

## **Sermon 50: Luke 9:57-62: The Cost of Discipleship**

### **OUTLINE**

No comforts  
No delays  
No turning back

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the West we no longer know what it means to count the cost to become disciples' of Christ. We live in an age where Christianity has been in the majority, but is now on the decline. This has led to a backlash in trying to market Jesus in a way that He stops losing popularity. We have removed all the offensive elements from the Bible, from our language and tried to sell a Christianity without the cross. Come to Christ to get a life coach who chases all your depression, all your sickness, all your failure away, and who will give you heaven when you die. Come to God to live a life of faith where you can design your own destinies by positive thinking and confession. Repentance is missing; killing sin is missing, enlisting in Christ's army against a terrible foe is missing, embracing a life of sacrificial service and deprivations is missing. This is why we need to turn again and again to the gospel to hear Christ call disciples to Himself.

The section we have been in has been an intensive look at Christ training the disciples. What we have in 9:57-62 is the sobering reminder of the cost we must pay in being disciples' of Christ. We have three individuals placed before us. The first and third are volunteers, the second is specifically called. Christ knowing the hearts of each lays out what is required in being His disciples. He is not begging for disciples that He is willing to take whoever will go on whatever terms. He is Lord, He must have first place and His will must come first. This is what He pointedly applies to these three men. He places before us the realities and priorities of being a disciple of Christ. Each of these men have differing issues that are preventing them from properly committing to becoming a true disciple of Christ. Our three points, as we look at these three men will be: no comforts, no delays, no turning back.

### **No Comforts**

V57-58, 'As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 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." Matt. 8:19 informs us that this man is in fact a scribe. What is a scribe? A scribe is an official interpreter of the law of Moses, those approved by the religious authorities to do so. They would be on the level of a professional theologian. They were educated, they belonged to the elite classes of the day, and would have been highly esteemed. A scribe was a high profile person. Now imagine it! If this was done in front of people, the crowds would have been wowed and impressed by this man wanting to be a disciple of Jesus much like many today are impressed when a Hollywood actor or famous singer becomes a Christian. A more exact equivalent would be a modern day intellectual becoming a Christian, even one from the opposition. On top of that this man's commitment seems sincere, he says that he is willing to follow Jesus wherever He would go. If this were you or I, we would be getting on our knees with the guy to say the sinner's prayer, but not Christ.

Jesus is no respecter of persons, all are sinners, there is no special treatment for those who have esteem in the eyes of the world. Jesus knows what is in the hearts of men, John 2:23-25. He sees the issue that this man has and gives a personalized answer. Jesus highlights the Son of Man lives worse than an animal and does not have a permanent abode. Jesus taps into the issue of personal comfort. Reading between the lines it is suspected that this man was seeking to promote himself in becoming the disciple of a famous teacher. In Matt. 8:19 the scribe addresses Jesus as teacher, indicating that he hopes to become His student. Ordinarily disciples lived with their teachers, but Jesus has no home. Jesus presents a picture of life on mission that is full of deprivations and suffering. The classroom that Jesus presents is not the one that takes place in ordinary predictable environment of the classroom but on the battlefield of ministry and obedience to God. It appears that Jesus thinks that this man is like the seed sown in the rocky soil that is eager and springs up quickly, but because it did not count the cost will die when difficulty arises.

Jesus is spelling it out for us, to become one of His disciples we must be willing to embrace a life of deprivation and alienation. Why does Jesus have no home, and why will we if we follow Him have no home? Firstly, Jesus has no home because He is committed to His mission. His mission requires the giving up of family life and having a stable predictable daily routine. He must preach and He must go to Jerusalem to die. Jesus called His disciples to follow Him and to be a part of this mission to Israel. Now do Jesus words imply that it is a sin for a Christian to own a home? No, it is clear that the early church kept possession of their homes, for they met in each other's homes. It became a tool for service instead of a refuge for selfishness. Peter himself would have kept his house 4:38 where his mother-in-law lived with him, and his boat, John 21:3. Jesus is not laying down law saying that a Christian cannot own a home, but rather to this man who seems to want fame and has not counted the cost sitting at Jesus feet, Jesus spells out the difficulties that come from following Him.

