

PM Luke 9:51-62

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[0:00] I'd like us to read together from the Holy Bible, from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 9, on page 1045 of the Holy Bible.

So up until this point in Luke, Luke of course begins with the narrative around Jesus' birth and also the birth of John the Baptist.

And then in chapter 3 and 4 we have the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, which is mainly based around Galilee.

And that's up to this point in chapter 9. And in chapter 9, verse 51, we have really kind of a new section of Luke. It's the middle section of a journey going to Jerusalem, which ends in chapter 19 when Jesus, with his disciples, arrives in Jerusalem.

And of course there he will be crucified and then rise from the dead. So let's read from chapter 9, verse 51. When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

[1:32] And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered the village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? But he turned and rebuked them.

And they went on to another village. 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.

[2:46] 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.

May God bless to us that reading of his word. Let's join together again in prayer. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. I'd like us to turn back to the passage we read to Luke chapter 9.

Page 1045. And we're looking at the section from verse 57 to 62. The last fortnight or so has seen the Winter Olympics.

And some great athletes performing their particular sports. And of course those athletes have to be totally focused, totally committed to their sport, to the event that they are training for.

And they go into training. They have a training regime that is often months, years even, before the actual event itself. They have a strict regime of diet, of sleep, of physical training, and of rest.

[4:16] But I want you to imagine a top athlete who's in training. It could be for the Winter Olympics or any sport. But a top athlete. And they're in their training regime.

And then the weekend comes round and some of their friends say, come on out with us. We'll go out and have a good time on the town. And they eat loads of greasy food followed by a big calorie pudding washed down with lots of alcohol.

And that doesn't happen just one weekend. It happens the next weekend and the next weekend.

And of course, our athlete friend is out very late so they get short of sleep.

And then every day, at the end of the day, after training, they have a big sugary cake followed by some deep fried Mars bars.

And things are not looking too good for them. And in addition to that, they get, you know, they're training every day, training hard, but they get bored of training and it's tiring.

[5:25] So, they pack in early. And also, you know, at the end of training, they're gasping for a fag. And in fact, it's not just one cigarette, it's 40 a day.

Well, if this athlete goes on like that, they're not going to do very well in the games. In fact, they will do very badly indeed if they carry on in that kind of lifestyle.

Because what is required for top level athletics is total dedication and commitment. A disciplined and rigorous training program and of diet and sleep.

In fact, it's a whole lifestyle that is focused towards one end, which is the competition and trying to win that competition.

That is the absolute priority. Well, today we're looking at following Jesus Christ. And this passage tells us that there is no less dedication and commitment required to following Jesus Christ.

[6:35] Here we see these three potential disciples. In verse 57, it begins, the passage begins, as they were going along the road.

And that reminds us that Jesus and his disciples, Jesus in particular, is on a journey. We read in verse 51 that when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And this journey takes up the whole middle section of Luke from here right into chapter 19. And it's a literal journey, you know, a literal physical journey.

And Jesus is followed by his disciples. But discipleship is also a spiritual journey of following Jesus Christ. Of course, we today, we can't physically follow Jesus.

He's not physically here. He's ascended in heaven. But if we belong to Jesus Christ, we are on a spiritual journey of following him.

[7:43] And Jesus' call in the Gospels, when he calls people to believe in him, it's most often in these terms. It's the terms, come and follow me.

That is what Jesus calls us to do. And that call comes to us, each one of us today, down the centuries. Whether it is for the first time, whether you need to begin following Jesus Christ, or whether it is to continue following Jesus Christ.

Well, in this section, there are three potential followers. The first and third, they volunteer to follow Jesus. the second one is called by Jesus.

But in each case, there are obstacles. In the first case, the obstacle is raised by Jesus himself. And in the second and third, it's raised by the potential followers.

So let's just look at these three potential followers one by one. The first one, we're introduced in verse 57, as they were going along the road.

[8:53] someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. According to Matthew's parallel account, this man was a teacher of the law.

And this man volunteers. He says, I will follow you wherever you go. And that sounds really promising, doesn't it? But Jesus warns him that following him is not easy.

In verse 58, Jesus replied to him and said, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

And we get an insight into Jesus' lifestyle here. Earlier on he had a home in Nazareth and then a home in Capernaum. But now he is a wandering, homeless teacher, reliant on hospitality, perhaps sometimes having to sleep rough.

life. It's a life of poverty, a life sometimes of rejection. And so the challenge that Jesus gives to this potential volunteer is, have you really thought this through?

[10:08] Perhaps this man thought that following Jesus would be a quick route to victory over the Romans. He is the Messiah, he's come, he's going to defeat the Romans, and then he'll be in charge.

And if I follow him, I might get a good position in his administration. But the reality is, Jesus warns him, the reality is hardship and suffering and poverty and rejection.

Jesus, a short time earlier, had spoken of the journey's end in Jerusalem. in verse 22 of Luke 9.

Jesus said, 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 to life.

Of course, there was resurrection, but before that, there was intense suffering. And if this man follows Jesus, he will be following the Messiah, the King, but a rejected Messiah, a rejected King.

