

The Cost of Following Jesus

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Preacher: Simon Rehberg

[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 9, verses 57 to 62. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. 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.

To another he said, Follow me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home. Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

This is the word of God. One thing that really annoys me, people, one thing that really annoys me is when you commit to something and there's a hidden little sentence, a hidden cost, something they didn't mention.

But now that you've signed a contract, now that you've committed to that thing, you have to deal with it, you have to pay it. For example, you buy a house or a car. I've never bought any of those things, but I imagine it's a bit like that.

[1 : 1 6] Or you subscribe, maybe. Okay, you subscribe to Amazon Prime and you think, Okay, now I can watch whatever movie I like and then you find the movie you want to watch and you have to still pay for it. I hate that.

Maybe some of you hate that too. You know who also hates this kind of dishonesty? Jesus. The Bible. Which is why Jesus is always up front, very straight to the point, very clear about any cost that is involved.

And to be honest, it's a bit paradox. It's a bit of an irony in our Christian faith because on one side we teach that grace is for free. There is nothing you can do, nothing you can bring to the table. And yet on the other side, we teach that it'll cost you everything. It'll cost you your whole life. And that is very difficult to hold together.

It's very difficult to make sense of that sometimes. But I think in this passage here this morning, we can see a little bit of what Jesus means. This is, by the way, not part of any sermon series that is happening at the moment.

[2 : 2 4] I think Corey didn't want me to let me mess up his Genesis series. Instead, I'm doing a standalone sermon. But it's a very important topic. And we're here in Luke chapter 9.

It's a big chapter. There's a lot happening in that chapter. I recommend you go home this afternoon and read it. There's a lot happening. But in between these events, Jesus is teaching what it means to follow him.

For example, in chapter 9, verses 22 to 24, he says, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

That is a hard saying. And then, of course, we have today's passage. It's a passage that I have often wondered about because the responses of these three people that Jesus is interacting with, they are weird.

[3 : 2 8] And they're strange. And they seem really, really harsh. And I've struggled with that. And maybe some of you have struggled with that. So let's look at that. Let's look at these three people that Jesus is talking to.

And the passage starts with the verse as they were going along the road. So just for context, Jesus and the disciples are on the road, on the road to Jerusalem, to be more specific.

And on this kind of road, you would have met a lot of different people. It's a bit like in the UK, every road leads to London. In Europe, every road leads to Rome.

And I guess in Israel, all the roads lead to Jerusalem. And it would have been a main road. Jesus would have talked to a lot of people. So not all of these interactions are written down in the gospel for us.

Luke is very specific about what he writes down to make a point. So let's look at this first encounter that Jesus has with that person on the road.

[4 : 31] So the first person here comes and asks Jesus. Oh, not really. He doesn't really ask. He makes a statement. He says, I will follow you wherever you go. I'll be there.

I'll go with you wherever you go. Why is he saying that? I think it's pretty obvious. Jesus is a fascinating guy. He's very, very interesting, to say the least.

You know, people would have wondered, did you see what that guy did? Did you see how he healed that person? Did you see the way he preached? Did you see his disciples? They were given authority to even cast out demons.

It's no surprise that people want to follow Jesus. He's very, very special as a person, very polarizing. And that person says, I will follow you, Jesus, wherever you go.

It's interesting. If we know the gospels, if you've been a Christian for a longer time and you've read the gospels, then you will know that Peter says a similar thing later on and just before he betrays Jesus.

[5 : 32] I will go wherever you go. And it's something, if you're a Christian, that you maybe have struggled with before, wanting to follow Jesus, come what may, but not actually being aware of everything that entails, of the consequences that such a decision or such a commitment could have on your life.

Sometimes we say things, we do things without knowing what it will actually look like. And that's fine. I think part of that is very normal. How many of you got married without knowing how much work a healthy marriage includes?

How many of you committed to a job without knowing how much work there actually was to do?

How many of you have committed to things that you weren't really prepared for?

That is fine. Jesus is not saying, you have to be perfect to follow me. It's the opposite. Jesus wants you to know that you will learn a lot and it'll be hard. Jesus' response here is actually not very inviting.

