

Luke 9:57-62 - In today's passage, Jesus' goal is to wave off those who would follow but be unwilling to pay the cost of doing so. He isn't being harsh -- or is he?

The High Price of Discipleship

More than half a century ago, martyr Dietrich Boenhoffer (1906-1945) wrote a brilliant but uncomfortable book, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1948). Boenhoeffer was one of the few German clergymen to stand up against Hitler's godless rise to power -- and he paid for it with his life. But his book's title reminds us of the cost of following Jesus closely. Jesus tells his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (9:23). Jesus' response to three would-be followers provides additional insight into what denying oneself really means.

One question I'd like you to ponder as we study is this: Can a person be a Christian without being a follower of Jesus?

As Jesus walked a whole company of people followed him, not only the Twelve. And from time to time various people would come up alongside him and engage him in conversation as they were walking. A man, moved by Jesus' words and vision, says to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus' reply, however, isn't encouraging, but rather off-putting: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." In other words, he is saying, I don't have any home. If you follow me, you have no home to call your own either. Does that mean that disciples shouldn't look forward to home ownership?

That's what it may mean for some. Jesus has left his family home in Nazareth to carry out his mission. He can't return to

Nazareth where they seek to kill him (4:29). He has stayed with friends in Capernaum for awhile. But now he has "set his face towards Jerusalem" (9:51) and cannot turn back.

We aren't to be other-worldly and detached from this life. Jesus wasn't. He lived all out in the here-and-now carrying out his Father's mission. He had no home here to call his own. He was on a journey, and Golgotha lay squarely in his route. The road was painful, but had glory at its end. "...Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). He allowed nothing to distract him from this goal.

That is Jesus' path. Can you follow him on it?

He isn't offering to follow you. You are offering to follow him and put up with the hardships and self-denial that come on HIS path. Are you really willing -- even though it means sacrificing some comforts?

"He said to another man, 'Follow me.'

But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' " (9:59-60)

Now if the man's father has just died, what in the world is the man doing hanging around Jesus? He should be home making funeral arrangements! It's obvious that his father isn't dead -- yet. Not even seriously ill, or the man would be asking Jesus for healing.

What the man is saying is this: I have responsibilities to my father as long as he lives. I'm not free to follow you right now. But when my dad dies -- and he is getting on in years -- then I'll follow you right away. I just can't follow now. Jesus' answer seems harsh. It seems to run counter to family responsibilities. It

is harsh: Jesus is speaking figuratively here of the spiritually dead -- those who have put off following Jesus. The spiritually dead put family responsibilities BEFORE their responsibilities to Jesus. But the spiritually alive are to follow -- NOW!

For most of us, our call to follow Jesus does NOT mean we have to physically leave our loved ones. But we may need to leave them behind spiritually in order to follow Jesus. I can't say: When my husband gets saved and decides to follow Jesus then I'll be the most faithful disciple you can find anywhere. I just don't want to get ahead of him spiritually. It doesn't work that way. You aren't to choose when you are to follow. Today is the day. Following Jesus is a NOW thing. It is immediate. No excuse you can offer is adequate to put on hold his compelling summons.

If the first two people had met hard responses, the third seems harder yet. All the man wanted to do was go home and say good-bye. That's all. What's so wrong with that?

In light of the immediate mission ahead -- the sending out of the Seventy to the villages of Judea -- for the man to go home will mean that he will miss out, though his request seems reasonable enough.

But it's not; he is looking to his own needs and desires, not the needs of Jesus.

"No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (9:62)

You never try to plough while looking over your shoulder. If you do, your rows are crooked and your field is difficult to work. If you try to plough while looking back, you're not fit to be in the field. You'd be fired in a hurry by the farmer. Rather, ploughmen fix their eyes on a point at the far end of the field and move steadily toward it, not veering to the right side or to the left.

Jesus isn't saying you can't glance back. But he is saying you can't continue to look back once you've begun to plough. If you do, you're not suitable for the kingdom

You may be thinking, What kind of demanding leader is this? What right does he have to command such sacrifice and instant obedience?

Jesus is the King of the Jews who laid down his life for yours. Jesus is the Creator of the universe, the Head of the Church, Very God of Very God, King of kings and Lord of Lords. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. He is the Lamb of God and the Risen from the Dead. He is the Bright and Morning Star. His name is higher than any other.

But he also humbles himself to come looking for you. To speak to you. To encourage your faith. And to pay you the highest compliment you will ever be paid, to call you to follow him. In the Book of Revelation, we read of Jesus, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me" (Revelation 3:16)

Do hear him calling you? Is he knocking? Do you hear it?

What are you possibly doing that could be more important right now than going immediately to the door and opening it to him?

Lord Jesus, forgive us when we've put our own priorities in front of yours. we've treated you more like a servant or an equal than our King and Lord and Sovereign. Forgive us. Have mercy upon us. Please help us to answer when you call, making no excuses. And though our track record of doing that is pretty iffy, We ask for your help and strength to be a disciple you can count on. In your powerful Name, We pray. Amen.