

+ Luke 9:51-62 + My Questions, Jesus' Answers: Will I Follow Him? +
+ 5th Sunday after Pentecost + 23 June 2013 +

How committed are you? How loyal, how devoted, how willing are you to stick with something or someone through thick and thin, ups and downs, good times and bad? How “committed” are you? Well, that depends. For example, are you the type of person who will stick by a brand even if it’s quality isn’t what it used to be or are you quick to move on to another product? Are you loyal to one company or quick to shop around?

How committed you are often shows itself in how you spend your time and money. For example, how committed are you to a particular sports team? How much time do you spend watching games or talking about what’s going on with the Orange? How much time and money is spent watching, discussing, or surfing the web about your NFL team? Or are you one of those fans who’s quick to give up on a team when it starts failing?

How about the “important” things in life, like your job? How committed are you not only to your job, but to your employer? Are you loyal to the company or are you simply committed to the task of making money? How committed are you to your family? If you’re married, how committed are you to your marriage? How much time do you devote to your marriage and family? How high of a priority are they?

How about your faith in Christ? How much time do you spend with Jesus in his Word outside of a Sunday worship service? How much of your earthly treasures do you use to support his work? How quick are you to set that faith in Christ aside when the conversation gets gossipy, when your show throws morality out the window, or when life gets difficult?

Sadly, our commitment to following Jesus can be as fickle as our brand loyalty. What’s even sadder is when commitment to family or your job or even your favorite NFL or college basketball team is stronger than your commitment to following Jesus. That’s what makes Jesus’ words in Luke 9 so painful to hear. Jesus shows you and me that following him means total commitment. It’s either all or nothing, and honestly, Jesus has every reason to question your commitment and mine. So today we have to ask a difficult question of Jesus, **WILL I FOLLOW HIM?**

“...Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Jesus had to go to the city of Jerusalem, and wherever Jesus went, his disciples followed. Some of the disciples would go ahead of Jesus to find a place for them to stay as they traveled through the next village or town. Often they received a pretty positive reaction from the local townspeople, but not this time.

“...The people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.” Jesus’ messengers got a very hostile reception from the Samaritans, who held no love for the Jews. Basically, they rejected Jesus and his Word, and Jesus’ disciples got pretty angry about it. In fact, the two hottest heads in the group—James and John, brothers whom Jesus later named the **“Sons of Thunder”** (Mark 3:17)—proposed a little vengeance on those who so rudely rejected Jesus. **“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”** “Let’s wipe them off the face of the earth!”

You can understand where James and John were coming from. They honestly didn’t want to see anyone reject Jesus and his word (and them), but **“...Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.”** There’s no place for vengeance in the Christian’s life.

Following Jesus does not mean we are to carry out zealous punishment against those who reject Christ and his Word. For you and me, that can be very difficult. Who of us wants to see people oppose Christ and his Word? Who of us wants to get a door slammed in our face, whether literally or when it comes to our relationships at work or school, because people reject the Savior we try to share with them? Who of us enjoys seeing people ridicule and parody and mock Jesus and his Word and his followers? Wouldn’t it be easier to be like James and John and ask the holy God to wipe those enemies out with heavenly fire?

...But that’s not how our merciful God operates and that’s not what following Jesus means. Following Jesus means enduring rejection for the sake of Christ and his Word. It means moving on and praying for those who have rejected Christ that one day he might open their eyes to see their Savior from sin before they face eternal judgment. At the same time, you and I want to be careful that we don’t get caught up in a defeatist way of thinking when people reject Jesus and his Word, that Christianity is always retreating and the Lord never seems to win a victory. That kind of thinking starts chipping away at your commitment to Christ. Many have fallen away because Christianity wasn’t as outwardly glorious or successful as they thought it should be. So I have to ask myself, “Will I follow him through rejection?”

Not long after that incident in Samaria, a very confident man came up to Jesus and said, **“I will follow you wherever you go.”** Typically people didn’t tell Jesus that they would follow him. Usually he was the one doing the asking, but when this confident man promised to follow Jesus, the Lord responded, **“Foxes have holes and birds**

of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” In spite of his boldness, the man didn’t realize what he might have to give up to follow Jesus.