It's strange. But he wants to make sure that you know what you're asking for. He doesn't just say, all right, no problem. Just walk with the other 12 guys. If we have a 13th guy, that's fine.

[6 : 42] That is not what he says. Instead, he says, foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. A very strange way to answer a question like that.

But the point is that even a fox, even a bird, have a place that they can call home, a base where they are safe, where they can lie down to rest, where they can sleep. And Jesus doesn't have that. In the chapter before, in the scene before, we read that Jesus was just rejected in a Samaritan village. So Jesus is saying not necessarily that he will never have a place to stay at, but he is saying that he will be rejected.

He is on his way to Jerusalem. We know what happens in Jerusalem. He's got his eyes fixed on the cross, on the mission that lies before him. This is not an easy way for him.

Even the animals have a secure space, but Jesus says, I'm in the open. I'm vulnerable. And he already has said what needs to happen. The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes and even be killed.

[8 : 02] And note how he talks about himself as the Son of Man. Now, this person that he would have talked to would have been a Jew. They would have been probably fairly familiar with the Old Testament.

In Daniel chapter 7, it says, Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man. That's where this term comes from. And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. Now, that's very remarkable. We read this and we, as New Testament believers, in the 21st century, we understand why Jesus was saying these things, that Jesus actually did achieve all these things, that he did bring the kingdom of God, that all peoples, nations, and

languages should serve him.

But for the person standing there in front of Jesus, this must have been weird. This must have been strange. Jesus, a rejected leader? I thought to you belong dominion and power.

But now you say you will be rejected and killed? So this is not just about having a hard time yourself, it's about following a rejected leader.

[9 : 16] We don't know why exactly Jesus chooses this picture of the fox and the bird, but he probably knew he was talking to, he knew the person, and he's saying, you can't just turn around, you can't just go back home when you've had enough.

We are on the road, we are doing this. This is either you're in or you're out. There's no half-heartedness in this. So Jesus is saying, I want you to follow me, but I want you to mean it. If you want to follow Jesus, then mean it and do it. The second encounter, the second guy, the second guy is a little bit different. Jesus actually goes to him and Jesus asks him a question. He says, follow me. So this time Jesus sees someone, he commands him to follow him. And the man says, sure, but I need to bury my father first. What would your reaction be if you were Jesus? I think 99.9% of all of us here would say, your father died? Okay, you go home and you go mourn with your family and you bury him and you take your time.

[10 : 26] And Jesus doesn't say that. And it's really hard to understand why Jesus doesn't say that. And I think most of us probably struggle with that. It's difficult. Why does Jesus, out of all people, respond like this?

I thought he valued family. I thought he wept even when his friend Lazarus died. Surely he understands. And one thing that really helped me to understand this passage better is to read a little bit about the context of Middle Eastern culture.

There is a scholar called Kenneth Bailey who has lived over there for many, many years and he's been teaching over there and he writes about this phrase, let me go and bury my father.

And this phrase to the Middle Eastern person means something like, let me go and serve my father while he is alive and after he dies I will bury him and come. So he says the father might be perfectly healthy.

He still has another 20 years to live. But the phrase means let me go and serve him and once he dies I can follow you. An Arab commentator writes this, he says, if his father had really died why then was he not at the very moment at home keeping vigil over the body of his father?

[11 : 40] In reality he intends to defer the matter of following Jesus to a distant future when his father dies as an old man who knows when? Little does he know that Jesus in a very short time will himself give up his spirit.

Now that changes things doesn't it? Now if that's true then Jesus is actually not rude to this man not allowing him to mourn over his dead father but actually this is about something else.

Jesus is asking this man to follow him but this man's family is holding him back. His cultural traditions and customs are holding him back. His parents would be angry with him if he went and followed Jesus.

His neighbors would say oh what a bad young man so selfish doesn't even care about his own father. It's about peer pressures. This is very applicable to us not necessarily because we have the same culture but what are your peer pressures?

What is holding you back to follow Christ? What is holding you back to proclaim the kingdom of God? Will your work colleague laugh at you? Will your friends think that you're weird?