And today, for us, it's possible that we could be deluded into thinking that following Jesus is a ticket to a comfortable, easy life.

[11:35] In fact, some preachers say that. They preach that if you follow Jesus, then you will have health and you will have wealth. But that is not what the gospel teaches.

That's not what Jesus teaches here. Even in our own land where there is relative freedom to practice and promote our faith, there can be great hardships to that.

There can be mockery. There can be exclusion. There can be just misunderstanding. People just don't get you if you follow the Lord Jesus. finances. Financially, it can be costly.

Maybe it could be giving up promotion or being overlooked for promotion because you're honest, because you don't go along with corruption.

And then there are the ethical demands of following Christ. Not giving in to temptation. Not, for example, joining in malicious gossip about people.

[12:39] Not joining in just the race to grasp as much money as possible or to lust or temptation of any kind.

And also just what is highlighted with the next two potential disciples. The fact that Jesus Christ must come first. Above all other demands, even the demand of family.

Every other claim. Jesus Christ claim must come first. Has this man considered that? Have we considered that?

Well, we move now to the second potential disciple. And this time it's Jesus who initiates it. He calls the man. He says to him, follow me.

And his reply is, in verse 59, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. Now, we have to understand this.

[13:41] This man's father is still alive. If his father was dead, the son wouldn't be on the roadside or wherever this is, but he would be at home by the dead body and the burial would be very imminent because in that time and place, because of the climate, burials usually took place either on the day of death or the next day because bodies decomposed quickly in the heat.

So this man's father is still alive. And what he's doing is he's asking permission to stay with and serve his father until his father dies and is buried and then he will come and follow Jesus.

And that could be years down the line. Now, this man was just following the cultural norm in that society. His family, his community would expect this.

But I think the key word here is the word first. First, let me go and bury my father. It's first in time but also in importance, in priority.

Now, South Asian culture, which I kind of work in and live in, is in this way very much like first century Jewish culture. South Asians take honoring parents very, very seriously.

[15:06] And that's good. That's a positive aspect of these cultures. It's, of course, the fifth commandment is to honor your father and your mother. But Jesus is claiming that following him takes precedence even over parents, even over family, even over what is required in the fifth commandment.

And we see here, what we see often, so often in the gospels, an implicit claim to be God. That kind of exclusive devotion that trumps even the claims of family is something that only God can make.

It's really the same sort of terms as the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me, or the Shema that the Jews said every day from Deuteronomy 6 verse 4.

A hero Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. That's the kind of devotion that Jesus is demanding and claiming here.

And this man's problem was that he puts honoring his father above obedience to Jesus Christ. And for us today it might be our parents, it might be our kids, it might be our partner, our career, our ambitions, our reputation, gaining acclaim and recognition, gaining money, whatever it is.

[16:41] There are so many potential things that we can put before our devotion to Jesus Christ. And so that thing becomes an idol for us.

We cannot follow Jesus Christ if there is something else or someone else that takes first priority in our lives. Following Jesus Christ has to be first for us.

Jesus Christ has to have priority, absolute priority in our lives. And we cannot follow Jesus with conditions. We cannot follow him on our terms.

I'll follow you but. We can't say that. His word is absolute for us. He is Lord, he is king, and we have to submit to him absolutely.

That is what he is worthy of. What Jesus' response in verse 60 is, leave the dead to bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

[17:45] God. When Jesus says, leave the dead to bury their own dead, I guess he's kind of playing with words a bit here. He's speaking of the spiritually dead. Of course, physically dead people can't bury anybody.

He's speaking of the spiritually dead. And Jesus is not saying it's wrong to bury your dead or to look after your aged parents. In fact, in Mark chapter 7, he teaches that people should honour and obey and look after their parents.

But again, he's speaking about a situation where family duties are first priority. And he's saying, leave that to those who are spiritually dead. If you are spiritually alive, I will be your first priority. And then he says, as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. The kingdom or reign of God, was what Jesus spoke about again and again.

You read of it just repeatedly throughout the gospels. And often the term is used as a summary of Jesus' message. He came preaching the kingdom of God.

[18:53] In Luke 4, 43, Jesus says, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. In chapter 9, verse 2, he sends the disciples out to proclaim the kingdom of God.

And that sort of fits with a Jewish expectation thought of that time, that God's reign would come in totality at the end of the age, based on many Old Testament prophecies.

And that reign, that reign of God would be a reign of justice and righteousness. righteousness. It would be a time when God's people, the righteous, would be vindicated, when their sins as a nation would be forgiven, and even when the dead would be raised, the righteous dead would be raised.

And this was the hope of this age to come, when this would happen, when there would be a restoration, a renewal, a renewal of creation even, as God had made and planned it at the beginning.

And Jesus' message was that God's reign has broken into this world, into this present age, with his own coming. He is God's chosen king. He is the anointed Messiah who will rescue his people.

