

Following Jesus (2) - "Yes, but..."

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[0 : 0 0] help us by the aid of your Spirit. We come to you, Lord, at all times seeking that your Spirit will guide us and bless us, that you would show to us your way and keep us in that path of obedience to you. Lord, we have so much to bring before you that we would give thanks for. You fill our lives daily with so many benefits, so many things that we are utterly undeserving of, and yet you continue to bless us. You continue to fill our lives with so many aspects of your goodness shown to us.

We come before you also, Lord, with so much to confess, so much to confess of our own shortcomings, our own sin, and our own sinfulness. We pray that you would forgive us, Lord, our sins today and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We thank you for the assurance that your Word gives us, that you will do this as we come to confess our sins, as we come, Lord, to bring them before you, bring ourselves before you in our need of cleansing. We thank you for the sanctifying power of your Spirit, using your Word, O Lord, to that effect. We pray that you would help us to see constantly our need of that cleansing, our need of being washed through the blood of Christ, and to bring before you daily our need of that washing. O Lord, our God, we pray that you would help us to see into our own hearts more clearly, that we may realize that we are indeed in our very hearts sinful, that we need that you should create in us a new heart, and create in us, O Lord, that righteous outlook of life, that would focus on those things that are to your glory.

And we come before you today, O Lord, with so many needs that we seek that you would address for us. We thank you that through your Word and in the Gospel, you have taken account of all our need, of all the condition, that all the aspects of our condition, O Lord, in our sinfulness.

And, O Lord, we ask that you would today meet us in the power of your truth. O Lord, we thank you today for your Word that we have so freely in our possession.

When we realize, O Lord, throughout the world that so many people who would desire to have your Word and don't have it or have it and not in a way that can readily access it, we thank you, O Lord, that we ourselves have your written Word before us, that we have it in our possession.

[2 : 3 4] Indeed, that we have, many of us, many copies of it in our homes. We pray for those, Lord, throughout the world today who can't afford a Bible, or even if they could afford it, would not be allowed to use it openly.

And, O Lord, we pray that you would bless your people in these conditions, and that you would help them as they hide your Word in their hearts, as they seek to live it out in their lives.

We pray that you would encourage them. We pray that you would make us increasingly thankful that we have so many privileges, so much freedom to enjoy. O help us, we pray, to use it to your glory, to the advance of your cause.

Help us to use it in our own furtherance of our relationship with you. And help us to do so, O Lord, in a way that will constantly express our gratefulness and thankfulness to you as our God.

We thank you today for your promise that you will accompany your people through every issue of life. You are with your people even to the end of the age. There is no situation, no set of circumstances, no generation that is exempt from that promise.

[3 : 46] We bless you, Lord, for that today, for ourselves here, that you would bless us with the knowledge and with the conviction that this is true. Help us, Lord, when we lose sight of that promise and of the other promises of your Word that assure us of your care and your attentiveness to your people.

Forgive us, we pray, when we stray from such convictions, from such assurances of your truth. And forgive us, Lord, we pray, to return to that calmness of mind that will rest in you.

You did say, and you say to us in your Word, to take your yoke upon us and learn of yourself that you are meek and gentle, and we shall find rest for our souls.

We thank you that that rest is not confined to the rest of eternity in heaven. You give your people times of rest in this world. You give them to know your peace in their hearts.

And you, Lord, express your love for them in comforting them even in their times of affliction. We pray that that will be true of each one of us who knows the Gospel, who knows the Gospel so well.

[4 : 55] Help us to draw our comfort and our direction in life from it. We ask today your blessing to be with us as a congregation. Lord, you know all our need.

You know each and every one of us individually. You know us in our homes, in our circumstances in life. And we ask, O Lord, that you would bless us. Bless our children, our infants, our primary school children, our secondary school children, our young adults, our young families.

Lord, bless us in our homes and all our activities. Bless us in a way that would keep us following the way that you have marked out for us in your Word. But help us to do it, Lord, delighting in obedience and not at all following you out of a sense of mere duty or being pressed into it.

