

“HOW TO BE AN ALMOST FOLLOWER OF CHRIST”
LUKE 9:57-62

There is a kind of follower of Christ who is not a follower of Christ.

Consider the crowds that followed Jesus; on one occasion, after He taught of the necessity of believing solely in Him and the Spirit’s role in bringing them to faith and the Father’s call of all who believe, John says, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore” (6:66).

Or consider the man who made the claim to Jesus that he had kept the entire Law — what more did he have to do to inherit eternal life? When Jesus told him, “sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor,” Luke tells us that “he became very sad, for he was extremely rich” (Lk. 18:22-23).

Or consider a more recent example, the atheist **Anthony Flew** who announced a few years before he died that he had become a theist. A reporter for a Christian journal interviewed him:

“Flew has had to assure former students that he does not now believe in revealed religion. ‘Even one of my daughters asked if this meant we were going to say grace at meals,’ he said. ‘The answer is no.’ Flew is also quick to point out that he is not a Christian. ‘I have become a deist like Thomas Jefferson.’... To make things perfectly clear, he told me: ‘I understand why Christians are excited, but **if they think I am going to become a convert to Christ** in the near future, they are very much mistaken.’ ‘Are you Paul on the road to Damascus?’ I asked him. ‘Certainly not.’”

Flew died in that unbelief. There is a kind of follower who is not a follower of Christ. And as Christ more actively makes His way to Jerusalem to die, He again challenges the crowds following Him to genuinely follow Him. We summarize Luke 9:57–62 this way —

TO FOLLOW CHRIST, GIVE UP ANYTHING (EVERYTHING) TO GAIN HIM.

Following Christ is believing Christ. And to believe Christ means we want Him more than we want anything else. We will give up all to have Him (v. 23; Mt. 13:44-46). Like the parable of the sower and the soils (8:4-15), this passage is not just a call to follow but a call to self-examination — what is the state of my following? Am I following Christ according to His standards or according to my desires? It’s common to presume that one is a follower of Christ when he is not; while Jesus and Luke make no comment about the responses of the three individuals in this passage, it is safe to assume that like the rich young ruler (18:22-23) these men did not actually trust and follow Christ. In this passage we see **three pathways** to almost follow Christ (but not be a true follower of Christ)...

- 1. To Almost Follow Christ, Prioritize COMFORT (v. 57-58)**
- 2. To Almost Follow Christ, Prioritize CASH (vv. 59-60)**
- 3. To Almost Follow Christ, Prioritize COMMUNION (vv. 61-62)**

1. To Almost Follow Christ, Prioritize **COMFORT** (v. 57-58)

- As Luke often does, as he starts this story, he indicates a transition from the previous story by saying, **as they were going along the road...** This is a different time and place from the previous story, but the time and place (and identity of the people) are not important. This could be about any people at any time and in any place. It is as much for us as it was the three individuals to whom Jesus spoke that day. And the phrase also sets up Jesus' statement in v. 58 — He has no permanent home...
- **Someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."**
 - ✓ Again, Luke doesn't tell us who makes the statement; it could be anyone. (Matthew tells us that a scribe made the statement; but Luke emphasizes the universality of the claim.)
 - ✓ That's a remarkable statement of faith, especially because he offers his allegiance unprovoked...
 - ✓ He evidently has been listening to Jesus and heard Jesus' commands, **Follow Me** (5:11, 27-28; 9:23, 49, 59, 61; cf. 18:22, 28, 43; 22:39). The command appears 18x in the NT.
 - ✓ The command to follow is a command of allegiance — "Christ is my leader; I am committed to Him."
 - ✓ Matthew demonstrated that allegiance by leaving his business as tax collector; Peter and friends, their fishing business, and Simon his political activism. They all left family, etc. Christ was their all.
 - ✓ This man offers a similar claim to follow Christ, but adds, **wherever...** There are no limitations.
 - ✓ We don't know the motives of the man (scribe) who made this claim, but given Jesus' response, it is reasonable to suggest the man is looking at the adulation of the crowds, the popularity, and the "ease" of a life on the road — "the itinerant expert."
- This is a remarkable statement of faith: "I will follow you wherever..." *But is it true?* Jesus tests the validity of the statement with His own simple statement (and implied question).
 - ✓ **Foxes have holes...** Inconsequential animals have homes for comfort and protection. They have the most basic forms of comfort and provision. If **birds** have shelter and food isn't it reasonable to assume that followers of Jesus will have the same? Yes — Jesus made the same point in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34; cf. **Lk. 12:22ff**). God is aware of and cares for every lowly sparrow (Mt. 10:29). He will certainly care for the people who belong to Him.
 - ✓ Yet Jesus says this:
 - **The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.** Who is the Son of Man? He is the One who has been granted authority over all things by God the Father (**Dan. 7:13-14**) — Messianic claim.
 - The One who has all things also has nothing. As God, He possesses all things, but as God incarnate (God in the flesh), He humbled himself and became low, possessing nothing (**2 Cor. 8:9**).
 - The unstated question is, "You don't have position like the Son of Man; are you willing to be as humble as the Son of Man and go without all the comforts and pleasures you are seeking?"