[12 : 55] Might they even be angry? And of course we hear all the things that society is throwing at Christianity and it's really really hard to stand for what you believe in all of that.

We can see that in decisions that are being made in politics and we can see it in what we watch and consume in the media. is that hindering you to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?

It's very very difficult. The third encounter we have the third guy. Third encounter verse 61 it's a bit like the first one again he's offering he's volunteering to follow Jesus but he has some conditions. He says to Jesus let me first say farewell to those at my home and again we think okay surely this is allowed surely surely he can go home and say goodbye to his family and then catch up with Jesus and the disciples on the road.

Especially if you've read the Old Testament there is a very similar scene in 1 Kings chapter 19 we read about Elijah the prophet Elijah calling Elisha Elisha I don't know how to say his name what happens there?

[14 : 09] Elisha he is asked to follow Elijah and then he asks him can I first kiss my parents goodbye? Can I first say goodbye to my parents?

And Elijah says yes that's fine and Elisha goes home and he butchers a pair of oxen and they have a wee barbecue and everyone's happy and they say goodbye and it's all good and then Elisha follows Elijah and in this scene Jesus doesn't allow it why?

That is strange it's very harsh and I think the first thing to say is that Jesus is more important than Elijah that is one thing to say that he needs him to follow him now but again the cultural background we need to take that into account the importance of family saying goodbye here means not only to say goodbye but also to ask for permission you see what the problem here is the person is saying to Jesus can I first ask my father if he actually allows me to go with you the authority of his father is greater than Jesus authority and in that culture the father is supreme and the relationship between parents and the son is so much much more closer than here in our 21st century western world where people don't even care about their parents very much sometimes that would not be the case back in

Jesus day Kenneth Bailey he taught a class of Middle Eastern seminary students this very text and he explained to them that Jesus authority is higher than the father's authority and they all were just shocked they couldn't believe it so again is Jesus the highest authority in your life or is there someone else something else that has a higher authority in your life Jesus responds to the guy by giving him a picture Jesus uses an illustration here he talks about a plow what's that all about you see a plow I've done my cultural background research a plow in that time would have been quite difficult to handle in one hand you hold the plow in the other hand you you have a goat like a little stick two yards long with an iron spike and you use that to spike the oxen so it goes and then you have to look between the legs of the oxen to watch the furrow and all of that obviously needs attention you need to do all of that at the same time all hands on if you look around the whole time then you're not going straight anymore you need straight lines because you would plow the field multiple times and if you look around the lines they wouldn't be straight anymore you would do damage to the field that is what

Jesus is saying in that moment this is about having maybe greater authority in your life than Jesus but it's also about looking back over your shoulders maybe you've been following Jesus for a while now and you've been looking back over your shoulders looking back to things that seem more attractive to you more desirable things that are old sin patterns maybe you've gone back to that walking away from God and the lines are going well crooked not straight anymore I don't know if any of you watch Clarkson's Farm I like Clarkson's Farm I think it's a good show I am not getting paid to say this but I remember in one of the episodes he buys this Lamborghini tractor and he hasn't quite figured out how to go in straight lines and I don't know if Flynn is here this morning but he would probably laugh at this because he's probably very good at that he does that kind of stuff and he totally gets what this is about you can't just look around you have to go and set your eyes in front of you and see where you're going in order to not ruin the field so is this about family maybe but it's more about the kingdom of

[18 : 36] God if you follow Jesus then he demands your whole life all of you your whole heart if there are any conflicts in your life right now and that's something to think about to pray about to reflect on are there situations where you substitute Jesus authority with somebody else's authority or with something else these are hard sayings that Jesus is giving us here to say the least but Jesus is interested in your commitment often we talk and emphasize which is very good the love of God the grace of God his kindness and that is the very basis everything that follows is built on that but in this passage we also learn that following Jesus comes at a great cost there are multiple there are many examples of people who experience that one that I like a lot is a man called Dietrich Bonhoeffer he was a German theologian during the

