

Rediscover Jesus

Part 34: Following Jesus | Luke 9:57-62

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Jeff, I'm a pastoral intern at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to be preaching the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

So today, we'll be continuing our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus" - where we're studying the book of Luke in order to learn more about Jesus - who he is, what he did, and what he has to do with our lives today.

So let's get started with today's sermon: "Following Jesus"

Sermon Introduction

So, first, I have a question for you guys. Have you ever made a New Year's resolution? Something that you wanted to start doing in the new year.

For some of you, maybe it was:

- To exercise more
- Or to eat healthier
- Or to save more money
- Or to spend more time with family and friends

These are examples of the most common things that people want to do in the new year, but... many have trouble committing to these things wholeheartedly (or completely).

Research shows that 80% of people abandon their New Year's resolutions by the beginning of February. So in less than 1 month. And most people admit that this is because of lack of self-discipline.

Turns out, most people were not committed wholeheartedly, they were only committed half-heartedly. So once things get too uncomfortable, or other - more important - priorities pop up, these resolutions get dropped.

And it's similar with our followership of Jesus. We may want to learn more about who he is and to follow him - and perhaps for some of us, to know and follow him for the first time - but many of us have trouble following Jesus wholeheartedly (with a full commitment with all of our hearts), many follow Jesus halfheartedly. So again, once things get too uncomfortable, or other - "more important" - priorities pop up, Jesus gets dropped.

The One Thing

***Follow Jesus wholeheartedly
by making him our highest priority***

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you or if you have the Bible app, please turn to Luke chapter 9. Today, we'll be reading from Luke 9:57-62

So far, in the book of Luke, Jesus and his disciples have been proclaiming the kingdom of God and doing miracles in the region of Galilee.

A couple of weeks ago, we learned that Jesus began to set his face to go to Jerusalem - because it was almost time for his ministry on Earth to end. Jerusalem would be the final place where Jesus would be arrested, crucified, and then die on the cross for the sins of man.

So on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples passed a Samaritan village whose people rejected them. So then they left that village. And now, they're going along the road, making their way to another village.

And this is where God's narrative continues...

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 9:57-72 (ESV).

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."

This is God's Word.

Overview

How do we follow Jesus wholeheartedly? By making him our highest priority:

- I. Prioritize Jesus above our comfort (vv. 57-58)
- II. Prioritize Jesus above our responsibilities (vv. 59-60)
- III. Prioritize Jesus above our relationships (vv. 61-62)

1. Prioritize Jesus above our comfort (vv.57-58)

Verse 57 says this:

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

So as Jesus and his disciples were gradually making their way to the next village... I imagine that someone power-walked their way to catch up to Jesus and then said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go" - now if we think about it, that's a bold statement! That's like the ultimate resolution. That's not something that you'd just say everyday.

So I wonder if this person truly understood what he just said - what it truly means to follow Jesus wherever he was going.

Because unlike this person, we know exactly where Jesus was going - Jesus was intentionally going to Jerusalem - to be crucified, to die on the cross for the sins of man as our substitute.

And we know from the book of Acts - that later on, just like Jesus, his followers would also be persecuted, arrested, tortured, and killed because of their faith.

Most likely, that's not what this person had in mind when he made his resolution. Perhaps he had other expectations.

And just like him, perhaps some of us also have other expectations - that following Jesus would provide us with certain blessings; that it would guarantee our good health, financial wealth, companionship, and a comfortable life. Because sinfully, our desire is to want more comfort - more money, more success, and more worldly pleasures.

And based on how Jesus would reply to this person, it seems that Jesus knew that - deep inside this person's heart - his highest priority was not Jesus, but it was his own personal sense of comfort...

A. Prioritizing Jesus means going out of our comfort zone

Because let's see how Jesus replied in Verse 58:

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."

For foxes, underground holes are like a home; they're a place of shelter where they can sleep and be secure against outside threats.

And for birds, nests are also like a home; they're a safe and comfortable place where they can raise their young and be secure from predators.

But, unlike foxes and birds that have a place to call home, Jesus is saying that the Son of Man - Jesus himself - does not even have a place to lay his head. Because remember that at this time, Jesus and his disciples were traveling from village to village. They had no permanent home.

