

If any man will follow

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[0 : 00] We will return this morning to our studies in the Gospel of Luke. And we look this morning at verses in chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel.

And I think it is a very well-known passage beginning at verse 57 of Luke chapter 9. In our multi-faith and multi-culture Britain, we have to be very careful that we do not in any way water down the exclusivity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There can be no doubt that the Bible teaches very plainly that there is only one true religion.

And there is only one way to heaven. The early apostles preached that there is no other name given under heaven amongst men by which we must be saved but the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course they learnt that truth from Jesus himself. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life.

[1 : 33] No man comes to the Father but by me. And it is the way that is Jesus, the way of salvation, that Luke expounds to us principally through the words of Jesus.

Jesus said, in this middle section of his Gospel. His Gospel can really be split into three sections.

And we have dealt with the first section in which Luke's particular intention and we believe the Holy Spirit's intention was to let us know that despite the exclusivity of the Gospel, it is a Gospel, it is a Gospel, it is good news for all men who will listen and who will believe.

Luke's Gospel, we found it out in the first great section, we found it out again and again, it is a Gospel for the world. It is a Gospel for all nations.

It is a Gospel for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. And Luke recorded so many of the works of Jesus to enable us to see that his power, his saving ability, could work in whatever variety of situations he might meet.

[3 : 08] But now we come to the second great section. It has begun in verse 51 of this chapter and it will go right on almost to the end of chapter 19.

And it's about the way. It's about the way of this salvation. Very often it's about the difficulty of the way.

It's certainly about the exclusiveness of the way. You cannot be on this way on your own terms.

You can only be on the way on God's terms. It's exclusive in that way. And the thread that Luke uses to bring all this teaching of Jesus together is the thread of the physical way that Jesus was on.

All the sayings and the teachings of Jesus that are recorded in this part of the Gospel are sayings that Jesus spoke of while he was on the road to Jerusalem for the last time.

[4 : 28] And of course that physical journey was a very vivid picture of the difficulty of the way that is the Christian way.

The physical road to Jerusalem spoke of God's terms of salvation. It was because God had appointed the way of salvation that Jesus must set his face like a flint toward Jerusalem.

And if we are to be his followers, if we are to be his people saved by his power, then that same way, often a difficult way, a narrow way, but a good way, that must be the way of the life of every one of us.

And what it seems to me that Jesus is doing in the encounters with these three different men that are recorded for us from verse 57, what Jesus is doing really is he is setting out the qualifications for those who would be followers.

on this difficult way, the way of salvation, the way of salvation, the way of the cross, the way that leads to heaven.

[6 : 08] What are the qualifications? Well, the first qualification is this. The cost of salvation has to be appreciated.

Jesus set his face to Jerusalem because he appreciated the cost of salvation.

And if we are going to be his followers on that way, we also must appreciate the cost of salvation. This first of the three followers who had their encounters with Jesus in the passage here, this first one is different from the others.

The other two were not willing enough to follow Jesus. But it seems, at least on the face of it, that this first man was too willing to follow Jesus.

I'm willing to go with you wherever you go. But Jesus had to caution him.

[7 : 27] Jesus had to encourage him to delve just a little bit deeper. And he's really saying to the man, as he would say to all of us here this morning, on what basis are you willing to say that you will follow me wherever I go?

Do you have a proper knowledge of what you are saying when you say, I'll follow you wherever you go? Is it that you are thinking only of your own ideas about following Jesus?

And you have not appreciated sufficiently God's ideas about following Jesus? That seems to be what Jesus is saying in the answer that he gives.

I must tell you about what my life is like. What the way that God has prepared for me is like.

And it will be the way that you will have to follow if you are going to follow me. And so he says at verse 58, Foxes of holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay his head.

[8 : 49] The way is such that it will seem that there are more hardships for you in life if you're going to follow me than there are even for the birds of the air and for the animals of the field or of the wood.

Have you really considered God's terms? And if you will consider God's terms, what you must consider, you see, is the one whom you are saying you will follow.

