

The cost of following

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[0 : 00] Now let us turn to Luke chapter 9 at verse 57. Luke chapter 9 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 whithersoever thou goest.

And Jesus said unto him, Foxes of holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go, bid them farewell which are at home at my house.

And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. The prevailing idea in many quarters of what constitutes a Christian is that it's merely a matter of church attendance, or a matter of respectability, a matter of good social behavior.

But when we go back to the founder of Christianity, that is to Christ himself, he breaks our complacency.

[1 : 29] And in no ambiguous fashion, Christ Jesus emphasizes the cost that is involved in following him. And he demands that that aspect of discipleship should be given careful attention by all of us.

Do you remember how Jesus spoke about two different peoples who had to make an assessment of their responsibility towards what they were going to do?

The first had to do with building. Here is a builder, says Jesus. Now, you don't start building unless you are quite sure that you're going to finish and complete the structure.

It's foolishness if you start building and then give up halfway through. And so, in the same way, says Jesus, it's foolishness on the part of a king with his army to go to war if he realizes that halfway through the battle he's going to capitulate and ask for terms of peace.

No, if you are going to make war with an enemy, you must be absolutely convinced that you're right and that you're going to carry through this warfare to its completion.

[2 : 57] And you see, this is what Jesus demands from us, that if you're going to be a Christian, you must sit down and count the cost. You must be prepared to take what it has to go all the way.

No going halfway and then turning back. Now, in these instances before us, let's consider them together.

And we notice here that following Christ involves self-denial. Let's remember that, that following Christ involves self-denial.

If we were to read this incident that is recorded for us in the gospel according to Matthew, it's he who tells us that the man who spoke to Jesus or with whom Jesus spoke was a scribe.

It came to pass that as they went in the way, a certain man, Matthew says it was a certain scribe, said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

[4 : 02] And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. You see, the man was well enough intentioned.

I will follow thee, he said, whithersoever thou goest. And that is true of all who want to follow Christ. You know, in the book of Revelation, it tells us of those who followed Christ, that they are they who follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth.

And that is true of Christian discipleship, that you are prepared to follow Christ, prepared to follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth.

But you see, what this man said was said in haste, and in a spirit of self-confidence. And he had to be cautioned.

And that is what Jesus does at this point in time with this man. He gives him a caution. Now, says Jesus, before you make up your mind too quickly, just you consider all the implications that are involved here.

[5 : 18] You see, as a scribe, this man was accustomed to a life of quietness. He was accustomed to a life of ease.

You see, following Christ, as John Calvin puts it, would mean walking among thorns, marching to the cross, amidst the afflictions of life.

Now, there is no question, when we are confronted by our Lord, that he commands and compels our admiration. And when that happens to us, on the impulse of the moment, we are ready to do anything for Christ Jesus.

This is why sometimes you hear of a certain individual, and all of a sudden they get excited about Christ. And they get excited about religion.

And it's at white heat. And then suddenly the whole thing fizzles out. You see, sometimes when you are confronted by Christ, there is an emotional disturbance in your whole life.

[6 : 48] And you've got to be careful when that emotional disturbance is created. Because then you might say you are going to do a certain thing, and in the end you don't do it.

You remember Peter carried along on the impulse of the moment. When he realised that things were beginning to get difficult for the apostolic band, and when he began to realise that perhaps death was in front of his master, this is what he said, Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death.

Ah, the same bold man who was ready to go to prison and to death was the same man who denied Christ. I know not the man. Did we not see you with him?

I don't know him. I don't know this man that you're speaking about. No wonder when he said that he was ready to go to prison and to death, Jesus cautioned him and Jesus said, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

So you see, sometimes our Lord offers us a caution. It's all very well to be carried away on the impulse of the moment and like this scribe to say, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

[8 : 28] He didn't know what he was talking about. He was a scribe. He was surrounded by the comforts of life. He didn't know what self-sacrifice might mean for him.

And so Jesus says to him, you know, foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.

Are you prepared to follow me to that extent? We must remember that the Christian life means discipline. It means self-denial, even to the point of sacrifice.

Do you remember how Jesus said on one occasion the servant, he said, is not greater than his Lord? If it means poverty for me, it may mean poverty for you, says Jesus.

you see, look at what it cost the Lord to be our Savior. He was rich, rich beyond compare.

[9 : 47] We are all taken up just at the moment with Prince Charles, the most eligible young men in the world, they say.