But what Jesus is highlighting here is not just a physical home. It's much more than that.

Because for many people - including us - our homes represent our biggest source of comfort. It's where we feel safe and at ease both physically and mentally.

- Physically, we can come into our homes, lock the door, and have peace of mind that we're safe.
- Mentally, our homes are where we can be ourselves - to just lay on the bed, be with the people that we love, and be surrounded by the things that are valuable to us.
- Our homes represent our ultimate comfort zone.

So when Jesus says that he has nowhere to lay his head, he means that following him will not always be comfortable - following Jesus will take us out of our comfort zone.

And if we take a look at Luke's narrative up to this point, disciples of Jesus have been commanded to do things that were not comfortable:

- They're commanded to leave everything behind... and to follow him.
- And they're also commanded to proclaim the kingdom of God to other villages, and risk getting rejected.
- And two weeks ago, we learned how they're also commanded to love their enemies and to show them mercy (including the Samaritans who rejected them).

Following Jesus will take us out of our comfort zone - both physically and mentally.

But this is what it means to follow Jesus - that we make him our highest priority, even above our comfort. And it means that we love and serve God - by loving and serving others - and, at times, even before ourselves. So that will be a bit uncomfortable at times.

Even for us today, just think of some of the things that we do as a church:

- Accepting that we are sinners in need of a savior (that's not very comfortable).
- Reaching out to new people, and discipling other brothers and sisters (that will take us out of our comfort zone. And that will take the sacrifice of our time, energy, money, and other resources).
- And in our discipling relationships, when we're committed to speak truth and to lovingly rebuke our brothers and sisters (that will also put us in uncomfortable situations).

So again, prioritizing Jesus means going out of our comfort zone to love and serve Jesus - by loving and serving others - even when it's uncomfortable for us.

B. Prioritizing Jesus transforms how we view our comfort

But when we make Jesus our highest priority, something amazing happens. Prioritizing Jesus transforms how we view our comfort. The more we follow Jesus, the more we see that he is our source of comfort (now and forever).

We can be comforted in knowing that God loves us so much that he gave His one and only son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins (Jesus took on the punishment that we deserved)... that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jesus himself has provided the one and only way for us to be there with him in Heaven.

And just as Jesus was with his disciples as they headed to Jerusalem, Jesus is also with us today as we head to New Jerusalem - to Heaven - to be with God forever.

So though following Jesus now may put us in uncomfortable situations, our discomfort is only temporary. Because Heaven is to be our eternal home - a place where we can have eternal comfort in God's presence.

And we don't even have to wait till then. Even while we're still on Earth today, we can experience God's comfort, as he loves us and provides for us with everything that we need:

- Because if God provides foxes with holes and birds of the air with nests, then how much more will He provide us - His children - with our daily needs.
- And as we walk with Jesus daily, God has also provided us with brothers and sisters to encourage us to keep following Jesus even when things get uncomfortable (this is such a great gift, and we'll talk more about this at the end).

For now, let's be reminded to follow Jesus wholeheartedly by - first - prioritizing Jesus above our comfort.

And second, prioritize Jesus above our responsibilities...

2. Prioritize Jesus above our responsibilities (vv.59-60)

Let's return to God's narrative...

Verses 59 says this:

⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

So after the previous interaction, Jesus and his disciples continued to make their way to the next village. Then I imagine that another person power-walked past the disciples and caught up with Jesus.

But this time, note how Jesus was the one who spoke first and said to the person, "follow me."

These are the same words that Jesus said to Levi earlier in chapter 5. And how did Levi respond? He got up, left everything, and followed Jesus. Levi and the rest of the 12 apostles exemplified the only proper response to Jesus' command to follow him, which is to fully obey.

But that's not how this second person responded. Instead, he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

Initially, this sounds like a reasonable request. But if we look past the words, what did this person actually mean?

I believe there's a couple of possible scenarios here:

- (1) His father might've just died.

Or

(2) His father was actually still alive.

Now, if his father just died, then the Jewish custom at the time usually consists of a burial ceremony that takes 1 year from the time the body was initially buried to when the bones were finally placed in a chest.

