

Fit for the Kingdom

Introduction

The Text

⁵⁷ 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.” ⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹ Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57–62)

- A. What we have here really, in my estimation, is a further fleshing out of those hard words we dealt with back up in vv. 23-25 of this same chapter. Let me just read them again to you here: “²³ And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?’”
1. We might have read those words and said: “All well and good, but what does that really mean? Take up my cross daily and follow Him?”
 - a. That sounds hard, but so long as it’s never really fleshed out, it kind of loses its teeth. If we don’t really know how it touches the details of our everyday lives, then we end up feeling okay, even as we’re kind of wiggling out of it. “Am I taking up my cross or not? I don’t know. I guess I am. I call myself a Christian. I said the prayer. I raised my hand when the pastor called for decisions. I go to church on Sundays. I guess, yeah, I’m taking up my cross.”
 - i. Well, our text this morning is going to test this logic a bit. Because in it we start to see what taking up our cross and following Jesus really means.
- B. There are three men, three potential disciples here that Jesus encounters. Each man presents us with a particular problem at the heart level (that I’ll identify for us). And each man is also issued a particular call from Christ aimed to address that problem.
- C. Now, we’re going to look at these encounters one by one. But before we do that it seemed important to me to make one note up front.
1. It seems clear from the way that these encounters are recorded for us by Luke here that the emphasis is not actually on these individuals themselves. For, after all, they are never named, never described, and we never even hear how they ultimately respond to Jesus’s words. Do they follow or not? We are not told.

- a. With an intentional ambiguity blurring these details, we are not permitted to get distracted with someone else’s story. Instead, we are, rather, invited to bring our own stories into the text.
 - i. By not recording for us how these three men respond, we are instead forced to face the question: How would I respond? What would I say? What would I do? Am I ready to take up my own cross and follow Him if this is what it entails?

(1) Uncalculated Enthusiasm? . . . Count the Cost! (vv. 57-58)

The Problem of Uncalculated Enthusiasm

- A. With encounter number one there in vv. 57-58, we are presented with the problem I would describe as Uncalculated Enthusiasm.
 - B. Let me show you what I mean: “As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go’” (v. 57).
 - 1. Now on the surface of it, we would think: “What great news is this?! Finally, a disciple who is willing to go all out for Jesus!” “I will follow you wherever you go.” Is this not the model disciple? Is this not what we all ought to strive to say? How many of us hold things back from Christ? How many of us are prone to say things like: “I will follow You here or there . . . but not there.”
 - C. So you would think Jesus would leap for joy at this man’s words: “Finally, I found a sold-out one!” But He does no such thing. He’s too smart for that. He sees the heart.
 - 1. He knows He’s dealing here with the type of soil He spoke of back when He gave the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8). There are those people who, when the seed of the gospel is sown, “they receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away” (v. 13).
 - D. There is initial enthusiasm here but it is uncalculated.
 - 1. This brother has perhaps seen some wonderful things from Christ—the miracles, the teachings, the power, the crowds—and he is excited about what is in store. He wants to be on the winning team. He is ready to follow Jesus wherever he goes, but this is only because he has a mistaken notion about where Jesus is, in fact, going—to a throne; to a place of prestige and power.
 - 2. He has enthusiasm, but he has no idea what following Jesus will actually cost him. He shoots up with joy when he thinks it’s all good, but when it gets hard he will fall away.

The Call to Count the Cost

- A. So Jesus senses the need to push back on this enthusiasm: “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’” (v. 58).

1. It's a sobering word, intended not necessarily to douse this man's enthusiasm or quench his spirit. But it certainly is intended to get him to slow down and think—to Count the Cost.
- B. Jesus' situation while on the earth is worse than beast or bird. "At least they have a home here. I don't even have that."
1. Wasn't that the meaning of the manger in Bethlehem? There's no room for Him among mankind. O sure, He can sleep with the animals, but He doesn't truly belong there either.
 2. And of course this whole notion of the Messiah's homelessness, as it were, will finally culminate in His death on the cross. It's as if all humanity was saying to Him in violent protest: "Get off of my land! Get out of my world!"
- C. So He is here pushing back on this brother and saying, in essence: "I am not first going to a throne, I am going to a cross. Will you follow Me even there? Because that's where I'm headed."