We thank you, O Lord, for the freedom we have to do this. And we pray that you would bless the children now gathered in Sunday school. We thank you for those who teach them, who give up their time to study your Word in order to present it to our children.

Bless them, Lord, richly, we pray. We pray, too, your blessing for all of our number today who are ill at this time. And we pray that you'd bless especially any who are seriously ill.

[6 : 12] We pray for those, Lord, who are anticipating treatment or surgery or going through such at this time or recovering from such. We pray that you'd bless them, Lord, at this time.

We ask for those who are anticipating traveling to the mainland for such that you'd bless them and that you'd make that journey as comfortable as possible for them. We ask your blessing, Lord, too, for those who have contracted COVID at this time in our community and who belong to us also as a congregation.

We pray that you'd bless Jackie, Lord, as she has come to have positive result from her testing.

And bless her colleagues also in donation as the outbreak there, O Lord, has increased at this time. Bless all the staff and all the residents of donation and be with Jackie herself and with her family and grant your hand to be upon her, Lord, for her healing and for her upholding at this time.

And we pray that you would graciously lay your healing hand upon her and upon all others, Lord, like her, whom we know are at this time suffering from this virus. We pray, Lord, throughout our land that you'd bless those who have the virus, those who are in intensive care units at this time.

[7 : 34] And we understand that many now are of a younger age group. We pray, Lord, that you would grant to our people that sense of being careful over their own lives for the benefit of others, too.

And we pray that you'll bless those who are attending to our needs at this time in nursing care and in vaccinations. We thank you for all that has been achieved already.

And we pray, Lord, that that will continue and be increased throughout our land, throughout our population. And we ask especially for our islands at this time, for Barra and for all the other parts of our island group, that you'd bless us at this time with your protective care.

Lord, we commit our way to you and ask that you would help us to trust in you as the great physician, the one who takes us into your own care spiritually and who will look after us in all aspects of that care, whatever else happens to us in this world.

We pray today, Lord, also for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, both in the congregation and outwith. And we pray for Chriselle, for Ian, and for their family, and for all of Chriselle's sisters and her brother as they mourn the passing of their sister Joan in this week gone by.

[8 : 57] Bless them, Lord, we pray at this time, and the wider family as well, and be with them. Be with all others who continue to mourn over the passing of loved ones. Lord, grant your comfort to them and be near to them at this time and shield them, we pray, from any assaults of the evil one who would come to seek to take advantage of our circumstances in life.

Grant that you'd bless us, Lord, in all our deliberations today as we attend to your word. And we pray that you would help us to deliver our minds to be ruled by your word and to be placed under it for our minds and our thinking and our lives to be shaped by the truth that you have given us.

And so receive us now, we pray. Continue with us and bless us freely and pardon our transgressions for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, reading of God's word today is from the Gospel of Luke.

It's chapter 9 and verses 43 to 62. So that's Luke chapter 9 at verse 43.

Just in the middle of that verse where the new section there begins. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, Let these words sink into your ears.

[10 : 26] The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. But they did not understand this saying and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it.

And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, Whoever receives this child in my name receives me.

And whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among all of you is the one who is great. John answered, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us.

But Jesus said to him, Do not stop him for the one who is not against you is for you. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem and he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him.

But the people did not receive him because his face was set towards 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?

[11 : 48] But he turned and rebuked them and he 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, 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.

Amen. We pray God will bless this reading of his word to us. And we'll turn now to look for a short time at that final passage from verse 57 to the end of the chapter there.

[12 : 55] Last time we looked at a short series of studies looking at the theme of following Jesus. And we took our first study from John chapter 10 looking at how the shepherd imagery is used there where Jesus uses that to speak of a shepherd calling his own sheep by name.

And as they hear the shepherd's voice, they recognize that voice and they follow him. And so we saw that Jesus, as he calls his own people to follow him, that he calls them to actually be his flock in this world and to follow him as their leader, as the good shepherd, as he names himself in that chapter.

