

Luke 9:57-62 **Yes.... but.**

Every day as followers of Jesus we are exposed to, and under pressure to, conform to ways of thinking and living that potentially can draw our attention away from Christ, that we might treasure more than Christ. The world will convey to you and I what it (the world) believes is of priority to us and the Devil will convince you that's acceptable.

There's huge pressure on the church to be more with the times, more accepting, more liberal, which invariably means more compromise. Whereas today's scripture is a *timely reminder* and a challenge to us on what we treasure most. A *timely reminder* that even in this day we must be unswayed by anything that draws our affections away from a treasuring of Christ, his word and truth. We're reminded that following Jesus consists not of what it is comfortable and convenient to us, but consists of complete self-denial <sup>1</sup>.

The message I want us to hear this morning from Jesus is: "I'm worth following". I'm worth being your greatest treasure.

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds 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 replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup> Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Where we pick up the scripture today, Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. This is the final leg of the journey with his disciples, there is still a lot to be learnt. But Jerusalem, will take Jesus to the cross.

There will be rejection, torture, crucifixion and death. Then there will be resurrection: this is the Lord they are committing to follow, at this point and beyond, but the disciples probably didn't have much of a grasp of most of that. But Jesus nonetheless wants them to understand the cost involved, when they say, "*I want to follow you*" ...

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<sup>1</sup> -> In 1941, Winston Churchill took the airways of the BBC to deliver a radio address to the people of Britain who were in the midst of literally a fight for their lives. It was, I think, before the United States had come into the war so it would have been earlier in '41 than December 7. I'm told of Churchill, by the way, who was not a praying man, on December 7 of 1941, the day we were attacked at Pearl Harbour, rendered up a prayer to the Lord. "Lord, Thou hast heard our prayers and hast delivered us." But this was earlier in 1941, when Britain was still very much in the balance fighting her own battle in Europe. He said to the people of Britain, "We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire. Give us the tools and we will finish the job." Now history records that Churchill's people did just that. They did not fail or falter; they did not weaken or tire. They were given the tools and they did finish the job. Scroll forward sixty years and President George W. Bush addressed the Congress and the American people after 9-11, after the attacks on the United States in September of 2001. And before the beginning of war against Iraq and Afghanistan he said, "We will not waver, we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail."<sup>1</sup>

## THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

Three men, three would-be followers, two of the men say they want to follow Jesus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> (V. 59) Jesus invites to follow him. All three are met by Jesus with different responses. We'll get to those in a moment.

We don't know whether the men went on to follow Jesus, my guess would be, no. But I think we can see in the meantime; the key word here is "*follow*". And why Jesus responded the way he did with the 3 men is because he wanted them to fully understand the cost of following the person Jesus. *Yes, be yes!*

I want you to see that each of these scenarios (though specific) represent any circumstance that puts anything ahead of following Jesus.

That is, it doesn't matter what it is, choosing to follow him, wherever that takes you, whatever environment you are in, whatever that means for you, whatever sacrifice that requires, always takes priority. That's the cost. Namely, that following of him is always on Jesus' terms, no negotiating, and goes beyond a commitment to home, to family and is without compromise.

This is not the 1<sup>st</sup> time in Luke we're challenged to count the cost of the commitment of following him. Three passages that illustrate my point:

Luke 5:10, 11 *Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

Luke 5:27, 28 *After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.*

Luke 9:23, 24 *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.*

Following Jesus is leaving everything behind.

Each time Jesus said "*follow*" in the gospels it is an ongoing command, *following* implies continuity, think of him saying, "*keep on following me*"

It's important to make the point here that what Jesus commands is different to what many experience in modern evangelism. So much is made of the moment of accepting Christ and less about the discipleship (the following) that follows. Following Jesus is first being born again, but it is also a lifetime

of following and obedience. *Is that what we understand we have committed to?*

Now there's a verse of scripture that comes prior to today's that is *essential* to understanding Jesus' intent in the 3 conversations. Go back to 9:51 *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.* Why is this essential? We know what happened in Jerusalem, and what that meant for Jesus...

