

## What does it take to follow Jesus?

Text: Luke 9:51-62 for July 21,2019 by Pastor Bolwerk

<sup>51</sup>When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>He sent messengers ahead of him. They went and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. <sup>53</sup>But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" <sup>55</sup>But he turned and rebuked them. "You don't know what kind of spirit is influencing you. <sup>56</sup>For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them." Then they went to another village. <sup>57</sup>As they went on the way, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup>Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." <sup>59</sup>He said to another man, "Follow me!" But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup>Another man also said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home." <sup>62</sup>Jesus told him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Do you remember playing the game "Follow the Leader" as a kid? The rules of the game were rather simple: Everyone followed in a line behind the leader and had to do exactly what the leader did. If the leader hopped like a rabbit everyone had to hop along with the leader. If the leader flapped his arms like a bird everyone else in the line had to do the same. If someone didn't do what the leader was doing, for as long as the leader did it, then that person was "out." When only one person was left in the line that person became the new leader.

If you want to play "Follow the Leader" there were two things you must be willing to do. You have to be willing to do exactly what the leader was doing. That means you have to be willing to give up doing whatever you wanted to do. You have to sacrifice your own wants and desires for those of the leader. To "Follow the Leader" you have to be willing to do something and give up something.

In this portion of scripture before us we find out that following Jesus has similar requirements. As our Savior speaks to us through the words of the gospel writer Luke we hear Jesus speaking of what is necessary if someone is going to follow him.

Theme: What does it take to follow Jesus?

- I. It takes mercy
- II. It takes sacrifice

Our text begins with Jesus starting his final trip to Jerusalem. The Lord takes the most direct route from Galilee to Jerusalem by going through Samaria. As the sun starts to set he sends messengers into a Samaritan village to prepare a place for them to stay. But we are told that **"the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem"** (v. 53). We know the Samaritans did not get along with the Jews, but we are not given a reason for this unkind reception. When James and John see how the people treat Jesus they are upset at the disrespect shown to their Lord. In their desire to defend Jesus they ask him, **"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?"** (v. 54). While their desire to honor their Lord is a good thing, the way in which they want to go about honoring him is not. They were willing to break God's Fifth Commandment ("Do not murder") in trying to keep the First Commandment ("You shall have no other gods").

Their desire can be our desire; their thoughts can be our thoughts. We see the enemies of Christ all around us. There are those who openly dishonor Jesus by rejecting him as true God: atheists, Muslims, and pagan religions. Then there are those who call themselves Christians yet they still deny Jesus is true God. On top of all that, we get tired of seeing and hearing Jesus' name dragged through the mud. We become frustrated with those who continually take God's name in

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vain. And in our zeal to defend our Lord, we may even ask God to destroy those who reject him, to wipe those unbelievers off the face of the earth. Our intentions may be good, but our thoughts and actions are breaking God's law. We want wrath while God wants to show mercy.

Jesus reprimands his disciples, and us, for a lack of mercy. When James and John made their request we are told, **"But [Jesus] turned and rebuked them"** (v. 55). This was probably not what James and John were expecting. After all, they were sticking up for Jesus. But even good intentions can be tainted with sin. When out of frustration we desire the destruction of the unbelievers in this world, our Lord turns his rebuke toward us as well.

Jesus' work is not about destroying earthly unbelievers; it is about showing people mercy. Jesus' work is about saving souls, not bringing eternal death to those souls. Jesus had said to his disciples **"For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them"** (v. 56). In mercy, God sent his Son into this world to save sinners. We are those sinners. Jesus was walking to Jerusalem to die for all sins. That means he was walking there for you too. Jesus sacrifice paid for your misdirected zeal. His blood washed away your sinful intentions. Christ has had mercy on you.

Having been freed from our sins by Jesus' blood, our Lord wants us to show the same mercy we have been shown. As we follow our Savior, let's show that mercy to others. We can show mercy through the fruits of the Spirit that the Apostle Paul spoke about. In love and patience, kindness and gentleness, we let others know about the mercy God has had on their souls. We show mercy by telling people the good news of how God's Son has saved them from their sin. When it comes to following our Lord, Jesus requires mercy.

But following Jesus requires more than us showing mercy. To be a follower of Christ means we also have to set certain things aside. If we want to follow Jesus we find that it takes sacrifice.