And the second study is really about where this passage sets before us following Jesus in the sense in which we find it there as something that these people really wanted to do but not immediately.

So you could say it's really following Jesus, yes, but. We've given that as our title because that's really what the passages there are about or certainly the second two examples there from verse 59 to the end of the chapter.

So we'll look at them first of all looking at the first instance verses 57 to 58 as Jesus, an injection of realism by Jesus as he responds to this anonymous man saying to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

[14 : 35] Now in the gospel of Luke, it's a very interesting feature of the gospel of Luke that the major part of the gospel from the just passage before this, verse 51, from verse 51 right through to chapter 19 and verse 54, the biggest chunk of Luke there is dealing with the road that Jesus takes or the journey that Jesus and the disciples take on from here to Jerusalem.

It ends at Jerusalem and of course ultimately it ends at the cross for Jesus. That's the terminus of his journey. And so what you find actually here fits in with that theme of following Jesus when Luke says literally they were on a journey, on a journey that ended at Jerusalem and ended in the cross.

But of course Luke is building that into the teaching of Jesus himself with regard to following him spiritually, following him as his disciples spiritually. so the two things are combined together just to present to us more aspects of what it means to follow Jesus in a spiritual way.

And as we said in this passage it's to do with Jesus insisting that following him is to be the number one priority. It's not an easy passage in many ways to understand or deal with.

There are aspects to it that we find difficult in dealing with particularly where he says they let the dead or leave the dead to bury their dead but you come and you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

[16 : 10] We'll see what that means or some of what it means when we come to it but it's not altogether an easy passage but the one thing we must never take from the passage we must never actually misunderstand the passage to the effect that Jesus is putting people off from following him.

It's the very opposite. He's calling people to follow him but as we'll see he is a realist and he's actually bringing us first of all an injection of realism into the situation with this man in verses 57 to 58.

So let's go and look at that first of all. As they were going along the road someone said to him I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus said to him foxes have holes birds of the air have nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

Now there was nothing wrong with this man's intention. Nothing wrong with his entire with his intention or his desire. Nothing wrong with the sincerity really of what he was asking about what he was wanting to do.

I will follow you wherever you go. He's very sincere about that. His intention is to follow Jesus to follow Jesus wherever he goes but he's actually not really given much thought to it.

[17 : 22] He's caught up in the excitement or in the enthusiasm of following Jesus of what it might mean to follow Jesus. And as he's caught up in the excitement of that he's really just simply blurted out I'll follow you wherever you go.

I'll follow you whatever it takes. Wherever you take me wherever you lead I will follow. And Jesus really wants him to understand something of what he's saying and he wants to inject this realism into his thinking so that he'll come around to realizing what exactly he is saying.

And so Jesus then speaks about himself. And that's really what does man represent. Someone who really feels it would be a great thing to follow Jesus. A really exciting way of life.

Something that would really bring this excitement into his life. But he hasn't really deep down thought about what it's going to mean other than that or even if that's the primary part of it which of course Jesus sets out to show is not.

Many went to fight we understand in the Second World War the beginning of sorry the First World War as many people were or volunteered to serve their country and we understand from reports and from history that many people went away thinking the war would be very short it would be over in a short time and it would really be quite a good thing quite an exciting thing just to take part in that campaign and then be back home quickly and be able to tell people of their experience and of course it didn't work out like that at all as we well understand they didn't understand many of them at least as they were leaving this country to go to the fields of Flanders and France and Belgium the horror of war the absolute devastation the massive loss of life the suffering the pain the wreckage of life and of many other things along with life itself their enthusiasm was very very quickly dissipated when they realized this is not what we expected this is not what we thought serving our country at war was going to be like it's quite different to what we had imagined and here's a man who's actually coming to Jesus and saying

