

## Luke 9.23

# Follow Me

## Frankton – 8/2/15

Scripture: Luke 9.23 deny, take up, follow

Proposition: Christ invites us to follow wherever, whenever, and whatever.

Today, we're finishing an interesting and short series of sermons on only one verse, Luke 9.23. [SLIDE] *Then [Jesus] said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* This is kind of Jesus' marching orders for us followers of Jesus. However, as we're going to find out, it's more than just Sergeant Jesus' marching orders to his platoon of privates. Rather, to follow Jesus' saying in our lives is to unleash Jesus' love and power in our lives. When we do what this verse says, we unleash Jesus in our life. We started last week by talking about denying ourselves. To be a Christian is to give all of yourself to Christ and not be a [SLIDE] Flexitarian by picking what parts of your life to give to Christ and what parts to keep. [SLIDE] Last week we talked about taking up our cross, our ministry, daily for Christ. Today, we are going to talk about Christ's invitation to follow him with three w's: [SLIDE] wherever, whenever, and whatever.

At the end of Luke 9, after Jesus offers his invitation to follow him, we are introduced to three men who initially seem eager to be followers. However, as they process how following Jesus will impact their lives, they begin making excuses. As they try to negotiate the terms of their commitment to Jesus, it becomes clear that they really weren't dedicated followers, they were more like fair weather followers. It's kind of like fishermen who only fish on nice days or sports fans who follow their team only when they are winning. We meet the first of these folks in verse 57: [SLIDE] *As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."* These words sound impressive. He seems to understand what Jesus is looking for. He knows the right words to say. He says he will follow Jesus: wherever. That sure sounds good. No restrictions. No borders. Wherever.

Jesus turns to this man, and I'm guessing with a bit of a smile, answers: [SLIDE] *Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.* [58] In effect, Jesus is saying, "Hey bro, I'm homeless." My guess is that this was often a deal breaker for a lot of would-be followers of Jesus. Jesus is making it clear right up front that following him won't mean going from town to town staying at the Holiday Inn and ordering room service. Jesus points the man to a place that will be a threat to this man's comfort and security and asks, [SLIDE] "What about there?" We are left with the impression that this wanna-be follower, didn't really wanna-be a follower there.

It's much easier to speak about Jesus when you are making a general statement without any specific commitments. But the most obvious and basic definition of following Jesus will mean making some significant changes in your life. Following Jesus literally means that you go where Jesus goes. We may be quick to say to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever...." But let's move from the general to the specific, because Jesus is going to ask, "What about there?" What about in your home town? There is this tendency to follow Jesus until we hit the front door of our house. What about into submission? We tend to stand up for our rights. What about serving? We tend to want

## Luke 9.23

to be served. What about work? I think many people drive to work and ask Jesus to stay in the car until their shift is over. What about the game? How may referees, coaches, players and fans think you checked Jesus at the gate and didn't bring him into the stands?

This man in Luke 9 was happy to say wherever, until Jesus said, "What about there." One of the reasons we don't follow Jesus wherever is that when he says, "What about there", we take that as more of a suggestion, rather than as a command. Jesus is not a consultant that we hire and then do what they suggest or not. Jesus wants followers who will say yes to him before they even know the request. A follower of Jesus says, "My answer is yes, now where do you want me to go."

Ok, moving on. Jesus asks another man to follow him and the man replied: [SLIDE] *Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.* [59] Then Jesus answers with this apparently harsh comment: [SLIDE] *Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.* [60] The man appears to be willing; he appears to want to accept the invitation to follow. He wants to follow Jesus but now isn't a good time. He offers Jesus an excuse to put off following him for a while. Jesus doesn't seem too moved by his excuse, but it sounds pretty reasonable to me: to bury his father. On the surface that sounds like a good reason to wait to follow Jesus.

But, let's look at this situation. If my father had just died, as was indicated by the man's words, I probably wouldn't have been around Jesus that day. I would have been doing things you do when your father dies: getting ready for his funeral and burial. I wouldn't have been sitting around listening to Jesus preach. This tells me that the man's father is probably still alive. So instead of "let me bury my father," what he was really saying was "When my father dies, I will follow you." When you look at it in this light, he's not saying no to Jesus, he is just saying, "not now." I suspect there are a lot of people who feel okay about a half-hearted relationship with Jesus because they have every intention of one day going all-in and being completely committed; just not today, not now.