[20:20] Well, of course, Jesus also proclaimed that the kingdom of God would come in its completeness at the end of this age, when Jesus himself reappears. But this is the message that this man and we today are called to proclaim, that Jesus Christ is king and lord, as he himself claimed in Matthew 28 verse 18, that all authority in heaven and on earth is given to him.

And that healing and restoration will come to our broken world through him. It is the good news of the kingdom of God. Well, then we come to the third potential disciple in verse 61.

Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first, let me first say farewell to those at my home. And it's again another volunteer with he's willing to follow, but there's a but there, there's a condition. condition. And his condition is actually, I don't think it's translated well in this version, in most versions. This is not just about saying goodbye. It's, the word can have the connotation of getting permission or taking leave of someone.

In South Asian culture, when you leave someone's house, there's a sort of polite form of words. You ask for ijazat. And ijazat means permission.

[21:54] Can i have permission to go? And it's kind of a formality. And it can be used in that sense, and that's how it comes to be translated farewell. But i think this man is meaning more than just saying farewell, saying goodbye.

It's permission that he's looking for, or that's the condition. First let me go and get permission of my family at home. And the key word again is first.

First let me go and get permission. And the question is, what happens if his family doesn't give him permission to follow Jesus? His parents would likely think this is a bit of a dodgy venture. Here's this homeless, wandering teacher going and following him. No, I don't think that's a good idea. And so they will forbid it, they won't give their permission, and this man will have a ready-made excuse for not following Jesus.

What in effect this man is saying is, I will follow you, but the authority of my parents comes higher than your authority, Jesus. So the question is, for him, for us, who comes first?

[23:11] Family or Jesus? Jesus. Now again, the Bible and Jesus himself stress the importance of honouring parents. It's the fifth commandment out of the ten commandments.

It's not optional, it's something we must do. But what happens when there is a clash between what parents want and what the Lord Jesus wants, between honouring parents and honouring Christ? Christ. If our parents, or indeed any other authority, stand in the way of honouring Christ and honouring God, then we must obey God rather than humans.

And again, we see that the Lord Jesus is making a huge claim here. He is saying that obeying me is a higher priority than obeying your parents.

Obeying me, honouring me, is a higher priority than even the demands of the fifth commandment of God's law. Because obeying Jesus Christ is obeying God.

[24:19] And to disobey him is to disobey God. And again, we see there's an implicit claim to the first commandment and that command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.

That Jesus is claiming for himself, that he is worthy of that love, of that obedience, that worship. Now, as we've noted, Middle Eastern culture values parental authority very highly.

One commentator, Kenneth Bailey, who spent most of his life in the Middle East, he talks of the shock of Middle Eastern seminary students when he expounded that this man in his 30s was claiming a higher authority than the second and third person's father.

That is what Jesus claims for himself. And yet, Jesus Christ is worthy of following.

He is worthy of our submitting to him. He is worthy of our commitment, of our dedication. Because he is the world's true and rightful king.

[25:34] king. He is the king whose character is filled with grace and truth and beauty. He is the king who one day will put all wrong to right and who will restore creation.

And he is the king who has loved us and given himself for us. Why wouldn't you follow a king like this? Well, really the second and third potential disciples, the issue was one of authority, of what carried most authority in their lives.

And that question of course comes to us. What carries or who carries authority with you? What authorities do you look up to? What is it? The social or political elite, opinion formers, of the right or the left, the media, liberal, conservative society, small l, small c, cultural consensus, or certain celebrities who you follow.

Do you follow their authority? Do they have authority in your life? And if so, does their authority come above that of Christ that is expressed for us in the Bible?

What happens when those authorities are in conflict with Jesus Christ? Who do you believe then? And who do you follow? But Jesus replies to this man, no one who puts their hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

[27:17] I've never ploughed with oxen, but I'm told that it's a difficult task that requires concentration. You have to look forward to keep the furrows straight to avoid rocks and other obstacles.

If you look back, the furrow will not be straight and you might hit a rock and ruin the plough. And Jesus likens following himself to ploughing.

It needs single-mindedness. It needs looking forward, not looking back to what you've left behind to see what others are thinking, what your family's thinking, what your peers, your friends are thinking. What really matters is that you're on a journey following Jesus. And what matters is what he thinks and what he tells you to do. And he says that those who look back are not fit for the kingdom of God or are not usable in the kingdom of God.

Following Jesus Christ is serving in the kingdom of God, in the reign of God because Jesus is that king. God has come and has begun to reign in the person of Jesus Christ.

[28:35] Christ. And that is why Jesus has the authority to make such demands on people because in him God has come. This is the coming of the Lord God.

Well in one of these three short conversations between Jesus and these three potential disciples are we told what the outcome was. Did they heed the call and follow Jesus or did they go back? We don't know the answer to that. Because the important thing for us is our response to the call of Jesus Christ. His call comes to each one of us today.

Follow me. And whether that's to begin that journey for the first time or whether we've been on that journey and we're to continue on that journey. The call is follow me.

And so have you heeded that call? Are you following Jesus Christ? Are you committed to him? Is his authority ultimate in your life?

[29:42] What has first place in your life? May God bless his word to us. Let's go. Let's go.