K-E-V-S-L-A

- A. What a question for us to consider here in Silicon Valley, where it seems almost as if we have the whole world at our fingertips.
- B. Can I just tell you, a little while ago my family and I were driving back from visiting the grandparents in Folsom, and while we were driving down the 87 we came upon a Tesla. In other areas of the country, I imagine this is a pretty exciting affair, but around here it's just another Tesla. Nonetheless, as we got closer I noticed the license plate. It was one of those personalized ones and here's what it said: K-E-V-S-L-A. Now, I realize this is conjecture, but my guess is that this dude driving the car was named Kevin. And so his license plate is this creative blend of both his name and his car: KEVSLA. Cute, right?
1. But you see what this pictures for us, don't you? There's this tendency in us to merge our names, our identities, with our stuff. We don't know who we would be without our possessions, without our comforts, without the things of this world. We spend so much of our time and energy trying to accumulate more and more. There's status in driving a Tesla, there's a feeling of success, of I've made it. And we long for that, to finally feel like we've got our slice of the pie.
 - a. In other words, we want to make our home in this world.
- C. But Jesus is pushing back on us in this text and saying, in effect: "Would you follow Me? Yeah, okay, the tech execs might have their Teslas, the average folk might have their Hondas, but the Son of Man doesn't even have bike—I'm walking with my thumb in the air. That's how I get from point A to point B while I'm here. Are you able to turn in your keys—with all the comfort, all the status, all the stuff, and follow Me?"
- D. Listen, this doesn't mean necessarily that you shouldn't have a car. It doesn't mean that you're in sin if you own a bed.

1. But it does mean, that your heart has been uprooted from these things and re-rooted in Christ. You've left this world for Him. And if trials come that take this stuff from you, you might hurt, you might cry, but you're not fundamentally destroyed. Your identity isn't crushed. You know the One you're following. You knew what you were getting into.

(2) Principled Postponement? . . . Commit Already! (vv. 59-60)

The Problem of Principled Postponement

- A. We move now to consider the second encounter there in [vv. 59-60](#), and it is here that we are presented with yet another problem and call. The problem now, it seems, is what I might describe as Principled Postponement.
- B. Before I can flesh this out further, the first thing we must realize is that this man is quite opposite from the first. The first was eager, zealous to follow, but Jesus had to slow him down. This man is hesitating it would seem and so Jesus has to speed him up.
 1. Here is the person who hears and sees and kind of likes it but is still postponing full commitment, still shuffling his feet. Therefore, Jesus does not wait for this man to come up to Him with some promise or pledge, but, rather, Jesus goes after him instead: ["Follow me" \(v. 59a\)](#).
- C. Now, it is in the response of this man here that we start to see what I mean by Principled Postponement. Look at it there in [v. 59b](#): ["But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."](#)
 1. Now I say this is "Principled" because it seems on the face of it to be a decent request. He is not asking to go and have his share of worldly pleasure, to accumulate riches first, or sleep around a bit, and then come.
 - a. No, he is talking about fulfilling his duties as a son. The burial of one's father was regarded as a significant responsibility in Judaism at this time.
- D. But Jesus knows the heart. And he knows that there is something underneath this request that must not go unaddressed. There is something in this man that keeps postponing the decision, putting off the final surrender of all things to Christ.
 1. Commentators go different directions at this point, but many conclude that there really is a bit more to the request than we first perceive.
 - a. We read it and think that the man's dad just died and he needs to quickly bury him and he'll be on his way following after Jesus. But we don't realize that it is highly unlikely for this man to be out and about if his father had truly just died. For according to Jewish law, contact with the dead in this manner would render him unclean at this point.
 - b. So more likely is it, then, that either (1) This man is saying: "My father is near death, we're not quite sure when it's coming, but I need to stick around a while to take

care of it”; or (2) Perhaps he is referring to a practice that was occurring around Jerusalem in this time where the body of the deceased would first be buried, then left to rot for a year, so that after that the bones could be then placed in an ossuary box and set in a tomb.

