

Following Jesus:

A Gospel View

Scripture: *Luke 9:51-62.*

Summary of Sermon: We can *decline* to follow Jesus, or be *distracted* from following Jesus, or be *determined* to follow Jesus.

Introduction

Our topic in this teaching is: *Following Jesus*. Our passage of reflection is **Luke 9:51-62.**

In this age of social media, the word *follow* has come to mean taking an interest in someone on social media and keeping up with their social media posts. The dictionary definition of the word, *follow*, however, is this: *To go or to come after a person or a thing, to pursue someone, or to go in the same direction as another person.* The word also means to act according to an instruction, to pay close attention to someone, or to understand the meaning of what someone is saying or doing. So, for example, if I say to you, do you follow what I am saying now about the word *follow*, what I mean is, do you understand what I am saying now about the word *follow*?

The NT has all these dictionary meanings of the word *follow* in view when it refers to *following Jesus*. A gospel view of our passage of reflection this morning helps us to see this in three ways.

First, this passage shows us that we can outright *decline* to follow Jesus. Second, it shows us that we can allow ourselves to be *distracted* from following Jesus. Third, and most importantly, it shows us that we can be *determined* to follow Jesus.

So, we're taking a gospel view of these **3D's** from **Luke 9:51-62** to gain a good understanding of what the NT means it refers to *following Jesus*. Hopefully, this will also help us to see how this applies to us today.

I. Declining to follow Jesus (Verses 51-56)

- 1) The first verse of our passage, **verse 51**, tells us about Jesus' firm resolution to travel to Jerusalem in Judea, in the southern part of Israel, after three years of preaching and teaching in Galilee, in the northern part of the Israel.
- 2) **Verse 52** tells us of Jesus' decision to travel through Samaria. This is significant because, in the days of Jesus Christ, as a result of the hostility and animosity between Jews and Samaritans, many Jews travelling from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south, would cross the Jordan River twice and travel down the east bank of the river rather than pass through Samaria, even though this lengthened the trip considerably.

Verse 52 shows us that, contrary to this prevailing trend, Christ deliberately chose to pass through Samaria. So, He sent messengers ahead into one of the Samaritan villages to book hotel rooms for the night.

However, in **verse 53**, we read that the residents of that Samaritan village refused to welcome Christ and His disciples because they were heading to Jerusalem.

- 3) The Samaritans' rejection of Christ and His encourage is the first common response to following Jesus; the response of declining to follow Jesus. The Samaritans, like many people today, wanted nothing to do with this Jew, even if they had heard that He was a special prophet of God.
- 4) Many people, hearing about Christ today, decline to follow Him, for various reasons. Some decline to follow Jesus because they belong to other religions or because they hold to a humanistic worldview that ignores God and His will in their lives.

Others decline to follow Christ because they simply do not understand why they should take seriously someone who lived so long ago in a different culture. For example, there are many young people, who although they were raised in Christian homes, when they leave home, turn away from the Christian faith, and decline to follow Jesus.

- 5) Some people decline to follow Jesus because they associate Christ with religion in general which they consider to be backward, superstitious, and primitive. Others decline to follow Jesus because they are too busy with the daily concerns of their lives.
- 6) Many others, however, decline to follow Jesus because they would rather run their own lives than hand it over to the God who created them. Some of these people will tell you that if there is a God who is as good as Christians claim Him to be, how can He allow all these terrible things, like the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, for example, to happen?

These people are not aware of the Bible's teaching that God originally created a perfect world and that the evil of pain and suffering came into this world as a result of our first parents' sin of disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden that we read about in **Gen. 3**.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our first D** from this passage by saying that, like these Samaritans in this passage, for whatever reason, we can simply **decline** to follow Jesus.

II. Distracted from following Jesus (Verses 57-61)

- 1) From **verses 57 to 61**, three short conversations that Jesus had with three nameless men show us the second common response to following Jesus. This is the response of being *distracted* from following Jesus by the things and concerns of this world.
- 2) The first conversation occurs in **verse 57**. Here, a man approached Jesus to eagerly express an interest in following Him. From the reply Jesus gave to this man, we get the impression that this man did not really mean what he was saying, and that he was just being rash and impulsive.

There are many people like that today. In a meeting somewhere, these people were probably asked to come forward and repeat a certain prayer, and they did so, but without having first experienced true repentance that is a work of the HS in our hearts, when God calls us to commit our lives to Him. Perhaps they were threatened with hell, or they were promised an end to all their problems.

The truth is that the NT does not tell us to pray to *receive Christ as our personal Savior* nor does it ask us to pray to *invite Christ into our life*. What the NT teaches us is that we only become followers of Christ when, upon hearing the gospel, we receive it with faith, and we respond to it with repentance in our hearts that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. This results in a complete re-orientation of our hearts, our minds, and our wills *away from sin, to God*.

A person who says *I am saved* or *I am born again* but who shows no change in his or her life with reference to God and to sin shows that they have not truly repented of their sin, and they have not understood what it means to follow Jesus.

- 3) The second conversation takes place in **verse 59**. Christ initiated the conversation with this second nameless man, inviting the man to follow Him. The man replied by saying: *Lord, let me first go and bury my father.*

In this verse, the tenses used in the original Greek text indicates that this man's father was not dead. His answer was therefore just a way of putting off the decision to follow Jesus. This man was saying, in effect, *let me wait until my father has died and I have done my duty as a son by burying him.* This might be many years away. This man was obviously using his family responsibilities as an excuse to procrastinate the decision to follow Jesus.

Again, there are many people today who will tell you, I'm too young now to follow Jesus. I want to live my life and have a good time. They say this as if they know how long God has given them to live in this world. Others, who may not be so young, but who are having a nice and comfortable life, also see no need at all for God in their lives.