- ✓ We can trust that Christ will provide for us, but we shouldn't presume that life will be one of ease and comfort and free from trial and difficulty. If we want an "easy" life we can't think that we will get it from following Jesus. He promises comfort, but He also promises trial (Jn. 15:20; Mk. 10:35ff).
 - There is no safer place to go than to Jesus for protection and comfort.
 - But He only promises safety *in* the storm; He does not promise safety *from* the storm.
 - Consider the life of Paul (2 Tim. 3:10-12). When there is trial, God will keep us safe (sometimes by taking us Home through martyrdom).
- ✓ Even beyond Jesus not having a home, what this man may not have been aware of was that Jesus has been revealing His intention to go to the cross (vv. 22, 31, 51). To go to Jerusalem for Jesus was to go to betrayal, trial, persecution, and crucifixion. *Was this man willing to do that?*
- ✓ Is he willing to suffer for Jesus? Is he willing to carry the cross of persecution (vv. 23-24)?
- ✓ Luke doesn't say what this man said or did; it is most likely he turned and walked away.
- This passage is inviting self-examination. What about you? Why do you want Jesus? Are you following Him because you think life will be simple, easy, uncomplicated, and comfortable?
 - ✓ To follow Christ is to be humble like Christ and embrace suffering like Christ and be rejected like Christ and be "homeless" like Christ. To choose Christ is to choose rejection from the world.

"...we want to forget that most of God's wonderful people in the early days of the church did not have peace of mind. They did not seek it. They knew that a soldier does not go into the battlefield to relax — he goes to fight." [Tozer, *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?*]

- ✓ But life with Him is good. You will never be disappointed with Him.
- ✓ And no one entering Heaven has ever said, "Well, this is a bad trade; I gave up so much for this?"
- ✓ But the enticement of the world is that today's comforts are more important than eternity's joy.
- ✓ If we want that kind of comfort, we are *almost followers of Christ*. Non-followers of Christ.

2. To Almost Follow Christ, Prioritize CASH (vv. 59-60)

- It has been said, "From the time a baby girl is born until she is 14 years old, she needs good parents and good health. From 14 until she is 40, she needs good looks. From 40 to 60, she needs personality. And after 60, she needs cash." The desire for cash is old. It was evident in the day of Christ (and before).
- The first individual offered a superficial allegiance; the second man is called by Christ to follow Him.
 - ✓ **He said to another, "Follow Me."** It is the exact same command as in 5:27; 9:23; 18:22. It is a command of continual allegiance, obedience, and submission. "Follow and keep following Me."
 - ✓ The man offered what seems a legitimate request: **Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.**
 - You might think that his father has just died and he wants to make funeral arrangements.
 - Except remember that at that time, bodies were buried within 24 hours; so if his father was dead, he wouldn't have been following Jesus with the crowd; he would have been at home.

- His father is almost certainly still alive. It's possible that his father was sick and approaching death and he is asking to do attend to his father in his dying days.
- But because Jesus strongly corrects the man, there is something wrong in his appeal. What is almost certainly going on is that the man is saying, "I will follow You, but first I want to wait for my father to die so I can receive my inheritance." He didn't want to lose out on what he would receive from the estate. And what is left unsaid is that if he gets the inheritance of land, then he will also want to take care of the land and manage the household, etc.... He's not coming soon. It's probably safe to say that he's not coming at all.
- ✓ We can say he's not coming because we know the man's priority — the real problem with the man's statement is the word **first**. That's a word of priority. "I will follow You, but I have another priority that usurps my desire to follow you." It's a conditional word. "I will follow You if/when..." And Christ will not be followed conditionally. Which is why Jesus addresses the man the way He does.
- ✓ Did the man have an obligation to honor His father? Yes! But when obligations and duties become idols, they will keep us from other and greater priorities that God has given us.
- ✓ It has been said that "We must always beware of that word 'first.'" [Davis, 170.] Jesus and the Triunity will not take second place to anyone or anything. Christ demands primary allegiance (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18).
- So Jesus corrects the man. **Allow the dead to bury the dead**. The meaning is clear — "allow the spiritually dead to bury the physically dead." It is like Jesus' correction in 12:13-15. Don't get wrapped up in secular priorities that anyone can do. Don't let financial greed be your priority.
- Instead he says, "**go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God...**"
 - ✓ Anyone can bury a body, but not everyone can preach the gospel and evangelize. [To preach the advent of the Messiah's Kingdom was to preach repentance and forgiveness; 3:3, 4:18, 43....]
 - ✓ The force of this response is, "Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead, but you who are both physically and spiritually alive, preach spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead."
 - ✓ Jesus is calling the man to help the spiritually dying; he can no longer help the physically dead.
 - ✓ It is a call to remember that there is something far worse than dying physically — it is infinitely worse to die spiritually (a theme He will return to in 12:5; 16:19ff).
- Following Jesus means investing our lives in serving Him. It means not wasting our lives pursuing financial gain for its own end and not pursuing anything else for personal benefit, but prioritizing eternal callings and commitments above all things.
- Again, the anonymity of this story invites self-examination. Is this me? Do I want Jesus, but only after building my career and after cashing in my retirement and traveling? Do I want Jesus but I want something else more (first)? Is Jesus on my list of priorities but He is second or third or fourth?
 - ✓ God will choose to grant physical wealth to some. But He does it so they will invest it in God's purposes and not so that they use it self-indulgently or so they love it more than Him (Acts 5:6).