Nazi regime in Germany he actually was involved in a plot against Adolf Hitler and there was a book he wrote which is called The Cost of Discipleship and he writes this he writes when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die most of you will not have to go through that but if you look back over the course of the last 2000 years there were many many many who had actually they had to endure that it's still happening today a couple of weeks ago in Congo 70 Christians beheaded we're very privileged here that we don't have to experienced that but they have and so did Dietrich Bonhoeffer it's a very extreme example I know that and we also have to emphasize that God gave him the strength to do that I don't want to scare you away I don't want to scare myself away I don't want to

make our faith unattractive but

Jesus is so so honest here following Jesus is no part-time business and yet it is so so worth it because apart from Jesus Christ there is no life there is no truth there is no way John 14 6 I think it is talks about that okay let's think about this more practically let's apply this what makes you look back when you plow the field what makes you turn your head around what distracts you from kingdom work what has more authority in your heart than Jesus sometimes maybe that's just me but I like this chair behind me and everyone has this chair in their lives it's the chair of your heart okay everyone has this big old throne okay you with me naturally you want to sit on that throne okay when you become a Christian Jesus says I want to sit on the throne I want to call the shots because look where it has led you you are not fulfilled you are not happy you are still struggling with your addictions and your insecurities and your doubts

Jesus wants to sit on the throne every time we turn our head around it's like we take Jesus and drag him away from that throne and we want to sit on there that is the picture we are getting here what is it for you!

your! family pride the list could go on and on and on and we have to be very careful and consider this and reflect on this if you have been watching back over your shoulder recently or are you more like the second guy let me first bury my father let me first do this Jesus and then I've got time for you let me first finish my degree it's so busy and maybe then I've got time for you let me first enjoy my life and then maybe when I'm old and weak I will follow you let me first be successful and popular let me first let me first or are you the first man you're excited to walk with Jesus you want to follow him and suddenly you realize people are offended by Jesus and because you are following Jesus they might even be nice hobby or perhaps you started reading the

[23 : 01] Bible and it was fascinating but then you realized wow Jesus says really uncomfortable things here and now this has become difficult that's the point of the passage let me say being a disciple of Jesus following Jesus comes with a cost and that hurts and it seems paradox because we talk about grace being free but grace is not only free it is costly and just like Jesus experienced suffering and rejection his disciples also experienced suffering and rejection but not out of their own willpower depending on the Holy Spirit Peter you remember Peter he said Jesus I will follow you wherever you go and then he betrayed Jesus when a servant girl asked him if he knew him a few weeks later Peter goes and preaches to thousands of people and later gets executed for following Jesus that doesn't come just out of your willpower that is something

God gives you that is something God helps you with and it still happens today Bonhoeffer had to experience this too his cost was his life again that can happen probably won't happen which is a good thing but for him it was worth all the trouble I think we can look at these examples and just stand in awe and be inspired by that and say wow Dietrich Bonhoeffer realized one thing grace is costly and he writes this in his book he says such grace is costly because it calls us to follow and it's grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ it is costly because it costs a man his life and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life it is costly because it condemns sin and it's grace because it justifies the sinner above all it's costly because it cost God the life of his own son you were bought at a price and what has cost

God much cannot be cheap for us above all it is grace because God did not reckon his son too dear a price to pay for your life but delivered him up for us costly grace is the incarnation of God it's in that that we see that it's only because Jesus became like us that we can become like him so let me ask you this morning are you following Christ are you following Jesus if yes think about what the text says that Jesus is your number one priority that he is walking against the stream of culture that being a Christian is difficult and some people won't like it but it's worth it if you're not following Christ yet consider this all of these three encounters with Jesus were very specific!

He says follow me today if you look around and you will see a lot of people who are following Jesus and I encourage you speak to those people and you will see that that has been the best decision in their life you can talk to me as well I'm happy to testify for that Jesus says come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light if you're not sure about him yet that's okay but let me tell you he was sure about you when he died on that cross would you consider that let us pray holy father we stand in awe at what Jesus has done for us when he was on the road to Jerusalem seeing the cross and everything that was put before him and yet he considered it a joy and we give thanks that he did that for us so we

could live freely and alive in abundance father I pray that you would move our hearts that you would help us come to an acceptance with this passage and understand what it is you ask for us help us realize that it is Jesus who died for us so we could live for him in Jesus name we pray Amen!