- So if this was the case, then what the person was actually saying was: "Lord, let me first take care of this responsibility, and then I'll follow you in about one year."

Or... if his father was still alive then what he might've meant was: "Lord, let me first live with my father, and take care of him until he dies, and then I'll follow you."

Either way, it seems like this person - unlike Levi - was not able to follow Jesus immediately because of other responsibilities that he had.

But imagine what's happening. Jesus is going to keep walking to Jerusalem. If this person heads back home, he may never see Jesus again. So there's a sense of urgency in following Jesus here.

But for many of us, like this second person, we don't feel that sense of urgency either. And so we tend to prioritize other responsibilities.

- "Lord, let me first finish school"
- "Lord, let me first get a job"
- "Let me first reach a certain level of financial security"
- "Let me first get married"
- "Let me first have children"
- "Let me first retire, then I'll follow you more seriously"

Our sinful tendency is to prioritize our own responsibilities above Jesus - perhaps it's because we believe that once everything on our list is checked-off, then our lives will be complete, and we'll be perfectly happy.

But if we wait till everything is done and checked-off, then we'll never follow Jesus - because our to-do list will never end. Because once one thing is settled, another thing will pop up.

That's how it is for us, and - most likely - that's also how it is for this person. Perhaps once he's buried his father, he'll ask for more time to be with his mother, or with his wife... his to-do list will never end.

And based on how Jesus would reply to him, it seems that Jesus knew that - deep inside this person's heart - his highest priority was not Jesus, but it was his own personal responsibilities...

A. Prioritizing Jesus means proclaiming the kingdom of God

Because this is how Jesus replied in Verse 60:

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."

The word 'dead' here can have two different meanings. It can refer to the physically dead but it can also refer to the spiritually dead - or those who are not alive in Christ, and not followers of Jesus.

So essentially, what Jesus is saying is:

- Let those who are spiritually dead - those who are not my followers - focus on their own responsibilities that are not of the kingdom of God - leave the dead to bury their own dead.
- But as for you who are spiritually alive - who are my true followers - your duty is to follow me, and to go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

What Jesus is saying is that following him means prioritizing this responsibility to proclaim the kingdom of God - to share the gospel (or the good news) - that God's kingdom is here, and that we must repent of our sins, put our faith in Jesus, and live in such a way that pleases Him.

This responsibility cannot get lost with all the other responsibilities that we have. Because both Christians and non-Christians have a lot of important responsibilities to do, but only Christians can proclaim the good news to others. If not, no one else will do it.

But this does not mean that we drop all the other responsibilities that we have for our family or for our employer. That's not what Jesus is saying here - because being irresponsible would not make us good witnesses of Christ.

And being a good witness of Christ is one of the ways that we proclaim the kingdom of God by revealing the gospel with our lives - by showcasing his love, grace, mercy, and goodness unto others.

- But we cannot be good witnesses of Christ if we don't take care of our family, or if we're lazy in our jobs, or if we treat others poorly.
- We can be good witnesses by being a good friend, a good son/daughter, a good father/mother, a good worker, a good citizen, and so forth...
- We are to showcase Christ-like character to the world.

B. Prioritizing Jesus transforms how we view our responsibilities

And when we make Jesus our highest priority, another amazing thing happens. It transforms how we view our responsibilities. The more we follow Jesus, the more he is integrated into everything that we do.

Right now, how we view our responsibilities may be like a to-do list with our most important responsibility on top and the least important on the bottom. For some of us, maybe Jesus is closer to the bottom. For some of us, maybe he's closer to the middle.

But in order to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, we must make him our highest priority - the very top of our list.

But when we do that, it doesn't mean we just forget about the other responsibilities. Again, being irresponsible and dropping responsibilities would not make us a good witness.

But what happens is that 'being a good witness' and 'proclaiming the kingdom of God' becomes integrated - and a part of - everything that we do.

- Privately, it affects what we do... when no one else is watching except for God
- And publicly, when we go to restaurants, it affects how we'll treat our waiters
- At work, it affects our diligence, and how we'll build relationships with both Christian and non-Christian co-workers
- At church, it affects how we'll invest our time and our energy in discipling others
- And in our families, it affects how we'll show care and patience to them, even when we don't feel like it.
- And so forth...