[19 : 47] I will follow you wherever you go and Jesus injects this note of realism he's not killing his enthusiasm Jesus has nothing to criticize about enthusiasm and for us in our own lives enthusiasm an increased amount of enthusiasm would be welcome for myself certainly I wish I had more enthusiasm in serving the Lord in preaching the gospel in witnessing to Jesus you may be saying the same thing today there's nothing wrong with our enthusiasm nothing wrong with enthusiasm in the service of the Lord but our following must not be just based upon excitement or enthusiasm there has to be a realism about what it means to follow the Lord and elsewhere in the gospels we'll actually see Jesus made reference to that so he turns and speaks about himself Jesus said foxes have holes birds of the air have nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head in other words he's saying even these animals foxes and the birds of the air they've got a home in this world they've got a place that they go to and rest and find some refuge but the son of man and that's Jesus himself he's got nowhere to lay his head he doesn't have any place in this world that he can say this is my home of course his home is in heaven his home will be when he goes back to heaven having served the father in this world but what he's really saying is if you think that following me is a life of comfort think again be realistic about it because even the son of man the master of the disciples the head of the house he doesn't have anything in this world except discomfort and deprivation and suffering and pain as he goes through this life of obedience this life of service this life of providing eternal life for his people following Jesus is not for glamour for fame it's not just for mere excitement there's much exciting about it in a proper way but it's not for the things that the world will actually give you in terms of of of fame or of glamour or of luxuries it's not like you're going to have mansions and luxury living following Jesus as he says from this is really giving up living for this world we still live in this world we interact with the world we have so much to actually give out to the world we have relations with the world even with those who don't at all want the gospel or want to follow Jesus but our lives must never be lived for this world this world must not be our priority the things of this world must not be our priority physically or financially or in whatever way after all the end of the journey for Jesus is not going to be a palace at Jerusalem he is the king of the world but the end of the journey at Jerusalem is going to be the cross and what he really is saying to us and saying elsewhere for example if you go to chapter 14 and verse 27 you'll find a passage there that deals with pretty much the same thing where you find the cost of discipleship actually set out in that passage from verse 27 whoever does not bear his own cross and care after me cannot be my disciple for which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost whether he has enough to complete it and so on in other words he's saying don't enter into discipleship unthinkingly

don't enter into discipleship thinking it's something that will really be there just to please yourself and there's a cross at the heart of our discipleship and where's a cross there's a death Jesus is saying this is where my journey ends in this world on the cross the death of the cross and what he's saying is take up your cross when he says that it means die to yourself die to sin die to self die to everything that would please yourself it's demanding of course it's demanding but Jesus is injecting this set of realism realism in case we set out on the Christian life on the life of discipleship with a totally wrong understanding of what it means he's not dampening enthusiasm he's not trying to put us off following him but he is a realist and he's saying to us be sure you know what it's about because if you enter into it without really thinking about it and then you come across the reality of it you're likely then to give up if you enter into it and you know this is what it's like this is what Jesus has said this is what Jesus promises it's about then you are going to say well I know that but this is my priority to follow him to please him to be his disciple to witness for him to enjoy his company to know that he's with me to believe his promises everything that then comes into it you've actually already prepared for at least most things although there will be surprises too so that's the first thing and it's so important for ourselves today following Jesus is not on the basis of our own understanding it's not on the basis of what we would like it to be or rather it to be because following Jesus is as he puts it taking up our cross and following him there's an affinity with the life that he lived in this world there's a close connection with the type of life that it was for him and that it's going to be for his disciples too so that's the first thing this injection of realism but then you find two injunctions against delay we'll call it where you find him saying to these other two individuals first of all the man who came to him and said

I will follow you wherever you go and then he turns to another and he said Jesus 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 dead but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God now you notice that Jesus didn't actually say where he was going to follow him to and neither does this man actually ask well where are you going you're saying to me to follow you but can you tell me where you're going there's nothing like that in the passage at all and that's actually quite interesting because following Jesus is not a matter of where we're going and where we're heading not that that's unimportant because following Jesus obviously is taking the road that leads ultimately to heaven to eternal life in heaven but following Jesus is actually more to do with who we are traveling with rather than where we're traveling to following Jesus is actually following him in the sense in which you want him to be with you in your life you want him to lead your life you want him to be in charge of your life you want to actually be under his direction you want to be under his correction you want to be under everything that he brings into your life by way of being in charge of your life by way of actually taking control of your life really that's what he's saying here as well follow me there's no sense of where it's going to be just follow me in other words what that amounts to really is