- E. Whatever the case, one thing seems clear: The man is not ready to follow, but, behind the smokescreen of principle, he is postponing. He sounds righteous, he sounds like a good Jewish son, but he is truly noncommittal and scared of what it will mean to go all out for Christ.

“But Please Not Yet”

- A. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his dealing with this text brought in St. Augustine as an example at this point. Before his conversion, Augustine quite openly speaks of his unbound lust for women and addiction, really, to sex.
 - 1. But, in time he was brought to face the gospel and the teachings of Christ. And he was intrigued by it, interested in it, but he was yet unwilling to let go of his sin.
 - a. Indeed, he records a prayer of his from this time in his life. It went like this: “Grant me chastity and self-control, but please not yet” (Confessions, p. 198). In other words: “I want to follow you at some point, and surely I plan to, but I’m having a bit too much fun here now.”
- B. Now, interestingly, he too also hid this postponement under a thin veil of principle. He claimed he still had much studying to do, he still needed to look further into the claims of Christ and Christianity before he could rightly make up his mind.
 - 1. But he writes later, in effect: “O I knew. I already knew. Jesus is the way the truth and the life. I just wanted sin more than I wanted Him. Even though,” Augustine would say, “the sin was a burden to me.”
- C. I wonder if you have ever been in this sort of place. Perhaps you are there even right now. You have been keeping a safe distance behind Christ for a little while now. You like the teachings well enough. You like the gatherings, the music, the fellowship. But you maintain this sort of principled postponement. “I’m just not sure. I need a little more time. I have all these other things I must do first and then maybe.”

The Call to Commit Already

- A. Well, it’s into this sort of thing that Jesus speaks next. Look at the call that he issues to this man in our text: “And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (v. 60). It’s the call, if I may put it bluntly, to Commit Already.
 - 1. I actually get the phrase from the Christmas movie Elf. Do you remember that? When the boy is reading what people want for Christmas from Santa’s list? He finds the news anchor’s name and reads this: “Charlotte Denon wants a Tiffany engagement ring and for her boyfriend to stop dragging his feet and commit already.”

- a. Isn't that it though? Can't we kind of be like this boyfriend with Jesus? We shuffle our feet. We like some of the benefits, we like the idea of a relationship with Him, but we don't want to go in all the way, for fear of what that's going to mean, what it's going to change.
- B. Throughout the Scriptures there is this emphasis on the present moment and an awareness that time is always marching and you know not what tomorrow may bring for you. Therefore, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts . . ." (Heb 3:15).
 - 1. Stop postponing the matter. Set your priorities straight now, today! If you have been putting off decision for Christ, put it off no longer. If He has been convicting your heart of sin, turn from it straightaway! I don't care what earthly responsibilities are clamoring for your attention. I don't care what matters may seem more pressing to you in the moment. There is nothing more pressing than this very thing.
- C. And that is precisely what Jesus is trying to help this brother see there again in v. 60: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."
 - 1. It's a bit enigmatic, but the essence is this: If, as you say, you are truly concerned with caring for the dead, give yourself to proclaiming the message that can bring the dead to life.

(3) Divided Loyalties? . . . Surrender All! (vv. 61-62)

The Problem and the Call

- A. I haven't left myself much time for this third encounter other than to say that this man brings a bit of the problems of both men before him to the table here.
 - 1. Like the first, he initiates with seeming enthusiasm. But, like the second, he hesitates, he looks back, and wonders, do I really need to make a clean break with all of this? "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home" (v. 61).
- B. The problem here I would describe as Divided Loyalties. "I want a little bit of this and a little bit of that." And Jesus will have none of it. The call is issued, in essence: "Surrender All!" "Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God'" (v. 62).
 - 1. I love the way one commentator puts it: "One cannot call Jesus Lord, as this disciple-aspirant does, and then impose limits on his lordship" (PNTC). We can't say: "You are Lord . . . but not of that!" He either has all of you, or He has none of you.

