes were coming along. Jesus turned and said, 'If anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brother and sisters, and yea, hate his own life, he can't be My disciple.'" You're back to that whole thing of self-hate. And it doesn't mean that you...you loathe the people in your family, you despise them with some kind of vitriol. It simply means that in a relative sense your love for the Kingdom of God is so great that you are really from the spiritual viewpoint indifferent to the compulsions and the pull and the interest of your family.

By the way, Jesus responds, verse 62, with a proverb that can be traced back to a writer named Hesiod in 800 B.C. "No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God." The proverb probably said something like, "You can't plow a furrow looking backwards." Jesus said, "Look, you...you can't follow Me looking backwards. You can't have a divided heart. You can't be Mr. Facing Both Ways, to borrow the words of John Bunyan. There are people who come all the way up to believing, all the way up and could be pushed to pray the prayer, make the decision, accept Christ, do whatever the moment's called to do, but if you confronted them with the fact that the self-denial is so complete that it asks you to be willing to give up all your comfort, all your possessions if that's what the Lord asks, and all your relationships. And the one who is truly being prompted by the Spirit of God and brought into the Kingdom is going to say, "Look, Jesus Christ is so infinitely valuable to me that I don't care what the price is, I will gladly sell all for the pearl." This man's heart was divided. And there was no way that he was fit for the Kingdom of God because he was holding on to the kingdoms of this world.

The issue here is salvation, people. The issue is coming into the Kingdom. And if you've ever wondered what the issue here was, some people think it's sort of second-level discipleship. No. And verse 62 makes it clear. It's about coming into the Kingdom. And Jesus is simply saying to these people, "Look, if you're holding back anything, you can't come in. Salvation is for those who have come to complete self-denial." The Lord may not take away all your comfort. He may not take away all your possessions. He may not take away all your relationships. But you're not negotiating. You're simply saying the infinite value of the gospel of Jesus Christ is so great that if He asks, I'll give it all up. I'll give it all up.

So responding properly to Christ is not a matter of emotion. It's not a matter of an event. It's not a matter of a momentary acceptance or decision. It is not some superficial interest. It is not even a matter of saying I will follow. It is a matter of self-denial, total self-denial, a willingness to give up everything because the value of Christ is so infinite. The sinner has reached that level of desperation by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He who doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of Me, Jesus said. He who has found his life shall lose it. He who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. It's about losing your life. It's about hating yourself. It's about holding on to nothing. It's a Beatitude attitude.

We aren't told how these three responded to what Jesus said, but pretty obvious. They left Christ to hold on to their earthly loves. What a sad decision. The pearl of great price is available to those who sell all. The treasure hidden in the field is available to all who sell all. That's how it is with true disciples. They've entered into a life of following Jesus...following Jesus.

Father, we thank You this morning for the words of our precious Savior. If we ever wanted to learn how to evangelize, couldn't have a better teacher. Sometimes we so deeply desire people to come to Christ that we alter and adapt the message to gain a momentary desired response and all we do is plant tares instead of wheat. I'm sure that all over the world there are people who made a decision for Christ but are not following Jesus. People who were told that they could follow Jesus and hold on to the world, they could have it their way and they may think they're saved but they're not. I just ask, Lord, that You would bring clarity to the gospel, clarity to the invitations to the sinners. Protect us from altering the truth and therefore putting people unwittingly on the broad road that leads to destruction. Help us to evangelize the way Jesus did, call for total commitment. We know that that's hard, it's a hard message and it's hard to believe. In fact, it's impossible apart from the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit sets out to do His work to convict of sin and righteousness and judgment and to break the sinner's self-love and self-esteem and personal ambition, when the Holy Spirit does His work part of His work is the grace and the mercy of self-denial. For those on whom the Spirit works, we need to be faithful to bring the true message that the genuinely penitent and self-denying sinner who sees the infinite value of Christ may understand the truth of saving faith. Use us that way, we pray for Your glory. Amen.

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