Following Jesus

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Preacher: Dr G.N.M.Collins

[0:00] Will you turn with me now to our reading from the New Testament, the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 9, reading again at verse 57.

And it came to pass that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee, whithershoever thou goest.
And the whole concluding part of the chapter, as you would have noticed, is about following. And that surely should be our paramount interest here tonight as we begin the communion season.
To have another look at our discipleship. But we haven't yet got anything to look at. Then to pray the Lord that it may begin from tonight.
And if we have been following, perhaps for many years, to look again at our discipleship.
[1:08] Because this is something we've got to do all along the way to the very end of the journey.
The prayer is needful even to the most experienced Christian.

Hold up my goings, Lord. Me guide in those thy paths divine. So that my footsteps may not slide out of those ways of thine.
Well then, the theme is discipleship. Although our Lord was, during his earthly ministry, despised and rejected of men, as was foretold by Isaiah in the Old Testament, there were times, as we well remember, when his ministry awakened great expectations.
It is at one such time that James and John besought them that they might be given the chief places in his kingdom.
One to sit on his left and the other, on his right and the other on his left. So certain were there that their master was destined for a kingdom. And it is of another such period that we read here.
[2:17] And then, when we read here, certain men revealed an inclination to follow him. And unsparingly, Jesus laid down to them the conditions of discipleship.

He wanted followers. They said of Joseph Arlene that he was insatiably greedy of souls. And that longing was more marked in the master than it ever was in any of his servants, however eminent they became in his service.
But much as Jesus wanted to have men enlist in his service, he didn't want them to be under any illusion as to the nature of the service and the demands that it was going to make upon them.
That didn't mean that he was throwing them back on their own resources or otherwise. Because always when he called his disciples to do some great thing for them, and especially when he gave them the great commission, it was with this assurance, all power is mine.
And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. The posters that we see exhibited at recruitment offices for the services of the crown usually exhibit the attractive side of military or naval or air service.
[4:05] and we see and hear about the conditions of service, the smart uniforms of course, the year of world travel, the possibility of making a very lucrative trade out of military service or any other form of the services of the crown.

It's not just soldiering while you're in the service of the crown, when you're learning something that you can put to good account when your soldiering days are over and so on. But you'll notice that none of these posters says anything about the trials of service and what armed service in the nation is all about.
The defence, the possible aggression of enemies, the hardships, the wounds, the battles. Nothing of that.
Because the whole purpose of the poster is to attract. And too often, I'm afraid, the presentation of the gospel is put just like that.

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One can understand the desire of preachers to attract people, to bring people to decision. we don't want to listen up in the slightest.
[5:51] But, this is one thing we dare not do, create any illusions as to the character of the service to which we are called.

The metaphors that our Lord used and that his disciples and his apostles used were always honest. It's a race. And it calls for the best that is in us. This discipleship. It's a warfare.
And as good soldiers of Jesus Christ we must be prepared to suffer hardship. Now, isn't that a bit off-putting?
Well, you may say so, but contemplate the alternative. What happens when the situation is not honestly and plainly set forth?
[7:00] Jesus tells us in this same gospel, just a chapter or two further on he tells us of a certain man who wanted to build himself a tower perhaps for defence, perhaps for habitation, a good strong home where he could live securely.

they began to build. But he didn't reckon the cost before he laid the foundations.
And you remember what happened. It came to nothing. he didn't have enough to carry through his enterprise to the end.
And he told us too about a king who decided to make war on another king and he didn't measure the opposing forces. Didn't reckon properly whether he had enough.
wherewith to meet the man who was coming against him with a strong army. And so instead of celebrating a marvellous victory as he had hoped to do he had the humiliation in the end of having to send an amber sage desiring conditions of peace.
[8:35] You wouldn't like your Christian life to end like that would you? It wouldn't be a proper Christian life in any case. But you wouldn't like this profession of Christianity that you are making, this religious life would you profess to end like that.