I have been wrestling for years with the commands of Christ where He tells people to sell everything and to follow Him; these words which seem to imply that disciples shouldn't have homes, or where Peter talks about having left everything to follow Christ, the calling of Levi where he just walks out of his old life to follow Christ. Add to these things the statements here about letting the dead bury their own dead and not even being allowed to say goodbye to family and a particular picture begins to develop. As a young Christian I thought that everyone should just sell everything and become a missionary, and at face value this seems to be what Jesus is teaching. Or if you link it with what some of the Christians did in Jerusalem where they sold property to give to any who had need while being in one another's home, maybe you would think that a communal life was implied. How do we reconcile the radical call for self-denial that we see Jesus calling for in the gospels with things like having a family, running a business faithfully as a Christian, owning a home, running play groups for children, going to school etc.?

The basic question which helps me is this one: what time is it? In other words, what is Jesus doing at this particular time that requires this sort of response? Here are a few things to keep in mind. Firstly, God has become flesh and is walking on the earth, the One promised from the beginning is here, it is appropriate that everything stop and take heed, that all of creation center on Him, and all of the usual tasks of life come to a halt to respond appropriately. Secondly, it is the time for the Davidic King to come to Israel as her Messiah. Israel is at a crossroads, if they reject Christ they will suffer the most terrible judgements, the very temple will be destroyed. The end of the Old Testament is upon them and there is a sense of urgency that all of Israel must hear. This explains why Jesus is moving around so much, and why you have to uproot from God given family living to go with Him. There

are other commands given by Christ to His disciples which are relevant only for this time: Luke 9:3-5, 'And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. <sup>4</sup>And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. <sup>5</sup>And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.'" But when Jesus prepares the disciples for the great commission things change given the change in the situation, Luke 22:36, 'He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.'" These things bring a sense of urgency to the gospels that changes when Jesus ascends.

Now the last thing I want to do is lower the requirement of discipleship, so how do we apply this way of reading the NT? Well what we do is we identify that which is specific to the time and that which is a timeless principle. The implication of a disciple not owning a home is personal to this scribe, and necessary given the time it was; the timeless principle that we extract and apply to ourselves is a simple one: we cannot allow personal comfort to get in the way of following Christ. We must not allow personal comfort to prevent us from becoming a Christian, nor must we allow it to hamper a life of service as a Christian.

It can also be applied as saying if becoming a Christian means that you will lose your home, then this is the price we must be willing to pay. We may not have homes because persecution prevents it. I have just recently listened to the audiobook, *Defying Jihad*, which is about a Pakistani teenage girl who was going to become a suicide bomber having a dream about Christ and through reading the Bible becoming a Christian. Her father tried to murder her and she had to flee, for years she had to live in exile. She finally had to flee to Malaysia and there await refugee status before she and her family would be resettled in another country. For more than seven years she was denied refugee status because on the cover of her case file it was written converted from Islam to Christianity, and the Muslim administrators that handled her case kept her case back. If this is the price we must pay to follow Christ then no comfort is too much.

Today we can apply this by sacrificing the comfort of home by opening our homes as the early church did and using it as a ministry tool. Our homes should be a place where the lonely find fellowship, the poor find food and shelter, abandoned children find a family, suffering saints find comfort.

### **No delays**

V59-60, '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.'" Our second man is not a volunteer he is called. This man has an excuse not to follow Christ now because he wants to first go and bury his father. Here is the problem in all likelihood this man's father is not dead. In the ancient world there was no such thing as refrigeration, a body was buried on the same day or the day after death. This man would not have been out following Jesus but home at his house mourning with his family if his father had really died. The most likely scenario is that this man has an aged father who may be near death. This man is essentially saying, 'one day but not yet.'

Some have suggested that there may be another motive at play here. When the father died there would be an inheritance and he wanted to be present to receive the inheritance, if that is the case then this man is saying not yet because there is something I need first. If this is the case then this man could be characterized as the seed among thorns.

