

FOLLOWING CHRIST  
Luke 9:57-62

Christ Jesus and His followers had just passed through a Samaritan village where they had expected hospitality, but where the attitude of the villagers had been so hostile that the brothers James and John, who had been nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder," wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume them. Christ's rebuke of them for their attitude revealed something of His love and pity towards those who in blindness and prejudice despised and rejected Him. He said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." In those words we note the great contrast between the attitude of Christ and that of His disciples toward His enemies.

How slow we are to apprehend this sublime truth as to the purpose of Christ's mission! How little we know of Christ's love for guilty sinners and erring saints. It seems that we do not actually realize that all Christ says to us, all He rightly claims from us, and all He offers to us are for the purpose of delivering us from a policy of self-destruction, and bringing us into the blessings of His wonderful salvation.

In our scripture lesson three unnamed men are presented. They are splendid types of many of the professing followers of Christ during His earthly ministry, as well as those of who lived in the intervening centuries. In all probability these three types are represented in this audience to which I am now speaking. At any rate, we have here an account of how Christ dealt with these three would-be followers of His. One of the most discouraging and distressing things about working in any one of the Lord's churches is the disappointment that comes from those who start out so admirably and then fail in attendance, interest and activity. No matter how much this grieves the heart of a faithful church worker, it grieves the Lord far more. From our scripture lesson, as well as from various other passages, we can receive encouragement, rather than yield to the temptation to give up the Lord's work and quit, for it was true in the case of those with whom Christ worked, we may expect it will be true of many of those with whom we work also.

In these six verses of scripture our attention is directed to three men who were involved in three incidents, with two verses being given to each of them. These three men appeared suddenly, and very quickly they were gone. We never hear anything about either of them again, and the tantalizing brevity of it all leaves us wondering what became of them. These three instructive incidents speak plainly of Christ's concern for all of those who would be His followers, and of His frank revelation of the cost of discipleship. From the lips of Christ Himself these three men learned about the sacrifices involved in true discipleship. Our Lord applied the same test to each of these men. He taught them and us that a Christian must not allow anything to come between Christ and His followers.

To these three men Christ made known three things about the manner in which He wants all of His disciples to follow Him. These things we need very much to learn.

I. Follow Christ Without Delusions.

Along the way a would-be disciple approached Christ and rashly, voluntarily and enthusiastically affirmed: "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." No doubt his intention was good, but he was directed by emotion to such an extent

that he failed to count the cost of discipleship.

This man who thus volunteered to follow Christ anywhere evidently did not think of the sacrifices involved in following Christ. He certainly did not have any clear conception of what it was going to cost him to follow Christ. He did not realize fully the implications of discipleship. Not only was there a cause to sponsor, but also a cross to carry. This impulsive and enthusiastic man did not have any conception of the self-denial involved in following Christ. Christ very quickly told the man what it would cost him to follow Him. He said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He was saying that to follow the Lord Jesus would mean to be in some respects worse off than the foxes of the field, or the fowls of the air. To follow Him was not a soft or easy thing, and Christ wanted this man to be without any delusions, and to make his choice with well-informed mind and opened eyes.

Christ wants people to follow Him, but that following must be real, and of the kind that puts Him first. Christ knew this man's heart, and it revealed that He was looking for his own ease first. The Lord Jesus was quick to let him know that He could not promise him ease, but that he must be willing to share Christ's cost and to sacrifice or do without that which foxes and birds have of comfort and ease. He said, but I do not have a home and My follower must be willing to love me more than home and bed and creature comforts.

When General Garibaldi set out to liberate Italy, he saw some young men at a street corner and summoned them to enlist in the cause. "What do you offer?" they asked. Said Garibaldi, "I offer you hardship, hunger, rags, thirst and sleepless nights; footsores in the long marches; privations innumerable, and victory in the noblest cause that ever asked you." The young men of Italy arose and followed Garibaldi and proved the truthfulness of his words.

This man, who volunteered so readily to follow Christ, was directed by emotion, but he was very slow to pay the price of following. The way in which Christ leads is a glorious one, but it is costly. Nobody should ever think that a profession, even when made enthusiastically, is enough. Churches are filled with members who joined them when they were stirred emotionally, but were not willing to count the cost and to pay it. All of the Lord's churches are suffering from the indifference of such members who attend only when it suits their ease, but who never get under the load. There is a call to heed and a cross to carry if one is to follow Christ.

This volunteer was evidently in a mood of great excitement. Having witnessed some of Christ's great deeds, his heart was stirred and he promptly volunteered to follow Him without really knowing what that meant. Emotional enthusiasm is not to be derided, but it needs to be guarded by knowledge and wisdom. That man did not really know the full implications of his statement, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

An outstanding characteristic of this man was his impulsiveness. As soon as his emotions were stirred he was eager to become one of Christ's avowed and open disciples. Our Lord promptly confronted him with the realities of discipleship. He told him that whereas he had been accustomed to a comfortable home and a social

position of honor, following Him would lead to rejection, hardship and suffering. Christ was anxious for the man to follow Him but He wanted him first to count the cost, for he certainly would have to pay the price to do so. Christians, pray that the Lord will strengthen you enough for you to be willing to follow Christ over the roughest places, in the most difficult tasks, and through the toughest times.