Luke 18:31-34 *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. <sup>3</sup>He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.*

I've taken you to these verses to make clear the implications of what's happening in the 3 conversations.

As Jesus *"resolutely set out for Jerusalem"* following him would not only mean witnessing his death on a cross, but mean for his followers, pain, rejection, temptations and indecision.

Jesus' was teaching that following him is not, and never will be, the easy and glamorous decision. Quite the opposite. Following is the hard road. The road met with hard decisions that need to be made.

That's the context. Jerusalem in view. Rejection, sacrifice and death in view. But also resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit in view. For us today, the whole story of salvation in view. The hope and the glory of eternity in view. But also for the life we live now, the joy of knowing his grace and mercy, in view. We have the whole revelation, so we know with eyes wide open what and why we give our entire lives to Jesus.

Now we see this context we're ready to see clearly what's happening with the three men and three would-be followers. Three times we read the word "follow". V. 57 *"I will follow you"*, V. 59 *"follow me"*, and V.61 *"I will follow you"*.

And three times these interactions are met by Jesus with a different *test*: tests that help them to *fully understand* the cost of following the person Jesus and whether he is truly the greatest treasure of their lives...that's the test before us, too

## FOLLOW JESUS WITHOUT LIMITS

<sup>57</sup> *As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “**I will follow you** wherever you go.”*

Did the man – Matt. 8:19 “teacher of the law”<sup>2</sup> – understand what he was willing to do as he said “*I will follow you wherever you go*”? Probably not (given v.58). Following, in the minds of most of the crowd would have meant little more than walking behind Jesus. Due credit for his enthusiasm but what was likely happening is being carried along in the hype and euphoria of the crowd and the man is all emotion, all in-his-head and blurts this out... “*I will...*”

...and Jesus says ok, take a breath, listen carefully. Jesus knew the man's mind and heart, because he's omniscient, he's God. The man thought he was genuine but for Jesus it wasn't, it wasn't enough of a commitment, his yes, was full of buts. Jesus knew the man had a desire for the comforts of home and personal easiness. Jesus knew it was self-centeredness, so he went right to the core of the issue, he says I'm going to give you a dose of reality...

### So what was the 1<sup>st</sup> test?

<sup>58</sup> *Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”*

“You want to follow me you must understand...unlike foxes and birds who have dens and nests, I have no home, this is not my home, I'm a stranger in a foreign land. There's *(point)* my home. Following me means giving up home, wealth, comforts and easiness for the certainty of difficulty ahead. Jesus' point is that following him, **is not** making the things of life we have security in – home, wealth, comfort, ease – our life's' priority. Following him is giving all up, no limits, no negotiation, no middle ground!

One of the best modern day examples of what I've just described is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed at 39 years old near the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> world war in a German concentration camp – in fact 1 month before Germany surrendered. But not without first reaching many others for Christ.

Bonhoeffer wrote extensively whilst imprisoned, among his letters he writes “*The first call which every Christian experiences is the call to abandon the attachments of this world...the only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> 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 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 - [Barriers to True Discipleship \(gty.org\)](https://www.gty.org/articles/Barriers-to-True-Discipleship)  
<sup>3</sup> [The Best Dietrich Bonhoeffer Quotes \(followingfulfillment.com\)](https://www.gty.org/articles/The-Best-Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Quotes)

His life and death a testimony to his following of Jesus. So much so, the concentration camp doctor testified after his death that: *"In the almost 50 years that I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."*<sup>4</sup>

That wasn't the first guy. He wanted the excitement and the blessing that came from following Jesus, but with limits. He wanted Jesus to be a convenient add-on to his life. That's not following Jesus though!

Let's look at Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> test...

## **FOLLOW JESUS WITHOUT DELAYS**

<sup>59</sup> *He said to another man, "**Follow me.**" But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."*

Unlike the first man, Jesus invites this man: *"follow me"* ...

But the man wanted first to go and sort out his father's funeral. Seems like a reasonable thing doesn't it? In Judaism burying a family member is of the utmost priority (1 Kings 19:19-2) But we know the father wasn't dead because the man was with Jesus.