Luke goes on to speak about people who wanted to follow Jesus, yet they were not ready to give up certain things. First, there was a man who sounded very willing to follow Jesus: **As they went on the way, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go"** (v. 57). This man sounds very eager to follow Jesus, but Jesus wants to make sure the man understands what is involved with following him. **Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head"** (v. 58). The point Jesus is making is that he does not have a permanent home in this world. The fox and the bird could point to their homes, but Jesus did not own a home. Jesus is not saying this man should become poor and homeless if he wanted to follow him. This was not even the case with Jesus. Our Lord was neither penniless nor without a place to sleep. But Jesus wants to make sure this man has his priorities straight. Following Jesus means focusing on heaven as home; it means living a life with eternal purposes in mind, instead of worldly priorities. Jesus wants to see if this man is willing to sacrifice his own priorities for God's priorities.

Next, Jesus is the one who asks a person to follow him. **He said to another man, "Follow me!" But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father"** (v. 59). The man's request sounds proper; he wants to show respect to his father by going to his funeral. But Jesus wants him to understand that loyalty to God and his kingdom are more important than even family. **Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God"** (v. 60). In speaking of the "dead" burying their own dead, Jesus is speaking of the spiritually dead. The Lord was pointing out that this man's family did not believe in Jesus as their Savior. Now that this man's father was dead there was nothing he could do anymore for the soul of his father. But there was something this man can do for the souls of others: He could proclaim the kingdom of God's salvation. Jesus wants to know if this man is willing to sacrifice his loyalty to his family for his loyalty to his Savior.

Then there is a third man who speaks of following Jesus. **Another man also said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home"** (v. 61). Again, his request

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sounds innocent enough. He simply wants to say good-by. But Jesus sees a problem in his request: **Jesus told him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”** (v. 62). This man had a problem with his focus. He said he would follow Jesus, but he was not ready to rely on his Jesus alone to guide his life. You cannot follow Jesus while looking to others to for direction and fulfillment in your life. Jesus wanted to see if this man would be willing to sacrifice his reliance on others for direction and fulfillment, and instead focus and rely completely on his Lord.

Our priorities, our loyalties, and our focus in this life are all things that turn our attention away from Jesus and his kingdom. What does it take to follow Jesus? It takes sacrifice. Yet, the sinful nature that lives within us longs for the things these three men wanted. Sadly, our sinful nature is always willing to choose those things over Christ. Left to ourselves these sacrifices would never happen.

But when our Lord calls us to follow him, he gives us what we need to be able to follow him. Our Lord leads by examples. Long before Jesus ever went to the cross he sacrificed the perfection of heaven. He gave up heaven’s perfect peace and happiness so he could live in our place in this sinful world. Jesus gave up everything – power, glory, honor, even his own life – so that he could rescue us from the eternal damnation that we all faced.

When we hear of the sacrifice our Savior made, his Holy Spirit uses that good news to create and sustain faith. That faith trusts Jesus, and it moves us to follow our Savior. As we start following Jesus we find ourselves not only on a different path than the rest of the world, but we find ourselves in a very different mindset. The things that were once the highest priorities in our lives don’t seem so important anymore. Our loyalty to our Lord starts taking on a greater importance as our focus shifts away from this world. Our Savior, and not the world, guides us and leads us as he directs our footsteps toward heaven.

But these are not easy footsteps to follow. Living as a Christian is one of the most difficult things in the world to do. The world wants to set your priorities: work, education, sports, leisure, hobbies. These are the things the world says should have top priority. While some of these things are important in this life, are they really more important than Jesus? Are we willing to rearrange our priorities to follow Jesus and serve in his kingdom? With his help we can, and we do. When we use our work, our education, our leisure, and our hobbies to give glory to God and serve his kingdom, that’s when we follow Jesus with our priorities in the right place. What does it take to follow Jesus? It takes sacrifice: The sacrifice of worldly priorities over Christ’s kingdom.

If you want to be good at playing the game “Follow the Leader” you have to be willing to submit to the leaders will and give up some things. Yet, that’s one of the amazing things about being a follower of Jesus. While there is a great deal we may give up to follow him, we are the ones who receive the benefits and the blessings. Jesus gave his all for us so that we may enjoy true freedom as we follow him on the path to that eternal paradise he has prepared for us. Amen.