And that's why I say it's so necessary that we should keep an eye all the time on our discipleship. We read this evening that interesting and in a way strange passage of scripture in the seventh chapter of Judges.
Israel was in dire straits. They were up against the Midianites, the Amalekites, the children of the south, a terrific host like the sand on the seashore that could not be numbered.
And when God called Gideon to take action against that innumerable host, and Gideon took up God's commission, all that he succeeded in gathering together was 32,000 men.
And then God said an astonishing thing. I suppose Gideon could hardly have believed his ears. The people that are with thee are too many that I should give Midian into thine hand.
[10:04] So Gideon had to proclaim to the people that if anyone was fearful and afraid let him depart early. He had no use one. And 22,000 men went.

Leaving this handful of 10,000. And then Gideon was astonished before. He was more astonished than ever at the next thing that God said. The men that are with thee are yet too many.
10,000 that I should give Midian into thine hand, lest Israel should bond themselves and say mine own arm hath saved me. And God told them that he put the people to the test at the springs.
And by a simple test he would tell them which men to take and which to reject. Remember the simple test they were thirsty and he brought them to the springs and what bore natural not thirsty men getting the opportunity and receiving permission should slake their thirst.
But how did they do it? Almost all of them threw off the readiness that ought always to characterize the soldier.
[11:27] It was enemy territory remember. The enemy was in occupation anything could happen any moment. But they thought only of their thirst they must get down to those springs and slake their thirst.

But 300 of them weren't going to throw off military readiness for the sake of slaking their thirst. And they just lapped water from the brooks.
Capped their hands for that purpose. And God said that's your army. There were only 300 of them. That's your army. With those men I will deliver Midian into thine hand.
Jesus and let me emphasize this Jesus always wanted as he still wants people to know what they're doing when they cast in their lot with him. He bids men count the cost.
Now in the passage that I want to speak on more particularly tonight for a little he's laying down the terms of discipleship to three men three representative figures I I sure we could find their

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counterparts in all our congregations.
[12:52] I want to speak to them like this that in the first man you have the impulsive man. Now listen to him. It came to pass that as they went to the way a certain man said unto him Lord I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

That sounds good. What more could any master want than that? You might feel inclined to class this man with the T.I.
of Gath that valiant man who had gone over to the side of King David who you remember when David gave him the opportunity of going away to his own country of Gath and not becoming involved in his troubles in his disturbed kingdom?
He was given this reply by the man to whom he had given permission to go away if he so desired. As the Lord liveth and as my Lord the King liveth wheresoever my Lord the King shall be whether in life or in death there will I servant be also there was a man who had counted the cost Gittite though he was now this man looks rather like him if you take him at the face value of his words you could hardly desire anything more than that could you Lord Lord I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest and he meant it I'm sure he meant it he would go the whole way with Christ whatever might happen just as Peter meant it every word effort and
I believe that this man meant to do when he said I'll go with thee wherever you go that's a significant thing that John says about his master in the second chapter of his gospel Jesus he said did not commit himself unto them to those people that were gathering around him in all the excitement of the miracle he did not commit himself unto them he needed not that any should testify to him of man for he knew what was in man Jesus knew this man he needed not that any should testify to him of man for he knew what was in man he knew what had produced the enthusiasm of this passing mood he was attracted perhaps by the miracles that
[16:25] Jesus wrought perhaps by what the people were saying about Jesus because you remember there were times when they said great things about him he was Isaiah he was Jeremiah he was perhaps John the Baptist one or other of these men came back from the dead this man heard the doctrine of his kingdom and wanted to be on the winning side and he believed that he had discovered the winning side as indeed he had but he wasn't fully convinced of it if this man had been with the multitudes who followed Jesus into Jerusalem at his last entry when they spread their garments in the way and waved palm leaves he would have out shouted the best of them in his Hosanna to the son of David yet if he stood among the crowd when