Now bear in mind a funeral process in Jesus' day is something that could take up to a year. So when the man says *"let me go"*, he's potentially asking for up to a year. So the likeliest scenario is "I want to wait until my father has died, (don't know when that will be) get my inheritance, then I'll follow you"<sup>5</sup>.

Whatever the scenario was...

<sup>60</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

What, such an important responsibility for a son in Jewish culture and Jesus says this. Where is the honouring of parents and family in that? Outrageous right? Here we're confronted by the fact Jesus doesn't take a casual approach to discipleship. Now Jesus does not mean that it is wrong for us to attend the funerals (or weddings, or other events) of family members. On occasion following Jesus means giving ourselves more to our families than we have been giving them (1 Tim. 5:8<sup>6</sup>) and sometimes following him means we make the hard decision not to give ourselves to family (or any other commitment) because that means a delay in our commitment to following Jesus. Jesus point here is don't hesitate, don't procrastinate, don't delay.

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<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *J Christian History | Christianity Today*

<sup>5</sup> May well have been many years away?

<sup>6</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

2 Cor. 6:2 *"In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now (don't delay) is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*<sup>7</sup>

Following Jesus means a constant careful weighing of matters that are of a temporal worldly nature compared to those which are of the kingdom of God. There are good and responsible things we must do, then there are critical kingdom matters we must attend to that take precedence.

This is the cost of being a follower of Jesus. Let's now look at the 3<sup>rd</sup>, *final*, test...

### **FOLLOW JESUS WITHOUT LOOKING BACK**

<sup>61</sup> *Still another said, "**I will follow you**, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."*

The third man – similar to the 1<sup>st</sup> man says *"I will follow you"* – but wanted to go back first and say his goodbyes to family. Like the previous man, seems like a reasonable request? But again Jesus knowing this man's heart, sees his commitment, full of good intentions maybe, in his time, but less than the commitment Jesus requires.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Jesus' illustration is very apt. The terrain in Palestine was/is rugged.

The man wanting to go and say his goodbyes is as if he was ploughing a field<sup>9</sup>, on that terrain, with his head turned in the opposite direction. There's no keeping it straight, while looking back! To borrow from Pilgrims Progress, you can't be Mr. Facing Both Ways. Where else do we see this idea of looking back?

Lots wife (Gen. 19:26); Isa – *"remember not the former things"* (Isa. 43:18, 19); Paul – forget what lies behind and strain forward (Phil. 3:13)

Following Christ isn't expecting all the benefits and blessings of following Christ then turning or looking back. Looking back means delaying the inevitable, it is longing for those things Jesus wants you to leave behind, but you can't: *"but first let me, but..."* This means for you, you're not sure

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<sup>7</sup> Paul quoting Isa. 49:8

<sup>8</sup> Going by Jesus' response it's likely this wasn't a quick drop, this would be a longgg goodbye...

<sup>9</sup> (illustrate from Elijah and Elisha? 1 Kings 19:19, 20)

about *the worth* of following Jesus and an indecisive heart is a divided heart and a divided heart does not treasure Jesus above all else.<sup>10</sup>

*Decision* to follow Christ (“yes I’ll follow you”) needs to be met with a *demonstration* of our obedience. Jesus doesn’t save us just to go back to our old ways and habits, he saves us from them.

2 Cor. 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*

Gal. 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me... (6:14) ...the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

If there is no *demonstration* of obedience (looking back) it is as if no genuine *decision* was made, no self-denial, Jesus says “we’re not fit for the kingdom”, which means no salvation.

Matt. 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will (obedience) of my Father who is in heaven.*

The Jesus-follower, and by extension the church, who understand the cost, will know, that plowing forward, serving in the kingdom and not looking back, is not the popular option. Cost! Following Jesus, the truth, will mean despite pressure to conform to and accommodate certain areas, worldly practices and habits, we don’t. 1 John 2:15 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.*

I take from Jesus’ teaching that as followers, and as part of counting the cost, we are prepared for rejection, intolerances, persecution and suffering as we *decisively* and *uncompromisingly* follow Christ. I want to remind you, that as Jesus makes his way into Jerusalem, what does he do (Luke 19:41-44)? He wept...why? He *anticipated* the rejection. Cost.