Yes, you say, I want to be in the way of salvation. Yes, I want to be in the way that is the way to heaven. Who would be so foolish as to say that they want another way?

Of course, the way that's the way to heaven is the way for me. Well, Jesus says, I am the one who leads in that way.

You will only be in that way if you follow me closely. Now consider my way. Consider the way that God has prepared for me, his son.

[10 : 21] And what a good time, what an opportune time for considering it, because just in these recent days, I have set my face on the way to Jerusalem, on the way to Jerusalem for the last time in my life here in this earth.

Consider what that means. I am the one, you see, who am the eternal son of God.

There has never been a time in all eternity that I have enjoyed all the glory of the Godhead. Gazing into the face of the Father, knowing the benevolence and the kindness and the love of the Father.

And with the Holy Spirit together, we have known only glory and blessing and peace and power and authority.

But my Father has prepared for me another way. And I have now left the realms of glory.

[11 : 40] And I have begun to experience things that I had not experienced for myself before. I knew about them because I know all things. But now I am experiencing them.

I have become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The trappings of glory have been laid aside for a while.

And I am learning what it is to be submissive to the good will of the Father. And I am learning that that inevitably in this world, this world of sin, this world of rebellion against God, for those who will follow God and be submissive to His will, it inevitably means suffering.

It involves loneliness. It involves deprivation. It involves much tension and pressure because there are those who hate God and there are therefore those who hate the servants of God.

And it's going to mean for me the cross. And it's going to mean for me that experience of being as it were in hell under the judgment of God.

[13 : 13] It's going to mean for me losing all consciousness of the Father's love and care so that I'm going to cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And Jesus goes on and He says to this fresh-faced disciple, this enthusiastic disciple, why is that the way that God has prepared for me?

Well, it's because of the power of sin and the sinfulness of sin and the abomination that sin is in the sight of God.

It's the way that can bring deliverance from sin. It's the way by which my Holy Father will deal with sin so that my followers can be forgiven and be safe and secure.

Now that's the way. And although, of course, you won't have to die for sin as I am dying for sin, you will have to die to sin if you are going to be my follower.

[14 : 44] And that's a difficult way and a hard way. And it's a way that this world naturally doesn't like.

So as long as you're in this world, it will be a difficult way. It will be a way of suffering. It will be the way of walking against the tide.

Have you appreciated the course? Are you still willing for that way? Have you balanced up the sin that naturally you love and that you cling to?

With the Christ who shows his hatred for sin by the way he is willing to die for sin that his people may be seen? Have you seen that the way of following Christ is the way of the cross by which we are crucified to the world and to sin?

Are you willing for that cost? You cannot trivialize this way.

[16 : 01] Are you really willing to face up to the sin that is in your life? that's the question that Christ was putting that day.

And that's the question that he's putting to all of us this morning. Some of you are here this morning and as far as I can judge, but of course, I'm not the final judge.

As far as I can judge, you're putting off following Christ in this way that leads to heaven.

Oh, for all sorts of reasons, you imagine. You're looking for some special experience, you see. If only I had just some real experience of the power of God, then I would believe and then I would follow.

Or you've got some intellectual doubt, there's still some part of the Bible and you can't fathom it and you're saying, how can I follow? I've got to get this difficulty sorted out.

[17 : 24] Will you find any Christian following Christ in the way who doesn't have some difficulty with some part of the Bible, but it's not keeping them from following Christ?

No, whatever delaying tactics you are using, you must face up to the real problem. It's your sin.

And as long as you put up these smoke screens, as long as you use these delaying tactics, it's allowing you to hold on to your sin.

Your sin that will bring you down at last to hell. And you're holding on to it when Christ is saying, follow me.

Difficult the way may be, sacrificial the way may be, dealing with your sin every day of your life, getting it by the neck and strangling it and putting it to death, that will be the difficult way that is the way of the cross.

[18 : 47] But it's the way that leads to heaven. It's the way that is Christ's way that delivers from sin for eternity.

Whatever it costs, have you not yet seen that it is worth it because it is God's way.

