

## Will You Follow Jesus?

Scripture Text: Luke 9:57–62

### Introduction

My dad used to tell me, “Lead, follow, or get out of the way”. I am not sure which one I did at the time, but I think my dad’s point may have been that if I was not leading or following, then I was getting in his way. In our lives, we have both leaders and followers. If you have a job, you probably are either a leader or a follower, or sometimes, you may be both. In our Christian walk, there is one Leader we are all called to follow. He is Jesus. We must follow Him if we are going to be His disciples. For instance, consider the following verse.

**John 12:26** *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

To be a disciple is to follow Jesus. How well are you following Him? Some may say, “I will follow you, Jesus, but tell me your complete plan for my life.” But, God rarely gives us all the details. In fact, God is not obligated to tell us anything. He just says, “Follow me!” He told Abraham to pack up his family and go to a land He *would show him*. God did not give Abraham a detailed plan, but only said “Go!” Sometimes God tells us to do something that we do not understand. Remember Jonah, who God told to go to the people oppressing him. It did not make sense to Jonah, but we do not need to understand God’s plan, we just need to obey Him. Are you following Jesus, today? Do you know what it means to follow Him faithfully? In this passage, Luke described three scenarios where the the word “follow” is used, where three individuals said they would follow Jesus, and where Jesus gave a description of what it means to truly follow Him.

### Following Jesus Means It Will Be Costly

What does it cost to follow Jesus? What does He ask of us? In a sense, Jesus has paid it all and there is nothing we can do to earn or pay for our way into fellowship with God. That is true, but, does following Jesus come at some cost? Does being Jesus’ disciple come with some sacrifice? The answer is yes! Look at the following verses.

**Luke 9:57–58** <sup>57</sup> *As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”* <sup>58</sup> *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.”*

Jesus and His disciples were traveling through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. A few verses earlier, Luke wrote, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Jesus was on the way to complete His mission. His death and departure were imminent. *On the way*, Jesus encountered three individuals and took the opportunity to talk to them about being His disciples. That is a picture of the church’s Great Commission. Discipling others does not have to be a scheduled event in the church. It does not have to be a church program that is carefully

structured. It should be something that happens “as you are going”, in your neighborhoods, in your work places, in your daily interactions with others.

As Jesus and His disciples were traveling, a person came up to Jesus. Matthew identified this person as a scribe (Matthew 8:19). Notice what the person said to Jesus: “I will follow you wherever you go.” Have you said that to Jesus? Have you told God that you will follow Him no matter where He takes you, no matter what the future holds, no matter what troubles or obstacles there may be? Will you follow Jesus no matter what? For some, it is easy to say, “I will follow Jesus” when things are going well, when things are going the way you expect, or the way you want. It may be easy then to say, “I will follow Jesus wherever He goes”. However, it is a bit different to say, “I will follow you” when the future is uncertain, or things are not going the way you expect, or you are in the midst of pain and suffering. It may be more difficult to follow Jesus then.

Jesus responded to the man, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Does that sound a bit odd? Why would Jesus say that? Sometimes, we expect following Jesus to go a certain way. In fact, some wrongly believe that following Jesus means you will prosper. It does not! Following Jesus is costly. It is hard work. Jesus says to anyone who would follow Him that the path of discipleship is not easy nor comfortable. Even animals, such as foxes and birds, had more earthly provisions than Jesus did. Following Jesus involves great hardship. Being a Christian is not for wimps. There will be challenges. There will be hard times. There will be people who reject you. There will be people who hate you. There will be people who attack you. That is true for every person who wants to follow Christ. Following Jesus will be hard, but, you still follow Him. You still trust Him. You still do what He has called you to do, for there is *great reward in faithfulness*. One truth that has helped me personally and I hope it helps you: God does not call us to be successful, but He does call us to be faithful. He calls us to follow Him. So, will you follow Jesus?

### **Following Jesus Means Jesus is the Priority**

What is your priority? What is the most important thing for you, right now? For some, it may be to just get through this sermon. For others, it may be to finish paying off that debt they have. For some, it may be a project at work or at home. We all have priorities. What is our priority for the church? What is it that we want most? Is it to see the gospel faithfully preached? Is it to see more disciples being made through our work together? Is it to see families and children a part of this congregation again? To see God glorified and the name of Jesus proclaimed? What is our priority? Jesus told the second person in this passage about the priority of a disciple. Look at the following verses.

***Luke 9:59–60*** <sup>59</sup> To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” <sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

So, Jesus told this second person to follow Him. That person responded to Jesus, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” That seems like a perfectly reasonable

response, doesn't it? To go and bury a loved one was and still is an important duty, and Jesus clearly upholds honoring one's parents (Matthew 15:1–9). A funeral during Jesus' time often involved a year-long period from the time when the body was first buried until a year later when the bones of the deceased were placed in an ossuary box. This man's father may have already died and he was in the long Jewish process of burying his father. Some think it could be that the man was expecting his father to pass away soon, and wanted to wait until after that before following Jesus. Either way, the man's request to first go bury his father meant not that Jesus was not his *immediate priority*. This man's response was an excuse to not follow Jesus. Though this was a basic family obligation, Jesus was teaching the priority of God's kingdom over one's family. To follow Jesus means to make Him the priority over everything and everyone else.