Pilate put that fatal question what shall I do with Jesus which is called the Christ he might very well have shouted all the rest away with him crucify him crucify him we have no king but Caesar at all events these are the extremes that the enthusiast is capable of we've seen it too often haven't we I sometimes wonder if John Bunyan found his prototype of pliable in this man you remember pliable of course pliable who was distressed when his neighbour Christian had left the city of destruction took off on this mad cap errand of his making for the wicked gate and for the celestial city that lay beyond and in his heart of hearts he was sorry for him and he went after him to talk him out of this mad thing that he was doing forsaking his wife his family his all shutting his ears against their entreating cries and saying that he fled life life eternal life but you remember what happened instead of talking
Christian out of his journey and out of his purpose he was talked into it as he listened to the testimony of Christian he said come neighbor Christian the hearing of this doeth the heart good come let us mend our pace he was more eager than Christian himself it would seem at least he found the going easier because you see he wasn't carrying a burden he could mend his pace that was alright until they came to the test of the slow despond and there they both fell in and Christian not withstanding that he had a burden or should I say because he had a burden splashed his way through to the far side the side that was nearer the city the celestial city upon which his heart was set whereas pliable yes because he had no burden went back to the city of destruction now with characteristic earnestness
John Bunyan gives us another glimpse of pliable before he takes us away from him he shows us when he went home he wasn't a hero with his neighbors they didn't admire him he was cowardly and nobody admires the coward and says Bunyan and oh don't you feel the sting of these words he sat sneaking among them and that was the end of the venture what goes wrong well Jesus answers that question in the parable of the sower as in many other places but I'm taking the parable of the sower in particular because it's very illustrative about theme the sower sower on different kinds of

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ground and had you gone to the field which he sower shortly after the sowing you would have seen one patch there well sprung and very promising you might have said not knowing the character of the soil well the farmer's going to get his bosom full of sheaves out of that part of the field anyway but if you had gone back in time of harvest you'd have been surprised that bit that looked so promising before it was now burnt black barren not a sheave what had gone wrong well said Jesus the cause was superficiality it had no depth and shallow soil is alright so long as life doesn't become too testing but oh when it does pity the man who has nothing more everything collapsed now Jesus wanted to save this man from any such fate as that and he said to him in effect if you follow me you are setting your face to difficulty just as he said to the disciples quite clearly in the world you shall have tribulation the servant is not greater than the master but he did have this be of good cheer I overcome the world I am with you and you share my victory well let's transfer our attention to the second man and I want to speak of this man as the diffident man he said unto another you see the other was not a volunteer he was a conscript he said unto another follow me but he said

[23:37] Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father Jesus said to him let the dead bury the dead but go thou and reach the kingdom of God we said about the first man that he apparently hadn't counted the cost it rather looks as if this man had counted the cost but he was wrong in his reckoning he wanted I think we can judge this from his answer he wanted to be a disciple but he was dogged by the demands of discipleship and the Lord brought him to the point follow me have done with all this vacillation all this hesitation make up your mind pull yourself together follow me and a chill bread went through the man

Lord yes I want to follow not just at the moment I can't get let me first go and bury my father and Jesus said unto him let the dead bury their dead but go thou and preach the kingdom of God now what was our Lord doing here do you think he was encouraging a spirit of indifference indeed callousness to kinsmen to loved ones that's what he meant that would have been quite out of character for him how tenderly he spoke to his mother what an example he gives us there as in all else even in the agonies of the cross when he saw her there he thought about forgot his own sufferings to speak a word that would meet her needs in the cheerless days ahead son behold thy mother mother behold thy son

John took her from that house to his own house so it wouldn't be like Jesus to say to this man you've just got to toughen yourself and be callous in your relationship with the rest of the family this is something big I'm asking you to do and it was something big but Jesus wanted the thing to be in tenderness and with a real sense of duty it's a bit difficult perhaps is it to arrive at his meaning when he said let the dead bury their dead but go thou and preach the kingdom of God after all it wasn't a great thing you might say that the man was asking just time to go and bury his part so George Utton Smith tells a very interesting thing in this connection when he was in