- ✓ Listen carefully: the issue is not having money; Jesus is addressing our hearts. Do we have money, or does our money have us? Is money our heart desire, or is investing our money in Kingdom purposes our heart's desire?
- ✓ Jesus is reminding that He and the Godhead will not share their glory with another (Is. 42:8; 48:11).
- ✓ John Piper summarizes this topic well:

Jesus is not against investment. He is against bad investment — namely, setting your heart on the comforts and securities that money can afford in this world. Money is to be invested for eternal yields in heaven: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!” ...The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being deceived into thinking a six-figure salary must be accompanied by a six-figure lifestyle. God made us to be conduits of his grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do. [*Desiring God* (2025), 197, 208.]

- ✓ Are we setting Jesus aside for the pursuit of financial security, or are we investing in eternal reward?
- ✓ If we want that kind of reward, we are *almost followers* of Christ. Non-followers of Christ.

3. To Almost Follow Christ, Prioritize **COMMUNION** (vv. 61-62)

- There is a third man in this account; like the first man, he also offers to follow Jesus: ***I will follow You...***
 - ✓ He even adds the address, ***Lord***, meaning that at least in some way he is affirming the sovereignty and authority of Christ. He is affirming (at least verbally) that Jesus is the Master.
 - ✓ But also like the second man he has conditions (and he also uses the word ***first***). As someone has said, this one is a “follower,” but even more he is a “but-first-er.” [Davis]
 - ✓ He also has priorities that are greater than Christ.
 - ✓ His priority is family and relationship: ***permit me to say goodbye to those at home.***
 - Superficially, this is not unreasonable. Elisha made the same request of Elijah and Elijah permitted it (1 Kings 19:19-21).
 - But there is something in the request that is wrong, that Jesus corrects (v. 62). He's not just “going back,” he is ***looking back*** (v. 62). Like Israel longing for Egypt (Ex. 16:3) and Lot's wife longing for Sodom (Gen. 19:26), this man is longing for relationships and family more than Christ.
 - Jesus will address this later with a similar call — **14:25-26**. He is priority over every relationship. [And as a reminder, whatever we “give up” to gain Him is infinitely less than what we receive from Him (Mt. 13:44-46).]
 - ✓ What's the problem with looking back while plowing? You get a crooked row. Your work isn't usable.
 - ✓ Neither the work nor the worker are ***fit for God's kingdom***. “Double-minded discipleship is worthless.” Christ has saved us to be His, to pursue fellowship and communion with Him over all. God has made us for fellowship and given us fellowship on earth (marriage, children, church, work, community...), but all those relationships are fulfilled best when we love Christ most.

- Again, this story invites self-examination. Is this me? Do I want Jesus, but only after marriage and children and other relationships? Do I want Jesus but I want someone else more (first)? Is Jesus on my list of relationships but He is second or third or fourth? If we want that kind of relationship with Jesus, we are *almost followers* of Christ. Non-followers of Christ.

CONCLUSION: I read this week of a man who just attended his 10,000th baseball game. If that sounds like a lot, it is. For the last 35+ years, he has averaged attending over 200 games every year. (MLB teams only play 162 games and half of those are away from their home stadium, so he really worked hard at this goal.) He said this about his feat: “After trying all the normal stuff and realizing I ain’t getting married, and everyone I ever liked, or whatever, went somewhere else and another way, I just kept coming....I made baseball and the people at the ballpark my family.” Said his friend, “This is his life....Some people go to the movies, some people sit around on Netflix, [Mike] goes to games.” [My emphasis]

Last week Keith preached on Psalm 46 and finding our refuge in God. The three individuals in Luke 9 are all seeking refuge in something other than God and Christ. And similarly to the psalmist, Christ is exhorting these men to come to Him as the ultimate place of safety and refuge, and to give up every other kind of refuge.

This story is given to us for the purpose of self-examination: am I pursuing a kind of salvation and refuge apart from Christ? Do I prefer something to Christ? Do I want to hold onto something even if it means not having Christ? Do I want “Christ and...?” Jesus warned us that we cannot love both Him and something else with the same love; He will be first (because He is greatest of all, 16:13). The questions in this passage are for us. **Am I a follower of Christ or an almost follower?**

If you are a follower of Christ there will be hardship and sacrifice and suffering. And you will never be disappointed in Him.

If you are an almost follower of Christ, He would appeal to you — “Follow Me.” How do you follow Him? You trust that He died and rose again to pay for your sin and that He is worth living for more than anything else. You want *Him* above all. Read 9:22-25.

Follow Him. Beware of being an almost follower of Jesus.

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25