Jesus pushes back. Now you might think that this is a perfectly acceptable reason for delaying discipleship, doesn't the bible give a priority to family? The Bible gives special dispensation to not go to funerals in the case of Nazirites, and the highpriest because of uncleanness. In Ezekiel 24:15-18 the prophet Ezekiel is forbidden from public mourning when his wife died as it tied in with his prophetic ministry to Israel. We must understand that Jesus is not encouraging disobedience to the fifth commandment, nor is He trying to downgrade the family in importance as if the NT puts less emphasis on the family. No our duties to family are important, anyone who does not provide for family is worse than an unbeliever. Jesus refutes the Pharisaic teaching on Corban which made money that would ordinarily be given to look after ones parents free to be given to God instead. Jesus goes on to make a rhetorical point, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' When it is a choice between family and Christ the choice is simple. Even good and important things take a backseat to following Christ. Christ calls those who are at home, those who are not following him, the 'dead'. In saying this He is not trying to say they are not family, nor that there is no responsibility towards them, but is putting the issues at hand into perspective. The choice to follow Him is a matter of life and death. We must be careful not to overstress these words. If we take them with a flat literalism it sounds like Christians are not allowed to go to the funeral of an unsaved person, but this is not Jesus point. Note as well the contrast between family duty versus duty to preach, and Jesus teaching us which must take priority. Jesus is not calling upon this man to be a bad son, but rather to be a faithful preacher of the word. To have to choose between sowing a body in the ground or the seed of the word in the world there is only one choice. Now this does not mean that someone could not leave the mission field to look after ageing parents. I have already indicated that there was an urgency to the time at hand, an urgency that required immediate action.

The two principles we can extract from this point Christ is making are: there is no reason good enough to delay becoming a disciple of Christ and secondly, even good and right things must take second place to faithfulness to Christ and His kingdom.

### **No turning back**

V61-62, '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.'" It is possible that this man had been listening on the conversation between Jesus and the second man. He may too have intuited that there was an underlying desire for the inheritance. So he makes clear that he is not going to wait around for the inheritance and is happy to leave all the riches behind. But he wants to be able to go and say goodbye to his loved ones. Once again another delay and if his priority isn't money then it might be relationships. Now if you know your OT well, this exchange might surprise you. Think back to 1 Kings 19:19-21 when Elijah called Elisha to follow him. Elisha begged off following immediately to go and say goodbye to his parents, he went back and burned the plough he was using and slaughtered the ox he had been using and threw a feast then departed. Based on this you might think that there is OT precedence for this man to go and say goodbye. Jesus is saying, I am demanding more, something more urgent that demands immediate action is happening right now. This helps us to get a sense of the seriousness of the call of Christ, there is no negotiation, there is no vacillating, we must follow and we must follow now.

Jesus knows the heart of this man and what his priorities really are and gives him a word specific to what he needs to hear. Jesus does not accept reasonable excuses for delay he

pushes back, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' Looking back has a bad history in the bible. We all know the story of Lot's wife who looking back after fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah in disobedience to the angel's commands was turned into a pillar of salt, Gen. 19:29. Or the many occasions that the Israelites complained during the Exodus as they looked back to the meat pots of Egypt, wishing they could return to what they thought a more comfortable time. Jesus uses the familiar picture of plow to make His point. Today if you are plowing with a tractor looking back is important to keep things straight, but with an ox and plow looking forward is what guaranteed that you were making straight furrows. Jesus says that the one who looks back is not fit. This word fit means not effective, not suitable, not usable. Jesus is talking about effectiveness in kingdom work. It is clear that Jesus is once again using sowing seed as a picture of sowing the word of God. If a person is double minded, if they keep looking back at their sins or even at other priorities, they will plow skew. This means that there will be areas that do not get sown and things will not grow. A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways and he is not useful or effective.

Now there are times when we look back. I think of Peter after Jesus was crucified. In John 21:3 Peter is discouraged, his hopes for Jesus as a political Messiah are crushed and so he reverts to a life of fishing even though he has been given the task of shepherd. He looks back. But Jesus appears to him, Peter is reinstated and becomes effective for Christ. Have you been looking back? Have you been taking your eye off of your task and become ineffective in your work for the kingdom? No distractions, no regrets, no looking back with longing at the life we have left behind but a full commitment to the work the Lord has for us, this is what Christ requires in discipleship.

Christ has given up His home, and has walked in our footsteps, He has entered into our suffering, in order that He might bring life to us. He calls us now to commit this life of a servant, this life of a soldier. He calls us to be willing to put aside comforts; He is calling us to prioritize following putting even important and good things aside to do so; He is calling for total commitment and undistracted service. He has done it for us, we can do it for Him. Let me end with some words from John Wesley: 'John Wesley once gave some helpful advice to people who wanted to know how to follow Jesus. He said: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can." To this helpful summary we should add the phrase "as soon as you can." Disciples of Jesus do all the good they can, by all the means they can, in all the ways they can, starting as soon as they can.'