And does this word speak to those of us who are on the way? that still we have difficulties weighing up the cost and making progress on the way.

we have some spiritual lack or rather in our lives. We are seeing perhaps that our lives are not what they should be.

There is not that progress towards holy living that there ought to be on this way that is the way of the cross. But oh, we make such excuses. Surely God will take into consideration my circumstances, my home circumstances, my personality difficulties that I have.

[20 : 11] Surely he will understand that it's such a dark day and the church in general is so weak. How can I make the progress in holiness that yes, I ought to be making?

But is the difficulty again our unwillingness to root out sin from our lives because it costs, because it's hard, because it's uncomfortable, because it means us changing the pattern of our living and we're really quite enjoying doing things the way we've been doing it now for some time?

But we've to appreciate the cost. And we've got to continue following. Only the way of obedience, keeping closely with Christ, is the way that leads to heaven.

Amy Carmichael put it like this. Hast thou no scar, no hidden scar on foot or side or hand?

I hear thee sung as mighty in the land. I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star. Hast thou no scar? Hast thou no wound?

[21 : 39] Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent, leaned me against a tree to die, and rent by ravening beasts that compassed me.

I swooned. I swooned. Hast thou no wound? No wound, no scar? Yet as the master shall the servant be, and pierced are the feet that follow me.

But thine are whole. can he have followed far, can he have followed far, who has no wound, nor scar?

The cost of salvation has to be appreciated. And then Jesus says that the spiritual nature of salvation has to be appreciated.

And to make this point, we see in verses 59 and 60, that's where we've reached now, we see that Jesus here uses a very delicate situation to make this point.

[22 : 55] That if we are to follow Jesus in the way, the spiritual nature of salvation has to be appreciated. He uses the situation of a man wanting to go and bury his father.

Now we've had a number of burials in our congregation in these last two or three weeks. A time when a family, out of love for their own, do whatever they can to make sure that the burial is right and proper.

There is in fact real comfort in it. To be able to give one's mind to seeing that all the arrangements are right and suitable.

It's an opportunity to mark at the end of our life the family loyalty and the family love that we feel. And it's good when we see it.

A care and a sensitivity to be put into all these necessary arrangements. And here's a man and he's been bereaved.

[24 : 22] And the arrangements had to be made and indeed the Jewish law saw the necessity of these arrangements and in the Jewish law burial arrangements took precedence over some of their most important rituals that they were supposed to keep in all their detail.

But when the necessities of a burial came along they could set aside for the moment their necessary study of the law. They could set aside the killing of the Passover.

They could delay circumcision. Imagine that central ritual they could delay it until the burial ritual was fulfilled.

fulfilled. And here's this man who comes with that background with this sensitivity. All I need to do is just fulfill this important family duty and then I will follow you.

And Jesus says let the dead bury their dead. You follow me. can you imagine how we might have felt if the Son of God had said that to us in such a situation?

[25 : 48] Now of course we recognize that Jesus knows the hearts of all men. And even the importance of the burial ritual must be used to challenge our minds and our hearts to think clearly about what it really means to follow Jesus.

There is no evidence that Jesus was suggesting that burial rituals shouldn't be engaged in with proper sensitivity and love and care.

but we need to use even that situation to test what is the true belief of our hearts.

You see in the end burial is to do with the body. With the outer shell that has been left.

the soul the spirit has already gone. And so the man needed to be challenged.

[27 : 06] Was it that the things of this world that the burial of the empty shell spoke of was that more important to him than the matters of the soul than the matters of the spirit?

That is certainly what Jesus is getting at when he says let the dead bury their dead. That is the spiritually dead could see to that ritual you see.

That after all is what the spiritually dead are most involved in. The things of this world their attitude very much is eat drink for tomorrow we die. Let us make a life for ourselves here and now and they neglect the needs of the soul.

And so often that is seen in the way they neglect to see the urgency of spiritual matters.

Jesus spoke the parable of the great feast to teach that very lesson the same lesson that he's teaching here. Burial was such an urgent matter in the days of Jesus you still notice that it's the same ritual in Israel to this day you find that when there's some disaster on the same day you see on the television screens the burial taking place.