Jesus is saying irrespective of where this leads to trust me that's what it amounts to trust me he's just simply saying follow me and he's saying to you and he's saying to me follow me if you haven't started yet to follow Jesus in the spiritual sense you're following him because you're here under his teaching in the gospel and it's great that you're here but have you actually started following him in your heart and following with your will and following him in such a way that really wants to follow him to be in charge of your life to actually teach you every day to instruct you every day to sanctify your life to give you acceptance with God all of those things that enter into our salvation and saving relationship to God today are you and I really following Jesus more than just following the gospel more than just following the church I met a man once who told me when he hadn't been in church for some time

I've gone off the church for the moment you know and you try to reason with him and say well the Christian life is not about following the church or being on or off the church it's about following Christ it's being obedient to him but he just wouldn't have it he said no I don't I've just gone off the church and I don't really want to go to church for the moment I might pick it up some other time in my life for many people discipleship is that for many people I'm not saying it's like that for yourselves I hope it's not that you know better than that following Jesus is not a matter of just belonging to the church it's not a matter of following the gospel it's not even primarily a matter of any of these things it's following himself it's having your trust in him and in his word it's trusting what he says to you and whatever it is wherever it is he leads you through life following him is imperative because he always knows best even in the difficult times the challenging times the painful times the times when he has acted unexpectedly towards you the times when he seems to have turned his back on you the times when you lack that comfort that you want from him the times when he seems to have receded into the background of life still he's saying follow me follow me there follow me because I went for you and I followed my path right through to the death of the cross and we'll see this evening in Philippians that one of the arguments Paul is making there is that as he begins chapter 2 with in effect the amazing things that God has done as the triune God while he's saying if God has done this as he has why should we be anything other than united as Christians that's Philippians 2 let's leave that for the moment but in a sense that comes into a passage here as well when God has done what he has done when Jesus is who he is when Jesus has actually achieved what he has achieved isn't he now saying to us trust me not just to begin following which is what he's encouraging if you haven't done that up to now but if you've been following perhaps for many years and maybe you've become a bit despondent maybe you've lost something of that vision you had when you began following him maybe there's a certain coldness that has crept into your life into your relationship with him well he's now saying here I am

[31 : 37] I'm still here I'm still speaking to you follow me trust me wherever that journey takes you that's what he's saying to this man here and what he's saying is let me first go and bury my father and Jesus said to him leave the dead to bury their own dead as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God now that seems at first sight in no way of thinking that seems very harsh if not cruel but you mustn't get the impression from this that this man's father has actually died it's probably not that at all because if this man's father had died because of the Jewish custom of having to have a burial very soon after death this man probably wouldn't be here at all if his father had just died so what he's probably saying is almost like almost certainly this is about this man is saying well

I will follow but first of all I will need to stay at home until my father dies and I bury him and when all that is over when I have got my responsibilities attended to and I've done that then I will follow you in other words he is saying this is actually my priority first of all I have this obligation and I have to see this obligation through and then I will begin to follow you now there are many instances in life when we think pretty much the same thing it's not that we don't want to follow Jesus it's not that we don't want to have a life of following him and being his disciples but we have other priorities or we put other things as a priority I should say all the things in life can actually become a priority instead of following Jesus or ahead of following Jesus we might be saying well I've got family responsibilities I've got young children

I've got to look after a home I've got work responsibilities I've got a career I've got a study for that career I've got so much to do that I just can't at the moment give my full attention to following Jesus as my Lord and as my Savior I will do it when life gets a bit easier when I have more time to give to it the time I would like to give to it because I would like to give that time to it Jesus is saying follow me you can have all of these things in your life and indeed we have to have all of these things in our lives to an extent but you take Jesus with you into them you don't put them ahead of following him you don't make them your priority even the closest relationships you have in this world he has to come first and if that sounds cruel if that sounds harsh from this pulpit or from Jesus himself and I'm just really saying what Jesus is saying in the passage they're not they're not my words they're not my they're not my it's not my thinking this is what