And we don't have to wait till our to-do list is completed till we follow Jesus and be good witnesses. In fact, we shouldn't wait. Because our to-do list will never end.

So for those of us who truly believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior - if we truly believe that those who have not repented of their sins and have not put their faith in Jesus will be punished in Hell... then it's urgent for us to proclaim his good news now.

And for those of us who have not put their faith in Jesus yet, we invite you to know more about who Jesus is - the one who is fully God and fully man - the one who loves us and died for our sins so that we may be saved. So you're more than welcome to talk to me, or to anyone around you after our service to learn more.

So again, let's follow Jesus wholeheartedly by, first, prioritizing Jesus above our comfort. And second, prioritizing Jesus above our responsibilities.

And finally, third, prioritize Jesus above our relationships...

3. Prioritize Jesus above our relationships (vv.61-62)

So after that previous interaction, Jesus and his disciples continued to make their way to the next village. Then I imagine that yet another person power-walked past the other travelers on the road and caught up with Jesus.

Verse 61 then says this:

⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

Just like the previous person, this third person's request also seems reasonable. Before heading out with Jesus, he just wanted to stop by his home, and then say farewell to his family. That in itself seems harmless.

But we can catch a glimpse of his heart posture by what he says - "I will follow you, Lord, but... let me first..." Now that's a yellow flag. It shows that there's a higher priority above Jesus.

And it's the same with us... if Jesus were to walk into this room right now, perhaps some of us would be saying the same thing: "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first..." And whatever comes into our minds first is probably the thing that we prioritize above Jesus. Perhaps, like this person, it's also related to our family.

And that's our tendency - it's to not prioritize Jesus, rather it's to prioritize ourselves and our relationships.

So again, based on how Jesus would reply to this person, it seems that Jesus knew that - deep inside this person's heart - his highest priority was not Jesus, but it was his own personal relationships

A. Prioritizing Jesus means focusing on our relationship with him

Because this is how Jesus replied in Verse 62:

⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Now this may sound a bit confusing to us, but Jesus lived in an agricultural society, where his audience would've understood what he meant here.

So in farming, to plow is to dig deep into the soil and then turning it over. This is done using a tool (that's also called the "plow"), and the purpose is to break and loosen the hard soil to make it easier for seeds to sprout and for roots to grow.

And to plow effectively, the farmer would have to constantly keep his hands on the plow and then he needs to guide the oxen that are pulling the plow to go in straight lines.

Now the only way the farmer could go in a straight line is if he focuses his eyes on one target at the end of the field.

If the farmer gets distracted or loses his focus - if he takes his hands off the plow, or he keeps looking back and taking his eyes off his target - then not only will his lines be crooked, but the soil won't be properly prepared, and that would affect the harvest. Essentially, the farmer wouldn't be an effective farmer.

So what Jesus is saying here is that his followers must focus on him - and him alone - in order to be fit (or effective) for the kingdom of God. If Jesus is not our highest priority, then we won't be able to follow him wholeheartedly and proclaim the good news effectively. We won't be effective Christians.

Because imagine what would happen if we prioritize other relationships above Jesus...

- Then what happens if our parents, spouse, or best friend don't want us to follow Jesus seriously?
- What if they don't want us to go to church? Or get baptized?
- And what happens if they don't want us to talk about Jesus with others?

Would we ultimately follow and obey Jesus? Or would we obey and try to please them? So at the end of the day, who will we listen to?

If we prioritize other relationships, then those relationships can pull us in different directions away from Jesus. We'd be like a farmer looking in many different directions while trying to plow straight.

- But if we hold firmly to our faith in Jesus (like a farmer constantly holding his plow)
- And if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (like a farmer focusing on his one target)
- Then we'll be able to walk a straight path that honors and pleases God (not others, but God)

One way we can keep our eyes fixed on Jesus is to treat the Word of God as our supreme authority - as our one target and our one focus point that will guide us to walk a straight path.

So even when our family and friends (or even today's cultural trends) tell us what to do, we can test what they say against Scripture to see if it's aligned or not aligned with the Word of God

Again, when push comes to shove, who will we listen to?