Now that we have looked at the three men and how Jesus responded to them, I want to ask us now, what do we hear when he says “follow me”? What do we understand following Jesus to mean for us today in the meaningful and mundane things?

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<sup>10</sup> [The Radical Cost of Following Jesus | Desiring God](#)

The answer is at least in 2 things:

1. We follow *the person* Jesus. **Why?** Because he gave his life for us
2. We follow *his teaching*. **What?** What is in his word.
  - a. Born again, We repent of our sin, We receive his grace, We lay down our lives, We obey, We worship, We glorify, We treasure him above any other love or commitment, *We follow him, without limits, delays or looking back*

This is what it means to follow Jesus. There is the person, Jesus, and the path he wants us to walk, *his word*. When we say we follow Jesus, we're saying we understand we treasure *Jesus* above all else and we understand how much the *follow* will cost. It's everything!

**C. T. Studd** (1860-1931) was the most outstanding cricket player in England at the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, by 1882, he was considered one of the best cricket players in the world and, probably, the best known athlete of his day in England. But in 1884, after his brother George became seriously ill, C.T. was confronted by the question: "*What is all the fame and flattery worth when a man must face eternity?*" His brother's illness had a profound impact on him. So against the wishes of his family, he left cricket and fame behind to serve the Lord through missionary work under Hudson Taylor with the China Inland Mission.

On his twenty-fifth birthday, Studd inherited \$145,000, a huge amount in that day. He'd already decided it would all go into the work of the Lord. He sent out huge checks to several ministries and gave the rest to his new wife, Priscilla. But she said, "Charlie, what did the Lord tell the rich young man to do?" "Sell all." "Well then, we will start clear with the Lord at our wedding." So they proceeded to give all of the rest of the money away for the Lord's work.

After ten years in China, Studd and his family began a ministry in India...where the Lord used them greatly, people were converted to Jesus every week. Then after nearly a decade in India, they returned to England because of his Priscilla's health.

Then C.T heard about an urgent need for missionaries in the wilds of Africa where no Christian had ever been before. He was fifty years old at this point. Even though his wife was nearly an invalid he set off to Africa without her where he worked until his death, 20 years later. In a letter home, C. T. gave a last account of the events of his life:

"As I believe I am now nearing my departure from this world, I have but a few things to rejoice in; they are:



1. That God called me to China and I went in spite of utmost opposition from all my loved ones.
2. That I joyfully acted as Christ told that rich young man to act.
3. My only joys therefore are that when God has given me a work to do, I have not refused it." <sup>11</sup>

The message in today's verses is "I'm worth following". I'm worth being your greatest treasure.

I want to close by saying to you following Jesus is not the easy road. It's a narrow hard and difficult road.

We're never promised it would be easy or feel good, but there is the deepest joy, the greatest contentment, that following Jesus brings to our lives...

One final verse that sums up our passage and all that I've said today. Hear these words and take them to heart.

*Ps 73 25, 26 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

It doesn't matter if you're a long time follower of Jesus or you've never made a commitment to follow him. Now you understand what it means to follow him, you know there's a cost. But boy the cost is worth it. It has unimaginable, immeasurable worth, joy in this temporal life, and eternal joy in glory with God for eternity.

Please don't be in any doubt that the only way into God's kingdom is through faith in Jesus Christ. If you're here today and you want to re-dedicate your life, or give your life to following Jesus, we'd love to talk with you. *Follow him without limits, without delay, without looking back.* Yes, without the but.

We're not told whether the 3 men followed Jesus, probably not. They walked away to follow earthly loves, tragic. Salvation in Christ is a free gift to us, but it costs us everything.

Can we say like Paul, *I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me?* Could it be that at the end of your life someone might say of you, *they died so entirely submissive to the will of God.\**

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<sup>11</sup> C.T. Studd - Missionary to China, India, and Africa - Worldwide Missions ([wholesomewords.org](http://wholesomewords.org))