Jesus told the man, "Let the dead bury their own dead." What does this mean? This was a saying in which "dead" meant both "spiritually dead" and "physically dead." Jesus meant that the "spiritually dead", those who do not follow Jesus, could bury the "physically dead". The spiritually alive, those who follow Jesus, should be busy proclaiming the kingdom of God. Following Jesus must take precedence over every other relationship and obligation. This means all of our obligations must be done out of obedience to Christ, not *instead* of obedience to Him. Jesus was not the man's *highest commitment*, for he said, "Let me *first* go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59). Jesus was not *first* in his life. Others responded to Jesus' call to follow Him by *leaving everything* they had to follow Him. For instance, Peter, James and John immediately left their boats to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11). Matthew left his job as a tax collector to follow Jesus (Luke 5:28). Luke tells us that these disciples *left everything* to follow Jesus. They had no other priorities. Have you left everything to follow Jesus? Are you holding on to anything that prevents you from faithfully following Christ? He must be "first." He will not accept second place to anyone or to anything in your life, even a good thing. If you are alive in Christ, if you have chosen to follow Him, then go and follow Jesus and proclaim the kingdom of God! That is our duty. That is our mission.

### Following Jesus Means Looking Forward

Have you ever thought about what direction you are heading? When Gena and I are traveling, we often use our phones to give us directions. For the most part, it is accurate. It tells us where we need to go and the best route to get there. Sometimes, it has made mistakes and put us on the wrong road. Sometimes, I have failed to do what it tells me and have gotten myself on the wrong road. It helps to follow the directions if you want to arrive where you intend to be. The same is true for following Jesus. It is necessary for us to keep our focus on Jesus and go wherever He tells us. What is the direction of following Jesus? Well, it is not behind us! Look at the next verses.

**Luke 9:61–62** <sup>61</sup> Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This man's response is quiet telling. He told Jesus, "I will follow you." He even called Jesus, "Lord" when he said that. Then, this man said that all-famous word. He said that one word that truly reveals one's commitment. What was that word? He said, "But!" The third man's response to Jesus was, "I will follow you, Lord, *but*." He said he wanted to follow Jesus, *but*, he wanted to say farewell to his family first. Again, this appears to be a reasonable request. How many people have left home, called to do something somewhere else, or accepted the call to become a missionary elsewhere, who didn't want to go home and say good bye? That sounds very reasonable. This third encounter even sounds similar to Elijah's call to Elisha. Look at the following passage.

**1 Kings 19:19–21** <sup>19</sup> *So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him.* <sup>20</sup> *And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."* *And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"* <sup>21</sup> *And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.*

Elisha asked for permission to return to his family and say goodbye before following Elijah. The prophet Elijah allowed it. So, why did Jesus not permit this? Elisha's farewell to his family, expressed no reluctance, no hesitation about following Elijah, no "but". Elisha was committed to following Elijah. In fact, Elisha slaughtered the oxen he had once plowed his fields and he did not look back. Elisha kissing his parents meant he had abandoned his home and his livelihood to follow the Lord. That is the commitment Jesus' expects of those who follow Him. Following Christ must take precedence over everything else. And what is home for the disciple of Jesus Christ, anyway? What is our family? Is not the church our true family? Is not heaven our true home? Ultimately Jesus was not at home in this world, and neither are we. Maybe, instead of saying goodbye to our family on earth, we should be saying, "Come with me".

Then Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God!" Anyone who puts his hand to the plow has to keep looking forward to guide the plow. You will not be able to plow a field if you keep looking back, otherwise the plow will quickly veer off course. What does that mean for us? Jesus said that anyone who looks back is not fit for the the kingdom of God. That is a serious statement. If you want to be a part of the kingdom of God, you cannot look back. If you want to follow Jesus, you cannot look back. You cannot be focused on the way it was. You cannot live in the past. You have to let those things go, and focus on the future and following Jesus. The prophet Isaiah reminded us to not remember the former things. Look at the following passage.

**Isaiah 43:18–19** <sup>18</sup> *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.* <sup>19</sup> *Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

God has done great things in the past, but He does not want us to be enslaved by that past. God is doing new things now and wants us to join Him in moving forward with new things. King Solomon wrote the following about the folly of treasuring the past over the present and the future. Look at the following verse.

***Ecclesiastes 7:10*** Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

We cannot follow Jesus if we take our eyes off of Him. We cannot move forward if we keep looking behind us. If we take our eyes off of Jesus, then we will not get to where He wants us to be. God’s kingdom has come, and God’s call to follow Jesus takes priority over everything else. The old family relationships are part of what one must leave behind to follow Him. The good ole’ days must remain in the past if we are to experience greater things in the future. We must put aside the past and embrace where He wants to lead us. So, do not look back. Keep your eyes on Christ and look forward.

## **Conclusion**

So, will you follow Jesus? In these three scenarios, Jesus has told us to follow Him and He has told us what it means to follow Him. Will you do it? Will you follow Jesus no matter what the cost is? Will you make Jesus the priority and follow Him and forsake all other priorities and personal desires for Him and His kingdom? Will you look ahead to the future and remain in the past? Will you look forward to what God has planned for you and for His church? Are you willing to follow Jesus wherever He shall lead you? May God help us to be obedient to Him by following Him more closely. May God develop in us a desire to daily draw closer to Him and to be faithful in all circumstances, no matter what happens. May God help us to truly believe and know that whatever happened in the past is done! We must move beyond past events and look forward to the future, no matter what change that may bring. May we place Jesus at the center of our lives and follow Him faithfully. This is good news! Thanks be to God! Amen!