Palestine exploring for his great book the best book I think that he ever did write the historical geography of the holy land he had the services of a young Arab in a certain area that he was exploring and became greatly attached to him the young man was intelligent and a willing servant and when Sir George was moving on to the next area he wanted this young fellow to go with him the young fellow become very attached to him and interested in the work but he shook his head sadly and said I'm sorry sir I cannot leave home till I bury my father and George Adam Smith tells us that his father was sitting there at the tent door not far away looking hale and hearty in his old age he wasn't dead so that what this man was saying just as that other man was saying in all possibility was

I must continue in parental duty that's my present duty and doesn't that explain what Jesus said that sounded so callous at the first hearing where the dead bury the dead for thou entreat the kingdom of God Jesus was really telling this man you must not let anything anybody come between you and me if you are going to be my disciple yes discipleship can be as difficult as all that didn't we sing about it a moment ago oh daughter take good heed and decline and give good ear thou must forget thy kindred all and father's house most dear it can be like that it often is at all events it would seem that the critical moment had come in the life of this man he had been playing with the idea of discipleship long enough and

[29:35] Jesus rallied him follow me I wonder what happened I often wonder what happened there's a time we know not when a place we know not where that marks the destiny of men for glory or despair that align by us unseen that crosses every path the hidden boundary between God's

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patience and his love my dear friend this is the biggest thing that will ever happen to you in life don't miss it Christ inviting you to become a disciple and saying him that cometh unto me oh I know all about his past I know all those thoughts of unfitness and unworthiness but him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out let nothing rob you of the present opportunity there was a minister in this city many years ago now who was visited on one occasion by a young one in his congregation who had made a profession of faith and she came to see a minister to admit to him quite frankly that things were not as they used to be the joy had gone out of her life the joy of discipleship that she once knew and her discipleship wasn't yielding her the satisfaction that it once did and her minister listened patiently till she was finished and then quietly took up his new testament and read from the act of the apostles where

Peter was jibbing at the Lord's command to go down to Cornelius and open the door of faith to the Gentiles remember Peter's blunt refusal not so Lord thy servant has never eaten anything that is common or unclean it was the vision that he had seen of the unclean things prohibited by the law and the Lord was saying arise Peter kill and eat not so Lord not so and he read that passage to her and he said I wonder if it's like that with you he said you see the Lord brought Peter to the point but he dared not say not so it must be water and still and still delude himself into thinking that he was a disciple and so he brought it to the point and he said you've got to face it like this tonight if you're going to call him Lord you can't say not so it must be one or the other that's what Jesus was saying to this man oh that we all of us who profess the name of Jesus could say to him tonight honestly and sincerely what that saintly soul Francis Ridley
Hamerkel said to him for thee my heart has never a trustless name that's the discipleship that Jesus was how do we compare let's pass on look at the third man I speak of this man as the irresolute man now here again you've got a volunteer listen to him Lord I will follow thee so far so good but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house I heard John McNeil remark once when he was reading this chapter this verse indeed and another also said Lord I will follow thee but let me first and John looked up from his reading and said what a procession me first and then Christ and Jesus said to him no man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God
I said that the first man hadn't counted the cost by all appearances the second man had done so but he was wrong in his reckoning and here you have a third man who had counted his cost also but he's not sure he wants to go over it again he's playing for time he volunteers to be a disciple but he attaches a condition to the offer let me go home and say farewell to them that are at home well but that was a reasonable request wasn't it that wouldn't take long when Elisha made a similar appeal to Elijah when Elijah called him to be his successor as prophet in Israel when Elisha wanted to go home and see his friends
Elijah didn't put any obstacle in his way when the man out of home Jesus cast the legion of devils wanted to follow Jesus Jesus said something like this to him that's not your priority go home the very thing that he wasn't allowing this man to do go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and he departed and began to publish in Decapolis how great things the Lord hath done for him and all men did marvel that was following Jesus going home can sometimes be following Jesus that was the beginning that was where he had to begin his problem no one wonders why Jesus dealt with this man in this way and here we can only conjecture was it and I believe it was that it was dangerous for this man to go home you see something comes into the case of this man that doesn't come into the case of the others did you notice the figure that Jesus used no man having put his hand to the plough there would appear to have been an act of commitment somewhere at some time he had put his hand to the plough he had taken up the work and he wasn't so sure about things and it rather looks as if he was wanting an opportunity to think things over quietly
[38:10] I will follow the but and you'll never follow Jesus successfully without but there's an interesting figure that Jesus used in replying to no man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God can you envisage it a ploughman out in the field and looking back over his shoulder while his hand is to the plough when he reviewed the far end I'm quite sure of this it wouldn't reflect any credit on him it would be very curvy very crooked and he wouldn't be in the running for any prizes that would go and Jesus was saying to him that's not the spirit of discipleship ploughing requires concentration ploughing requires determination if a man is going to plough a straight fellow he's got to give his whole mind to it what Jesus wants is that