Jesus himself is actually saying to us and he's not being harsh and he's not being overly harsh or cruel about this again it's just simply a realism a realism in the matter if Jesus is worth following he's worth following now he's worth following through through every issue of life he's worth putting ahead of everything else you have in this life and you know when you put other things ahead of following Jesus and say well I'll do that when I've got more time what you're really doing is leaving Jesus out of dealing with your relationships your marriage your children your home your family your work you're keeping Jesus at a distance from that and saying I need to attend to this first and when I've got more time for it I'll bring Jesus more fully into it no Jesus is saying this is what I'm here for so that I can be with you in these responsibilities so that I can actually give you my grace for these responsibilities that I can stand with you in these responsibilities that I can carry you through the difficulties of these responsibilities or duties whatever they might be but put me first and you know when we put him first then we can see what he is really able to do in leading our lives and controlling our lives the words that are following that are very difficult to deal with let the dead bury their own dead but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of

God again it seems really harsh what Jesus says this to him but the two words there for dead are different words in the Greek language of the New Testament let the dead bury their own dead he is really saying spiritually dead and I think what he is saying really although it is difficult to handle what he is really saying is well others in the family can attend to what you are doing what you are wanting to do and what he is really saying is leave the world to look after the world you know if a priority is the things of the world well the world can do that for itself it doesn't need us to do that in order to delay our coming to follow Jesus what he is saying to this man is the world can look after its own affairs but I want you to actually come and follow me and proclaim the kingdom of God and it does remind us there doesn't it that the kingdom of God is of much greater importance than the things of this world and again it is a case of what do we prioritize are we really following

[37 : 32] Jesus to the extent that he himself sets before us or are we just stopping short of that due to our own thinking or our own preferences or our own prejudices so that's the first injunction that's the first case where he gives an injunction against delay and he moves on to the second one yet another said I will follow you Lord but let me first say farewell to those at my home and Jesus said to him no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God now that's very similar of course to the previous one there are some subtle differences to it the emphasis here is not so much on returning to the world as you might make it of the first case the emphasis here is actually a reluctance to leave the world a reluctance to leave behind things that we ought to leave behind in order to follow Jesus and he doesn't want us literally of course to abandon family or family responsibilities or loving our families or anything like that but what he is saying is again is don't be reluctant to leave the things that you must leave for the sake of

Christ to leave your sinful lifestyle to leave the life that you lived since you came into the world to leave a life that has not yet come to be spiritually committed to Christ don't be afraid to leave that because you have to leave that to be my disciple to be a follower of mine that's why he's saying no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God so it's not that this man is unwilling to follow Jesus but he's not willing to let go of the world in order to do so and the illustration that Jesus uses of course goes back it's not like nowadays when you see tractors pulling plows massive big things usually nowadays when you see them on farms this is going back of course to the practice that you still see in the world of an ox usually pulling a plow and then the person that's controlling is behind the plow so in front of him he's got the plow his hands are on the plow with usually some reins for the ox or a staff in his hand to just control the ox but there's the ox pulling the plow there's the plow and there's the person behind that and in order to start plowing the person has got to put their hands on the plow and then give the ox or whatever animal it is give him some instruction and off he goes what Jesus is saying using that illustration is if somebody sets out to plow a field and puts his hand on the plow and then gives the ox the command to go forward he's not going to look back and wonder what's going on behind him because he's not going to plow much if he's going to do that he might actually get the plow into the ground but it's going to be all over the place and he's not really going to be plowing certainly not in a straight line certainly not in an acceptable way so what