Striking a Straight Furrow

- A. The picture Jesus gives is simple enough to understand. We are not going to be able to move straight ahead so long as we are looking back. A man pushing a plow must keep his eyes on the line ahead or the furrows will zig and zag in the soil and the sowing and harvesting and everything else will be a mess.

1. And I think that is the point. Many of us wonder why we aren't bearing the fruit we are wanting to, why we're still so stunted in our growth, why our Christian lives seem so powerless. I do think a good part of the problem is due to this divided heart we are often prone to. We want to follow Jesus but we still want the things of this world as well.
 - a. But Jesus says let all of that stuff go—earthly comforts, responsibilities, relationships—let me have it, let me take care of it for you, and then you shall find that you cut straight ahead in your Christian life—that you start actually bearing fruit, finding joy, foreign to you at one point, but now growing stronger . . . even in the midst of suffering.

- B. So, at the end of the day, what we find is that, though these words seem tough to us, though we are prone to think of Jesus as mean and uncaring here—like perhaps He was just in a crabby mood on this particular afternoon, He sounds more like a drill sergeant here than a Good Shepherd . . .
 1. . . . But in spite of first impressions if we a look a little deeper and discern the intent of these words, we find not harshness here, but love, not roughness, but grace. He is trying to help us set our hearts fully on the only One who can truly care for us in every respect. He's trying to save us. He's trying to set us free.

Faith, Hope, and Love

- A. I've been reading in Colossians, and Paul opens the letter with a discussion I wanted to briefly share here. He's writing to them so encouraged, and he says in essence: Because you have faith in Christ, you know that you have a hope secured and laid up for you in heaven, and, therefore, while on the earth, you are able to love freely, courageously, even at pains to yourself. Because you know you've given everything to Him and He's got you. You're free.
 1. That's the sort of place Jesus is trying to take these three men in our text and us.

- B. But what we often do is set our hope on something else, something in this world. We try to make heaven here. Once I get that relationship, or that house, or my kids to actually obey me, then I'll be happy. There's our hope. And then we place our faith in some other God, gospel, Christ to get us there.
 1. So if I want that relationship, well I put my faith in my looks, so I'm hitting the gym constantly, or I put my faith in those dating apps, so I'm constantly perusing, playing the game, learning new and better pick-up lines, or whatever.
 - a. But then now, what kind of fruit am I going to bear? Am I free, bearing the fruit of love, knowing I'm secure in God's hands. No. I'm anxious. It's all on me. I've got to keep it up. And even if I get it, I'm always worried I'm going to lose it.

- C. Don't you see? When Jesus says, "Let me have it all", He's not taking from us. He's giving to us. He's giving us freedom and life in Him. He's giving us a future and a hope.

Going Along the Road

- A. Perhaps all of this comes together when we make one simple observation I've not yet really brought to your attention. And that is this: All three of these encounters occur "as they [are] going along the road" (v. 57a).
1. Jesus is going somewhere, and the call to follow Him as a disciple is to follow Him there. So, then, we ask, where does this road lead? Well, to Jerusalem, of course, where He just told us He will "suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed" (v. 22a).
 - a. So should we expect that we shall share in the fellowship of His sufferings, undoubtedly.
- B. But that is not all is it? For while this road is leading to Jerusalem it does not end there. No! Jesus makes it plain as day: "on the third day [I will] be raised" (v. 22b).
1. The road we are following Christ down passes through suffering, and shame, and death . . . but it ends in glory! It passes beyond this world into the world to come. That's where Jesus is taking us. When this train lets out at the end of this road, you will have no lack, no sorrow, no pain, no tears. You will have God.
- C. He's gone before us, He's here to help us. Let us go to Him now!