Riches, he's got riches. But you see, the riches that he has fade into insignificance in comparison with the riches of Christ.

Christ, the Son of God, the Heir of Heaven. And yet, ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich.

And so, this Lord of Glory was born in a stable and cradled in a manger.

As the hymn puts it, he came down to earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all. And his shelter was a stable and his cradle was a stall.

[11 : 12] And when Jesus refers to foxes and birds, he does so as the commentator, the Anglican commentator Plummer puts it, because these creatures lead a vagabond life.

And that's the kind of life you see that our Lord had to live a vagabond life. And now this man who says, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest must remember that it might involve for him leading a vagabond life.

Oh, there were friends to give Christ of their bounty. Yet, nonetheless, he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

When our Lord was put to death, they hanged him on a cross, as if to say that this earth wasn't good enough for him to die on.

Suspend him between earth and heaven. He's not fit for the soles of his feet to walk on earth. And when he was buried, they had to find a borrowed, they had to borrow a grave for him.

[12 : 41] No room for Christ in the inn. No room for Christ in the world. No room for Christ even in the grave.

Room for everyone else and everything else, but no room for Christ. And if then we are going to follow Christ, we must be ready to deny ourselves, to take up the cross, to follow him.

The life of affluence and the life of ease enjoyed by the rich young ruler had to be discarded. In his case, it had become an obstruction.

Sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me. You see, the point that Jesus is making, and it must be this, that you don't become a Christian merely on the basis of some emotional decision, which may mean nothing at all.

You become a Christian on the basis of a calculation that you have made, and which may involve you in the loss of all and everything that you have.

[14 : 15] This is how it was for the apostles. This is how it must and might be for us. For the apostles it meant this, we are fools for Christ's sake.

We are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place.

That's what it means sometimes to be a Christian. Are you prepared to be a fool for Christ? Are you prepared to accept it in your neighborhood where you live, and those neighbors who know you, those workmates who have known you for a long time, now they're going to call you a fool.

Are you prepared to be a fool for Christ? people who will say, you know, that fellow, that woman, they're queer. They're religious fanatics.

This man had to be prepared to be involved in the cost. I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. Very well, says Jesus, you can follow me, but remember, foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but I haven't a place to lay my head.

[15 : 46] Will you follow me there? And following Christ, too, means, or demands, utter dedication to his cause.

You see, if this case, this man that we've been talking about, was the case of a precipitated disciple, in the case that's now before us, we have that of a procrastinating disciple.

Jesus said unto another, follow me, but he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

You see, when this man was confronted with the claims of Christ, the man had his own responsibilities and they were legitimate responsibilities. Indeed, what was a besetting difficulty for this man was what has been described by someone as the highest and the most beautiful of earth's responsibilities.

What's the highest? best? And the most beautiful of earth's responsibilities. This man had a home and a parent to whom he was devoted and attached and so the claims of kindred were allowed to come between him and Christ.

[17 : 22] I've got a home, he says. I've got an aged parent and I'm responsible to him. When he's dead and gone, I will come and I will do what you want me to do.

Now, what Christ would have us bear in mind is this, that his call is superior to any other call however precious and however intimate and however beautiful that call might be.

If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also he cannot be my disciples.

In other words, we must be prepared to regard with indifference the most intimate and the dearest ties that bind us to those in this world in favor of Christ.

Here was this man and he put forward the plea that he had a father to attend to. As soon as death would relieve him of his responsibility he would fulfill the demand of Christ in the ministry.

[18 : 55] But Christ points out, you see, that there are many dead people in the world, spiritually dead, and these people who are spiritually dead, they can attend to such matters as looking after the dead, and seeing to burial.

The important thing is to do the will of Christ. And at this particular moment for this man, it meant preaching the kingdom.

And Jesus says to him, you mustn't allow anything to come in between you and me. You mustn't allow anything to come in between you and this dedication to my cause.

We are taught here, are we not, the need for utter dedication to Christ and to his cause. And is this not the tragedy in the Christian church today, that we are not prepared to be utterly dedicated to Christ and to his cause.

You and I, as we look at the situation that confronts us today, we marvel at people who are absolutely and utterly dedicated to something that they believe in. I marvel at these people in the Labour Party.

[20 : 23] If they want to push their cause, what will they do? March the streets, thousands of them.

Hail, rain or snow, they'll march the streets to put forward their point of view. It might be the same with the Tories, dedicated to capitalism.

They'll do what they believe has to be done, and they are resolved to do it. I've always marveled at communism, Marxism.