Jesus is saying here is whoever puts his hand to the plow in the spiritual sense whoever actually reaches out his hands in order to begin to follow me don't hanker back to the things that would draw you back away from following Jesus from proceeding in a straight line if you like of discipleship in the service of Christ again there are many things that could do that for us many things that could get in the way and we would look back upon and in fact Luke makes a very powerful reference in chapter 17 to what happened with a woman in Sodom where you find Lot's wife on the day that Lot went out from Sodom fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all remember Lot's wife what happened to her was that she was overtaken by the deluge that came upon

Sodom and Gomorrah as God brought his judgment through his natural phenomena upon these towns of the plain here was a woman who had put her hands to the plow she had responded to her husband's appeal to actually follow him to get out of the place and as she put her hands to the plow then she looked back and she delayed and she was caught up in the overthrow so so that's that's why Jesus is saying this if you've put your hand to the plow today one thing that Satan will actually be after you to do is to look back is to try and actually have some regret over what you've done is to look back and hanker back to the things of the world you remember Israel when they came out of Egypt there they were they had come through the Red Sea they had seen the miraculous doings of the Lord so much that he had done to actually secure a safe exit from Egypt and crossing of the Red Sea and not very long after that they were hankering back to

Egypt because the way in the desert proved to be so difficult Paul tells about Demas makes one reference to him very briefly a companion of his in the things of the gospel Demas has forsaken me having loved or fallen in love with this present world you see there was Demas he had put his hands to the plow he was amongst Paul's companions he was there as part of the team of Paul's companions that were leading the gospel message being taken out into the world and now Paul is regretfully and with sorrow saying he has fallen in love with this present world he's looked back he's been sucked back into the world friends there are people today we maybe know some ourselves who've been sucked back into the world who've taken their hands off the plow who're not plowing in a spiritual sense anymore because for one reason or another they've looked back they've not continued following

[44 : 11] Jesus we have to pray for them because everybody who's put their hand to the plow is someone who has known something of the power of God in their lives who has confessed that his hand through the gospel was laid upon them and today we pray for them and we hope that they will come back we long to see them back and we long to welcome them back and we're waiting for them to come back we're trusting that God will do that for them but here's what he's saying to us and just because we're here in a pulpit or you're sitting in the pew it doesn't mean that if you keep on doing that you can't actually go back in your relationship to the Lord so he's saying to me and he's saying to you today following me is about being realistic about what it means taking the things of the Bible that describe the Christian way of life and not being surprised as Peter wrote in his first episode don't be surprised by the trials that are going to come upon here but be ready for them because

Jesus is with you nothing is going to happen in your life however great it may be as a test and as a challenge nothing is going I can guarantee you from the word of God nothing is going to happen in your life that will be bigger than Jesus himself that will be stronger than Jesus himself that will be more mighty than the Holy Spirit the devil will try and persuade you otherwise that it's just too difficult even to begin to follow Christ that these things in the Bible make it very unrealistic for you and for me to be Christians no Jesus saying follow me trust me trust in my word let me accompany you through life let me take charge of your life put your hands to the plough and having put your hand to the plough don't look back but push on in the work of the kingdom in the service of Christ to the honor and glory of his name may he bless this word to us once again now let's conclude our worship today singing once again we're singing again in

Psalms 119 this time it's from the Scottish Psalter version at verse 57 on page 404 thou my sure portion art alone which I did choose O Lord I have resolved and said that I would keep thy holy word with my whole heart I did entreat thy face and favor free according to thy gracious word be merciful to me and then verse 60 I did not stay nor linger long as those that slothful are but hastily thy laws to keep myself I did prepare verses 57 to 60 to God's praise good Wine I shall p blade out alone ■ Extension To o'er to Yeah I am would want over

Would keep thy holy word When thy whole heart I didn't treat Thy face unfavorable A glory to thy gracious word Be merciful to me I fought upon my former ways And in my life will try Until thy testimony's pure

My feet then turn it high I did not say nor linger though As those that sought for life But hastily I lost to keep Myself I did prepare Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen Amen

[50 : 01] Amen Amen Amen Amen