Let's contrast this man's answer to Jesus invitation to follow him with a few other people we know. When Jesus called the two fishermen Simon and Andrew to follow him, scripture says that "at once" they left their nets and followed. When he called another two fishermen, James and John, to follow him, scripture says they "immediately" left their boat and followed. That's the commitment Jesus is looking for in his followers. When some folks are asked about when they will get serious about their commitment to follow Jesus, the most common answer is , tomorrow. The problem is that the word 'tomorrow' is not in the Holy Spirit's vocabulary. When Jesus calls us to follow, he means [SLIDE] "What about now." Right now; today, not tomorrow.

The most dangerous part of following Jesus tomorrow isn't what you will lose between today and tomorrow. The worst thing that can happen is that tomorrow might never come. The truth is, the longer you put him off, the more likely it is that following him will never happen. It's kind of like hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock. You set the alarm for six, but when six happens you're not quite ready to get out of bed so you hit the snooze. A month later you're still hitting the snooze every morning and maybe even hitting it more than once. Jesus invites you to follow him, but you tell him, "ten more minutes" then "ten more minutes" then....

## Luke 9.23

The time is now. The day is today. Jesus has invited you to follow him. Don't tell yourself, "Tomorrow I'm going to surrender my secret sin." Don't tell yourself, "Tomorrow I'm going to start being more generous to those in need." Don't tell yourself, "Tomorrow I'm going to share my faith story with my neighbor." Don't tell yourself, "Tomorrow I'm going to sign up for a mission trip" or "sign up for a Bible Study." Today is the day to start following.

Now we've talked about wherever and whenever, so, let's talk about whatever. The last person to come to Jesus in Luke 9 appears to be ready to follow Jesus, just like the man before him. He says: [SLIDE] *Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.* [61] This sounds a lot like the man who wanted to bury his father before following Jesus. Once again, I think this sounds like a reasonable request – to say good-bye to his family. But he's probably asking for more time than to just go home and get a quick hug from Mom and Dad. Here's why I think that: in the culture of the day, when a person was going to go away, and leave the family and the area, it would have meant many farewell parties and could have lasted a period of weeks. So again, it sounds like the man who wanted to wait for his father to die.

Jesus answers: *Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.* [62] Jesus' analogy is that of someone plowing a field but looking backward while plowing. That's a sure recipe for disaster because he isn't giving full attention to his work of plowing. Jesus knows this man's request reveals where his heart truly lies. It's not that following Jesus wasn't important to this man, but following Jesus wasn't his top priority. Unless this man is willing to leave everything behind, it just isn't going to work out. This man wants to follow Jesus, but not with everything he has. He's not willing to go all-in. There's something else vying for his attention.

Many folks say to Jesus, "I will follow you." But Jesus points to what they are looking back at and says, [SLIDE] "What about that? Are you willing to give that up and give me your full attention?" It's like this: When you got married you agreed to give up all the other people you had dated. No more phoning your old girlfriend/boyfriend "just for fun." When you get married, that's over with. Your top priority is your spouse and you agree to give up those other past flames. It's the same way with Jesus. Jesus doesn't want followers who have a divided affection or split allegiance. And so Jesus points to what you value most and are most concerned about and says, "What about that?"

Have you exchanged following Jesus for a car that can really handle the corners? Have you exchanged Jesus for a job that really pays well? Have you exchanged Jesus for a house with all the upgrades? Have you exchanged Jesus for net worth? Have you exchanged Jesus for your fantasy football league? Those are not good trades. Understand that none of them are wrong or sinful in their own right, but for too many of us these good things become God things. They become too important and they keep us from following Christ with our whole hearts. St. Augustine referred to these things as "disordered loves." They may very well be legitimate, but they are out of order in our lives. What is it that is your "disordered love"?

I have a GPS on my phone, many of you do too. When I type my destination into the phone the phone gives me an option of getting directions to that place. The first option that normally comes up is, "directions from current location?" In other words, "Do you want to start where you are?" and then it begins calculating my route, not from where I was an hour ago, nor from my house, but

## Luke 9.23

rather from where I currently am located. When Jesus invites you to follow he wants you to start right from your current location. You don't have to go back from where you started from. You don't have to find your way somewhere else first. You don't have to get a little closer on your own. He reaches out to you with grace and love and invites you to follow him. He wants you to start right now and from right where you are. Will you?