

You must be devoted to following Jesus

Hello again, dear listeners. Over the last two messages we have been considering the **cost of our salvation**.

First we considered at what cost Jesus obtained salvation for those who believe in him. He was willing to accept suffering and death on a cross. He willingly submitted himself to the wrath of his heavenly Father, so that anyone who believes in the Son of God can have peace with God.

And then we learned from Luke 9:51 how determined Jesus was to suffer and to die for our sake. He set his face to go to Jerusalem to achieve his mission of obtaining salvation for sinners. He accomplished his mission by his suffering and death. In order for us then to have peace with God we must repent from our sins and believe and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Then we will have peace with God.

But the gospel of Luke also tells us that there is more to believing in Jesus than simply accepting the forgiveness of your sins. To believe in Jesus also means that you must follow him. That too comes at a cost.

That's what last week's message was about: as Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem he taught his followers what it means to follow him. There was one man who said to him, "*I will follow you wherever you go.*" And we learn from Luke 9:57ff that following Jesus means we have to live as temporary residents on this earth. We must not cling with our hearts to earthly things, but we must set our hearts on the things of the kingdom of heaven.

After this Luke tells us in chapter 9 about two other men who met Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Today I want to consider with you what Jesus told the third man. This man said to Jesus: "*I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.*" He was willing to follow Jesus but he first wanted to say good-bye to his family.

That seems like a pretty reasonable request, but Jesus' reply gives us another reason to reflect on what it means to follow Jesus. He told the man, "*no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*"

Jesus' answer indicates that when we promise to follow Jesus we must be prepared to be completely committed to the Lord Jesus. Jesus requires whole-hearted commitment from his followers. He calls us to be devoted to him, and he used a proverb to make the point.

Unlike modern farm equipment, oxen and horses don't come with a GPS system, so the farmer who is plowing with a team of oxen or horses has to keep his eyes on a fixed point at the far end of the field so that he can guide the animals in a straight line. If he glances back the oxen might veer off course and the field would be a mess. If the plowman doesn't do a good job then he cannot expect his plowing to yield the best harvest.

Now when Jesus gave this answer his audience knew that he was referring to the story of two Old Testament prophets: Elijah and Elisha. You can read this story in I Kings 19. There we read that the prophet Elijah was called to anoint Elisha as his successor. He found Elisha plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. And when Elisha received his call his response was immediate. He let go of his plow and ran after Elijah. And even though he was granted permission to say goodbye to his family, his response was quite

incredible. He took the yoke of oxen and slaughtered them, and he used the wooden yokes to make a fire to boil the meat and gave the meat away. Then he followed Elijah.

In other words, Elisha made a radical commitment to follow the call of God. In an agricultural society dependent on animal labour it was unthinkable to kill your source of income. But Elisha was ready to forsake everything to answer the call of God. His actions showed that he had no intention of going back to his former life.

That is the kind of commitment the Lord Jesus Christ expects from us when we follow him. We must be ready to let go of everything if we are to obey God's will for our lives. That's the point Jesus was making to this man who said he would follow him. Perhaps Jesus sensed that this man was not ready to make such a wholehearted commitment. Perhaps he wasn't ready for a complete change of life. And therefore Jesus gave him this warning.

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Sometimes we wrestle with this same temptation. We want to wait a little longer before we embark on the journey. We want to wait a little longer before we commit to Jesus, because that seems like the more difficult thing to do. You might think, "I'll wait to commit my life to Christ because I first want to have some fun. I can always make that commitment tomorrow." But the truth is that for you tomorrow might never come.

Remember what Jesus was doing when this man approached him: he was on his way to the cross. And Jesus had made the commitment to complete the task he had set out to do: he set his face to go to Jerusalem. There was no looking back. He had no time for second-guessing.

That counts for us too. Sometimes we look back at the things we used to love. Perhaps you have made a commitment to follow Jesus, but the things you used to do still look very attractive. But the truth is that looking back is an indication that you want to go back. And looking back often leads to going back to a former way of life. And that's why he says that if we are looking back to any thing in this world we are not fit to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Remember the wife of Lot, when he and his family fled from the burning city of Sodom (see Gen. 19). As they fled from the city she looked back because she loved the things of this world and she couldn't let go, and she paid with her life.

When Jesus calls he calls us to put our hand to the plow he calls us to work and to stay focused on our task. Our discipleship must look like the man walking behind the plow: he has his gaze fixed on his goal. We are called to stay on track, and stay focused.

And keep in mind that Jesus is coming back some day – he could return any day. How do you want him to find you busy when he comes back? Do you want him to find you with your hand on the plow guiding it forward in a straight line? Do you want him to find you looking back or plowing ahead?

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If we love the Lord Jesus then of course we want him to find us plowing the furrow that we have been called to plow, and bearing the cross that we have been called to bear. This means we are called to continue in the work and in the position that God has given us – and that we do so in self-denying obedience.

If you are a father, then shoulder your responsibility as a father and a husband. Go to work without complaining. Be a self-sacrificing husband and father, and don't look over your shoulder hankering for the days when you were single and had all kinds of time to hang out with your buddies.

If you are a wife and mother, do your work without complaining and don't look over your shoulder wishing for less responsibility.

If you are a young Christian, do your homework diligently, and don't live as if you could care less about your grades, but work hard at school because that's what God has called you to do.

In what ever situation we are in, we are called to plow ahead with self-denying dedication, because Jesus calls us to go where he has gone, to make whatever sacrifices he calls us to make, and to suffer the kind of losses he suffered.

God is calling us to set our hearts on Jesus and to follow him. The bible tells us: "*Look to Jesus who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. 12:2).

Look to Jesus, and never look back. He has gone before you, and when you trust in him he will be with you. He is walking beside you, and he has made the way ready for you. The good news is that when we put our trust in him, he will not leave us nor forsake us. When we trust in him we have the assurance that God will supply all our needs.