[28 : 31] It's the tradition of the day no doubt in some way to do with the heat of the country. And so it was an urgent matter that even burial was to do with this world and there's a more urgent matter than that.

That people will fill their lives with duties and responsibilities that they have in this world and that have their end in this world and will neglect their eternal souls.

That really is the great lesson of the parable of the great marriage feast. And when they were sent out with the invitations to come, they had all sorts of excuses.

There were more important things to be dealt with than meeting with Jesus, than seeing to it that the effect of his gospel reached down into their souls and prepared them for eternity.

That's the reason why Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. That's the reason why nothing will divert him, why he sets his face like a flint, despite the difficulty, despite the hardship, despite the terrible foreboding that is welling up in his human heart, despite the fact that he will sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane and say, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, despite all that would seek to be drawing him back from that terrible place, Calvary, he will go, and he will not divert from going, because the eternal destiny of sinners is at stake.

[30 : 38] that's what we're dealing with this morning. That's how important this way is.

That's why we must commit all to Jesus. Even if he would keep us from an important funeral, even if he would separate us from our families to do his will, we must lay all at his feet, because the most important thing in our lives is our eternal soul, and only Jesus can save us from hell, and only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from all sin.

And whatever choices have to be made in life, it's Jesus first, because only Jesus can deliver my soul from hell.

That's the message. And then there's a final message. We have to appreciate the cost of salvation if we're going to follow Jesus in the way.

We have to appreciate the spiritual nature of salvation if we're going to follow Jesus in the way. And we are to appreciate the final hope of salvation if we're going to follow Jesus in the way.

[32 : 38] Perhaps the way that Jesus deals with the last man is the most surprising of all. Not even allowed to say farewell.

Not even allowed just a little while for the common courtesies. But again you see by Jesus' reply, it's not whether or not one will be allowed the common courtesies.

That's not really what Jesus has in mind. His reply makes this perfectly clear. It's the state of the man's heart that is Jesus' concern.

if he's going to follow Jesus and he's going to be looking back, if he's going to be looking back wistfully to things that he has to give up, to things that are behind, rather than keeping looking forward, then he'll be found unfit at the end.

he'll get into difficulties that will mean that he cannot follow Jesus closely. We've got to understand that the Christian life with all its difficulties can only really be lived if we are sure of what's ahead of us.

[34 : 15] that was the way that Jesus faced the cross. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before him.

Because of the joy of resurrection, because of the joy of heaven, he could follow the will of God. And that's what God promises to all who will follow Jesus.

And that's of course why he asks us first of all to sit down and count the cost. Whatever may be involved, whatever we may have to give up, whatever we may have to leave behind, as we follow Jesus and as we follow the apostle Paul, we must be able to say this one thing I do for getting all things that are behind, I press toward the mark.

And so we have to consider, do we really want heaven? Do we really want holiness?

Because without holiness no man will see the Lord. Do we really want to get rid of our sin? or do we quite enjoy looking back?

[35 : 49] Do we like from time to time to slip into the ways of the world? Go to where the world gets its enjoyment and steep ourselves in that non-Christian atmosphere.

It gives us a buzz. It gives us a thrill. is that the way? Or do we like to rake up old problems that we have had?

Disappointments? Perhaps disagreements we have had with the people of God, for instance. and we like to rake them up.

And we like to remember them. And say, well, I'm following, but oh, I can never forget this that happened, or that that happened.

And willing to let bygones be bygones. are we really sure that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin?

[37 : 01] And that the power of Christ delivers from all sin? Do we really believe that Christ is true when he says that the work he has begun, he will also complete?

And will we set our face like a flint, as Jesus did? And will we spend each day seeing to it that we continue on the road of sanctification?

Because Christ has promised holiness and heaven to those who will follow him in the way.

Jesus is moving on this morning. He's moving on towards holiness and towards heaven.

He has power to enable everyone who will follow him. but there's only one way he will go.

[38 : 23] Will you follow him today? Amen.