But to be clear, Jesus does not mean that we shouldn't love our family members. Again, we wouldn't be a good witness of Christ if we don't love our family and friends. God's Word even commands us to honor our father and mother, and to love our neighbors. So it's clear that we are definitely to love our families, and to say "hi" and "farewell" to them.

But, Jesus is also clear that we are to prioritize our relationship with him above our relationships with others.

Later on, in Luke 14:26 (NLT), Jesus says this:

²⁶“If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.

This puts things in proper perspective. As followers of Jesus, yes, we are to love our family members. But we are to love Jesus so much more that, by comparison, our love for the people we love the most seem like “hate.”

B. Prioritizing Jesus transforms how we view our relationships

This may sound “impossible” or even “unloving” to our family members. But when we make Jesus our highest priority, another amazing thing happens. It transforms how we view our relationships.

We see that the best way to love our family is actually to love Jesus so much more than them.

Because Jesus calls us to love others sacrificially just as he loved his people sacrificially. So this challenges us to continue to love our families even when they're not being lovable or even when we don't feel like loving them.

So loving Jesus more is actually not unloving to our family... loving Jesus more is actually the most loving thing that we can do for them.

Personally for me, loving Jesus more has helped me love my family more. If you know my sister, you can ask her to make sure that this is true...

- Before I came to know Jesus, of course I still loved my family. But honestly, I only showed love to them when I felt like it. When I didn't feel like it (maybe because I was too tired or upset), I could easily raise my voice at my sister, or even throw things in frustration (if you ask my family, they can tell you that I've broken a couple of remotes and a cellphone).
- But now, as a follower of Christ, I am to love God by sacrificially loving my family. So even when I feel tired or upset, if my sister wants to talk to me about her difficult day, then I'm not going to raise my voice and tell her to leave, I'm going to listen to her patiently and then pray for her.

Loving Jesus more, helps us to love our family more. Because Jesus teaches us to show others the same grace and mercy that God has shown us.

Conclusion

And our God is so gracious and merciful. He chooses to love us even when He knows that we're sinners. Because even then, Jesus died for us.

So as we near the end of the year, let's be reminded that that's the Christmas story. That Jesus - the Son of God - came from Heaven to Earth to save us from the bondage of sin and death.

God knows that we're in need of a savior because He knows that - as sinners - we won't be able to live perfectly.

And it's the same with our followership of Christ. He knows that we won't be able to follow Him perfectly.

- God knows that, sometimes, we may stray away from the straight path
- Sometimes we may feel stuck like we're not making any progress
- Or sometimes we may even feel like we're going backwards.

Rest assured that even when those things happen, not only is God still with us, but He has also gifted us with brothers and sisters who can help us in our walk.

- When we're straying away, others can point us back to Jesus
- And when we're feeling stuck, others can encourage us to keep the faith
- And then when others are the ones struggling, we can be the ones to encourage and pray for them

So be encouraged that Jesus does not expect us to follow him perfectly... But we are to follow him wholeheartedly.

Now before we close, I'd like to share one interesting note. The author of this book, Luke, did not include exactly how each person responded to Jesus.

Perhaps they ended up following him, perhaps they did not.

It's possible that this was done so that we could see ourselves in each of these individuals...

So we can ask ourselves: what's our response? Will we or will we not commit ourselves to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?

To help us with our next steps, there are 3 life applications that we can do...

Life Application

1. Reflect and repent of what you prioritize above Jesus

Think about your top priorities (including new ones that popped up in 2022). How have they affected your followership of Jesus this year? Repent of the things that you prioritize above Jesus.

2. Prioritize your relationship with Jesus

Even if it's uncomfortable at times, make adjustments to your schedule (or your to-do list) so you can be in God's Word and spend time with Jesus daily.

3. Help others prioritize their relationship with Jesus

Even if it's uncomfortable at times, make adjustments to your schedule (or your to-do list) in order to gather as a church, and help others follow Jesus.

Let's be reminded that Jesus does not expect us to follow him perfectly, but we are to follow him wholeheartedly.

The One Thing

***Follow Jesus wholeheartedly
by making him our highest priority***

Conclusion

If you're able, can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?