They say that if you want to join the Communist Party, then they don't just take you as just coming along as you are, they indoctrinate you. Until they've got you to the point where you're prepared to say you'll die for communism.

That's dedication. Are we going to be dedicated like that? What's holding us back?

[21 : 42] Is it some family tie, some business commitment? commitment? If that's so, then we've got to allow the dead to bury their dead.

In other words, we mustn't allow ourselves to become entangled to such an extent with things of this present world system that they preclude us from living a dedicated life as Christians.

Remember how the psalmist puts it, hearken, O daughter, and consider and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people and thy father's house.

So shall thy king, shall the king greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy lord, and worship thou him. And then one point more, we must close.

Following Christ, it means, doesn't it, readiness to forsake all for him. Another also said, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go, bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

[22 : 51] And Jesus said unto him, no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. We've talked about the precipitate disciple.

We've talked about the procrastinating disciple. Now let's look at the irresolute disciple. I will follow thee, but, that fatal but.

You see, in this man's case, it was half-heartedness the temptation to go back, to participate in the old associations were too strong for him.

I will follow thee, but let me first go back. Jesus warns about that fatal backward glance.

It's so easy, you see, for us to look back, and it's fatal when we start to look back. There must be a steady, you see, going onwards and forwards.

[24 : 14] You remember the command that was given to Lot and to his family in Sodom and Gomorrah. look look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain, turn your face away, go forward, not back.

Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt. and Christ holds her up as a warning to all not to imperil our souls by rejecting his commands and when he commands us to go forward let's not turn and go back.

Here was a man and he was so unlike Levi the publican who made a banquet for Christ but when he made a banquet for Christ it was in order to introduce his friends to Jesus.

This man you see he wanted to go back and have his last fling. Let me go back just once more to have a last fling with my friends.

A last drink. A last dance. A last involvement in sinful pleasure just one more last time and then I'll be ready to follow you.

[25 : 56] That was the tragedy with regard to Demas. He forsook Paul having loved the present evil world. He wanted to go back to get involved once more in the present evil world.

If we are going to follow Christ we must be done with the past. Prepare to turn our backs once and for all upon the things that are a hindrance to our spiritual well-being.

God with regard to Abraham it tells us that he went out not knowing whether he went for he looked for a city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

And think of Moses. When he was come to years he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Moses once the prince of Egypt the son of Pharaoh of Pharaoh's daughter everything at his disposal everything for him to command but he gave it all up.

[27 : 21] He left the palace of Pharaoh he left the home of Pharaoh's daughter he gave up all the riches of Egypt he preferred to identify himself with the poor people of God than to enjoy the treasures of Egypt.

Think of the spirit of Elisha the prophet isn't that worthy about emulation? Elisha was called to succeed Elijah but Elisha wanted to go back and bid farewell to his loved ones and Elijah allowed Elisha to do that but you know what Elisha did he slew the oxen he destroyed the ploughing instruments and he sacrificed these oxen to God what Elisha was saying was this I'm finished with my past way of life as a ploughman I'm finished with it I've offered myself to God and to him I give myself and my talents and everything that I possess so then following Christ means readiness to forsake all for him you may not have to forsake all in that manner or in that way but you must be prepared to give up whatever it may be that becomes a hindrance from you becoming a committed

Christian if it is the public house you've got to give it up if it is the dance hall floor you must be prepared to give it up if it is your favorite television program you must be prepared to give it up whatever it is that is a hindrance to you from becoming a committed Christian you must give it up j mazel we may pity Christ. But as Campbell Morgan puts it, don't pity Christ, but pity yourself if the world is holding you back. Christ doesn't need your pity. You pity yourself if you are allowing something to hold you back. No obstacle of any kind must hinder us from giving ourselves unreservedly to him and to his service. We must become utterly dedicated to the Saviour, turning neither to the left nor to the right, but pursuing our course onwards and upwards on that pathway where he leads and never looking back. You remember how Cowper puts it in, and he does so so beautifully, where he writes, The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame. So pure a light shall mark the road that leads me to the land.

Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. Ah, let's not look back. Let's look forward and let's give ourselves unreservedly to this Saviour, this Master, this Lord. It's worth it. Let us pray.

O Lord, we pray that we may come to a total commitment of ourselves to thee, casting everything else aside in favour of Christ, pursuing thee whithersoever thou goest, becoming involved in thy service, whatever the cost, and so may we follow thee, wholeheartedly and unreservedly. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.