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Pauline concentration which comes out in the epistles of the Philippians there's one thing I do oh not that the apostle Paul was just a man of one thing but this was the supreme thing the other things were subordinate unimportant by comparison he lost sight of them because of this one thing I do forgetting the things that are behind not looking back but reaching forth to the things that are before I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus that's the spirit of discipleship that's putting the hand to the plough and keeping it there and concentrating on the judgment well if we have been a little bit introspective tonight

I just meant it to be that because I think it's good for us all to have a good hard look at ourselves especially as we begin a communion season like this and see just how we are and where we are and how we stand in relation to Christ and in relation to those promises that came so readily from us perhaps many years ago perhaps recently what's our discipleship like tonight what have we yet begun I pray that this night may be a night of reconsecration for us for us all those of us who already professed to be his disciples but I pray most of all that if anybody here tonight has not responded to the call that makes the disciple makes a man a disciple and if he hears the voice of Christ saying as he did to this man follow me that man will take him at his word trusting that whatever the cost of discipleship

Christ sends no man of warfare at his own charges but says to every man whom he calls just what he said to Paul my grace is sufficient for thee for my strength is made perfect in weakness do you remember that story of Roland Hill and the lady whom he put up for auction it was a strange thing to do but you know the story probably perhaps it's better known in verse than it is in the prose version he was preaching somewhere on the outskirts of London and the approaches to London in those days were quiet as compared to what they are today and the congregation was immense and it over spilled the road there wasn't much traffic of course you could do that sort of thing in those days but then a coach appeared bearing a lady a title lady who was on her way to the royal court and one of the outriders cried to the preacher to clear the road so that the lady might pass but Roland hill was always quick to see an opportunity he replied that he would do that but he was first going to put her up for auction and as the people listened in amazement he made known the offer that the world was making for her soul the devices that the devil was resorting to to gain possession of her soul and then the third bidder

Jesus and the preacher asked the title lady and said it's a true incident in a very remarkable light asked her which of the bids was she going to take and he put it to the man of sorrows Jesus and asked him what he would give for her soul but he didn't tell what he was going to give well he did but he didn't lay the principal emphasis there he told her what he had already given he'd given his life for her salvation and then the preacher pressed for an answer and the story goes like this she took from her hands the jewels the coronet from her brow

[44:47] Lord Jesus she said as she bowed her head the highest bidder thou thy life for my sake thou gavest and I take thine offer and take it now let us pray oh Lord our God we thank thee for thy wondrous patience toward us often thou hast presented us with the challenge of the gospel often thou hast set before us oh not only the difficulties of discipleship but the attractions only were so dim oh Lord in our vision we're not so ready as the apostle Paul was to count the present afflictions as nothing in comparison with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory Lord give us a glimpse of that tonight that we may mend our faltering discipleship and be ever only all for thee

Amen

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