Following Jesus means sacrifice. You can have all the self-confidence and zeal in the world, but will that confidence hold up when you have to make real sacrifices to follow Christ? Will that breathless excitement last when you might have to sacrifice house and home, even your livelihood for the sake of Christ? By nature, you and I don’t want to sacrifice anything at all. We don’t even want to give up a small portion of our income to support the work of the Lord, because we want to use it on ourselves to do with it what I want when I want for the reason I want. So when Christ talks about sacrificing even house and home for his sake, will I follow him?

Later Jesus ***“said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’”*** Jesus’ response is interesting. ***“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*** Jesus wasn’t trying to be cruel, but instead he wanted this man to realize what had to have top priority in his life. Someone else could take care of this man’s family obligations, because following Jesus and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God had to have top priority.

Following Jesus means reordering my priorities. That’s really tough for people like us living in 21st century America. Every one of us is encouraged, urged, even pushed into setting our priorities according to the world around us. You should be your own top priority. What you want and what you think should have higher priority than the needs of anyone else.

At the same time, isn’t it true that our kids can essentially become our idols? Or how about all the people working themselves to death just to earn a little more or have a nice home and a lot of stuff that they never use? Maybe you’re tempted to think your top priority is your friends or your activities or even your stuff, but following Jesus? Proclaiming the kingdom of God? Devoting some of your hard-earned time or money to serve the Lord? That falls pretty low on the priority list, and never quite gets up to the top. If your priorities are in line with the world and out of line with Christ, if he’s not your top priority, are you honestly committed to Christ and following him?

There was one more man Jesus met on the way. He was willing to follow Jesus, but wanted to go back and say goodbye to his family. In this case, Jesus responds, ***“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*** Jesus isn’t saying that you should stop loving your family in order to follow him, but he is telling us that following him means no looking back. There’s simply no way to follow Jesus while your attention is elsewhere. It’s all or nothing, and it can’t be on your terms or mine. It has to be on Jesus’ terms. If my attention is pulled in so many different directions, will I actually follow Jesus?

The sad reality is that the answer to all these questions is no. On my own I can’t follow Jesus, and you can’t either. On my own I won’t follow Jesus, and you won’t either. No matter how much self-confidence or desire or willingness you have, you won’t be able to follow Jesus on your own.

So how will we? It all starts back at the first verse of our text. ***“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”*** Why was Jesus going to Jerusalem? He was going there for you. He was going because you’ll never be perfectly committed to following him this side of heaven, so Jesus went to Jerusalem to bear your cross in your place. He went to endure your rejection, to sacrifice himself for the guilt of all your sins. Jesus made you and your salvation his top priority, and there was no looking back. Once he turned his face towards Jerusalem, nothing would stop him from accomplishing his mission to save you—not his enemies, not his friends, not even Satan himself could stop Jesus. It was all or nothing, and Jesus gave it all to save you.

That question we have for Jesus can only be answered by Jesus himself. “Will I follow him?” Because of his gracious mercy and love, Jesus tells you, “Yes, you will follow me through faith in me. With my help and strengthened by my love, you will persevere in the face of rejection. Here let me show you why all the treasures you have in this life don’t compare to the treasures of forgiveness and hope and peace and life eternal I have earned for you. Through my Word and with my help, you will be able to reorder your priorities to follow me, and you won’t have to worry about looking back. Instead, look ahead to what I have waiting for you! Heaven is opened, and someday you’ll be able to set that heavy cross aside forever. Someday not even death will be able to separate you from my love. Someday you’ll see me because I’m going to bring you to heaven to be with me forever. So follow me and keep going because I love you, I lived and died and rose again for you, and I won’t ever leave you.”

Seeing how committed Jesus is to us makes all those earthly commitments pale in comparison. It also helps us see them in a whole new light. With Christ’s help and by his power, you and I can and will recommit our lives to following Jesus. With Christ’s help and by his power, you and I can and will reorder our priorities and keep our focus heavenward. So my fellow followers of Jesus, with Christ’s help and power, let’s follow him. Amen.