That is how Christ dealt with the eager, impulsive, impetuous man by bringing him face to face with the hard, stern and pitiless facts. A fit of emotional enthusiasm is not going to carry anybody through the Christian life. It requires a fixed, dedicated and devoted will. That is why our Lord challenged the man to sit down first and count the cost. He confronted him with the hardships of His service, and sobered his emotional enthusiasm with real facts.

Unfortunately the man had not counted the cost of following Christ, and did not know what was involved in doing so. He was sincere, but he did not know enough about Christian discipleship. Had he have known more he would doubtless have said less. Christ is seeking individuals who will go all the way with Him, regardless of the cost or the consequences. A true disciple frequently has to forego his own desires and ambitions in order to fulfil the desire of his Lord and Master. Christ wants all of those whom He has saved to follow Him without any delusions about what is involved in doing so.

## II. Follow Christ Without Delay.

The second man who is mentioned in this passage did not volunteer to follow Christ. Seeing him, Christ took the initiative and invited this man to become His disciple. He was the subject of a very clear and definite call from the Lord, who "knew what was in" him. Christ wanted him, and He had work for him to do. He wanted him to go out and "preach the kingdom of God." What an opportunity! He had the opportunity of being a herald of the Lord's message, of announcing the good news about the kingdom of God. Surely his response will be whole-hearted, enthusiastic, and immediate!

The man was willing to go, but he was not quite ready to get started. He wanted to delay. He was slow, and did not want to be rushed. When Christ said to him, "Follow me," he replied, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Here was a man who was moved by sentiment for his family. He was willing to follow Christ except where his family was involved. He was frank enough to say that he did not think that Christ could expect him to put his family second to anything. If the members of his family were visiting him or wanting him for anything, Christ must take second place to them. It is certainly commendable to love and to care for our families, but not when we put them ahead of following the Lord.

Don't misunderstand the request of this second man, for it is not as feasible as it seems. This man's father was not dead. It is quite possible that he was not even sick. If he was, then why wasn't his son at home with him instead of mingling with curious people on the public highway? "Suffer me first to go and bury my father" is a well-understood idiom of the East. It was this man's way of saying, "Let me remain at home until my parents are dead. When I have discharged my obligations to my family, then I will respond. I will follow Thee, but it is not convenient for me to do so just now."

But Jesus Christ will not wait for our convenience. He will not take second place. He wants His disciples to follow Him without delay. This man moved by sentiment and using it for an excuse not to follow Christ. Christ wanted him to know that no sentimental tie, however tender, can excuse a real follower of His from doing his Christian duty. He reminded the man that there was a higher tie and a more sacred duty -- the tie to Christ and the duty to place Him first always.

Churches are filled with sentimental members who talk piously about religion, but they refuse to put Christ first in their lives. They have a conflict of loyalties. They say to the Lord, "Master, I'm busy with other matters now. Call me when I shall have more time." Christ is not pleased with such so-called followers. He wants us to follow Him closely. Thank God for the testimony of those who do the humanly hard thing of putting Christ above the dearest of human ties. What a pity that this man wanted to delay following Christ and sought to do so on the ground of family obligations! No matter how sacred one's duties to his family, they come second to the duties that he owes to God. Christ's rightful place is the first one.

### III. Follow Christ Without Dishonor.

This third man considered the cost of following Christ and wanted to follow Him, but he was dominated by business. He wanted to be one of Christ's men and to go up to Jerusalem with Him, but he was a volunteer who stated categorically the conditions under which he was prepared to follow Christ. He said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." He wanted to go back and put his business in order so that he would not lose anything during his absence. His request to "bid them farewell at home" seemed simple and natural enough. But the Lord knew that his looking back would soon result in his going back. This man's attitude was that Christ should not expect him to put the Lord ahead of his own business. He wanted his finances fixed in a certain way before he would yield to the will of Christ. He was not willing to let Christ's cause cost him too much.

This man made the tragic mistake of putting money-saving first and following the Lord second in his life. Our Lord wanted him to know that no money-saving service can be substituted for Christ-loving service. Churches are filled today with money-saving members who talk about loving Christ and His church, but put money-saving ahead of Christ-serving. Christ wants His followers to love Him more than they do their pocket-books. No follower of Christ should ask Him to let him substitute money-saving service for Christ-honoring sacrifice.

As a final word Christ made a very searching statement to this man: "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

To be fit for Christ's service one must have a clear vision and a determined purpose. Only these things will keep him at his post of duty when the going gets rough as is inevitable that it will at times.

The man who pretends to follow Christ and looks back for a place to rest, or seeks an excuse to stop, or keeps his eyes on the things back at home is not fit for the kingdom of God any more than he is fit for farming. The man who is pretending to follow Christ and is looking back to the things he left behind is not fit for His kingdom. This is a strong statement, but it is our Lord's plain teaching.

It is not always bad things behind that we do not want to leave. It may be some very good things. It may be our friends or our families. But whatever makes us look back makes us unfit for the kingdom of God and dishonors Him and cripples His work and injures His church. Thank God for faithful plowmen who carry on the work and plow straight furrows amid and in spite of all difficulties. Let us plow on steadily until at the end of the furrow we may hear the Master's "Well done!"