JW story. This friend of mine reminds me of **Luke 18:24**, where Christ declared that it is quite hard for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!

- 4) The third conversation is in **verse 61**. Here, we see a third person also expressing an interest in following Jesus. This third person asks Jesus to first be allowed to *go back and say good-bye to their family.*
- 5) Jesus' response to this person was based on His divine discernment of this person's real motive of procrastination because we know that Jesus did not teach us that in order to follow Him, we must forsake our normal everyday responsibilities to our families and our daily lives.
- 6) These three people represent the excuses people make who allow themselves to be distracted from following Jesus by the things of this world.

7) So, we can summarize **our second D** from this passage by saying that, like these three nameless people in this passage, it is quite easy to be **distracted** from following Jesus by the things of this world.

III. Determined to follow Jesus (Verses 51 & 62)

- 1) The three responses that Jesus gave to these three nameless people in this passage who were distracted from following Him by the things of this world help us to see what following Jesus really means.
- 2) In **verse 58**, to the first distracted person, Jesus said: *Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*

Jesus was telling this man that following Him could very well involve giving up the securities of life that this man had previously known. For example, today it is counter-cultural to seek to live by the values of Jesus and the gospel. Think of the pressure a person faces when they refuse to give bribes, or when they oppose sexual deviancy, or when they reject the non-Christian humanistic worldview that is all around us today. Think of the high price of unpopularity, hostility, and rejection that one pays for this today.

In **verse 60**, to the second distracted person, Jesus said: *Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.*

Christ was telling this procrastinating person that the spiritually dead could bury the physically dead, and that the spiritually alive should be busy living and modelling the life of the kingdom of God in their everyday lives.

In **verse 62**, to the third distracted person, Jesus said: *No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

Here, Jesus is using an illustration that was drawn from the farming practices of those days. Ploughing a furrow in one's farm with yoked oxen required following a straight line by continuing to look ahead. If you turned round to look back as you were ploughing, the oxen would stray from the straight line you want them to follow, and the line will be crooked and not very helpful for planting seed in.

- 3) These three responses by Christ to these three nameless people who were distracted from following Him, taken together with the overall gospel message in the NT, show us that following Jesus involves three foundational truths of the gospel.

First, **John 20:30-31** confirms that following Jesus means that we look closely at His life, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection, and based on this record, we accept the gospel announcement to us that Christ Jesus is the eternal Son of God who died and rose again for our salvation.

We therefore repent of our sins, we place our faith in Him, and in what He did for us on the cross. This is how we receive God's forgiveness of our sins, and God's eternal life. When we do this, we are in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit who transmits into us the very life of Christ. **Rom. 8:9** tells us that this what makes us a Christian in the first place.

Second, following Jesus means that, having done that, we pay close attention to Him as He leads and directs our lives through His Word, so that we can go in the same direction, and in the same way as He did, being empowered by His in-dwelling Holy Spirit to live sacrificially in service to others, as He did.

Third, following Jesus means that as we do this, in the daily grind of our everyday lives, we allow the Holy Spirit to develop in us the very character of Christ. **Gal. 5:16** refers to as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We will discover then, that as we are slowly but surely transformed into the image of Christ, we draw others to Him.

- 4) These three foundational truths of the gospel show us what it means to follow Jesus. They are reinforced in the first verse of our passage, **verse 51**. In the **KJV**, **verse 51** reads like this: *When the time had come for Jesus to be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.*

In other words, although Jesus knew that He would face persecution and death in Jerusalem, He was determined to go there. So, here in **verse 51**, Luke is using Jesus' long and determined walk to Jerusalem as a metaphor of the kind of firm and steadfast resolve that should characterize both our own decision to follow Jesus, as well as our actual determined experience of following Him, despite the distractions and challenges we may face.

- 5) Luke is reminding us of the message at the heart of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ by pointing us to the determination with which Christ resolved to go to the cross to lay down His life for our salvation and to make the gospel experiential in our lives.
- 6) Luke is saying that, if Christ, with such great determination, went through that incredible suffering and pain and death on the cross for us, can we too not make a determined decision to follow Him?
- 7) So, we can summarize **our third D** from this passage by saying that following Christ calls us to the same **determined** resolve with which Christ Himself, in His great love for us, so willingly went to the cross to lay down His life for our salvation and transformation.

Conclusion

So, those are our **3D's** from **Luke 9:51-62**.

Taken together, these **3D's** teach us that it is a mistake to allow the ambitions for wealth, social acceptance, power, our non-Christian culture, and the fleeting pleasures of this world, to keep us from making the life-changing decision to follow Jesus.

These **3D's** also teach us that when we do set out to follow Jesus, we must be determined and single-minded in our commitment to Him and His direction for our lives, and not keep longing for the life we have left behind that included such things as ungodly relationships, ungodly attitudes, and ungodly habits.

For example, in **Luke 14:26**, Christ said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

Christ said this not to minimize our relationship with the members of our families, but rather to emphasize that, if we really want to follow Him, our allegiance to Him must take priority over even the things and relationships that are right and good.

Narrate Fatuma's story. What about us? We may not be called to lay down our lives to follow Jesus, as Fatuma did, but as you listen to this today, what is making you decline to follow Jesus? What is distracting you from following Jesus?

For those of us who have determined to follow Jesus, let us be encouraged by the fact that, if Christ Himself went to such great lengths with such great resolve to win our salvation, and to bring us into God's Kingdom, we can safely trust that He will equally resolutely see us through our challenges, and one day, bring us home to Himself, as He did for Fatuma.

Let us pray!

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