

Luke 9: 57-62; Mt. 10:34-39; The Radical Call to Follow I. An Uncomfortable Following II. A Primary Following III. A Whole-Hearted Following

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what does it mean to follow Jesus? In today's age, to follow someone means that you track their social status- we have followers on Twitter that get update about the persons they are interested in. But in our passage, following is not a simple or casual thing! Over the last weeks we have seen how the Christian is to view himself with humility and meekness- how they are to view others with charity and compassion. Today our chapter concludes with the lifestyle of those who follow Jesus- what does their commitment to Christ demand of them. We are introduced to 3 different men- each with their own call to follow Jesus. In our text, the word Follow is central. To follow Jesus is to be a disciple of Jesus- it is a lifelong calling to go where He sends. As Christians, we will do this- because He is our master and our Lord! As the disciples would say- where else can we go, you have the words of life! Salvation is found in Christ alone- so we content ourselves to follow Him! And as we have just witnessed the baptism of little Jedadiah- remember that the name of God- the claim of Christ has been placed upon us! One of the things that Christian parents must do is teach their children the reality- following Jesus is not easy, but it is good! It is a hard life- but ultimately one that is blessed! What are our expectations for this life? So we see this theme: Jesus Christ calls us to radically follow Him through this life.

I. An Uncomfortable Following

We start by considering how the call to follow Jesus is one that is hard. The narrow path that leads to life is difficult- the road less traveled is not for the faint of heart! The first man comes us to Jesus in v. 57 and says- I will follow you. Wherever you go, I will go. Now this sounds like a credible confession- but Jesus tests the sincerity of this man. It is easy to say- I will follow- but do you know that this means- what will be required of you! Jesus responds- I am going to a difficult place. My lot in life is worse than many animals- for the foxes and birds have shelter and stability- but I have no place to lay my head! No home to find rest in this world! I am troubled and will soon be persecuted- ultimately tied to a tree and crucified. My life is not a bed of roses!

Remember that this is after the year of Christ's popularity- at the beginning of His increased persecution. Was this want to be disciple in it for the glory and the ease- well Jesus is making it clear. If you follow me, you will know poverty and want. People will persecute you- say all sorts of mean things about you- and you will not be on the path to quick wealth or privilege. I have no comfort in worldly things- when you become a Christian the comforts you once had will soon become dim. It may mean that you will have to give up your earthly home in order to receive a heavenly home. Are you prepared for this- are you sure you want this? Jesus is not trying to hinder this man from coming, but rather Jesus makes it abundantly clear- this is not an easy life! Make your decision with all the information! Jesus is on the road to the cross- do you really want to follow Him? One of the questions I ask people who desire to make profession of faith is this- are you ready to die to yourself- to forsake yourself- to take on a life of trial and struggle? Making a profession of faith is not some easy, insignificant thing! You are taking on the burden of Christ! To go where He went- to stay where He stayed! Remember last week with the Samaritan village- they did not want him- they refused to receive him. Well- are you willing to be rejected by men? If you want a life of ease- the Christian life is not for you! To follow Jesus is a difficult following! As II Cor. 4 says- outwardly we are wasting away- but inwardly we are being renewed! The road that leads to glory is a hard road- but it is only momentary affliction! To give up the comforts of this world to receive the comforter- that is what following Jesus is like. Don't expect worldly comfort!

II. A Primary Following

In v. 59, the next individual is introduced. This time Jesus says- commands him- follow Me! In response to this command, this man answers- but first let me go my own way. The words he says are telling- when Jesus calls he answers, but first. There is something more pressing on his mind- a higher priority- and that is to bury his father. Now this seems reasonable, to bury your close family member was the one thing excuse that could get you out of almost every other responsibility. But in this context, the burial process was long and complicated- lasting almost a year until the dried bones were preserved in an ossuary. But the call to follow Jesus is not one that should be postponed- rather it is a primary calling! Today is the day of salvation- choose you this day whom you

will serve. Following Jesus is not a choice you can make at your earliest convenience! Rather, it is compelling and urgent! If you want to flee the coming wrath, you must follow Jesus now! When the good shepherd calls, His lambs must immediately come before the door closes! The question is this- what is more important to you? Your family or your Lord? Obedience to Jesus trumps family ties- taking precedence over all others. His call upon us must be the focal point of our entire being! As we read in Mt. 10, if you love father or mother- brother or sister- more than me, you are not worthy of me. But we like to soften this primary call by saying- can't I have both? Doesn't Jesus tell us to honor our father and mother. Yes- but that truth can easily be used as an excuse. If we are not serving our family as part of our service to Christ, then we still have it wrong! WE serve our family because of Jesus, not instead of Jesus. Would you rather choose your biological family over your spiritual family? Jesus came to bring peace on earth between God and men- not peace on earth between man and man! No- here we find the sword at play. The world hates you- and sometimes that world is found in your own home. Remember, that loving God first means being forsaken by your family in many countries. To follow Jesus means that your Chinese or Indian family will in fact hate you and throw you out! Even in our own context, church discipline can turn family against family. Will you truly give up your earthly family to get a Spiritual family? Leave the dead- You follow me! If you had to miss your own parent's funeral in order to be obedient to Christ- would you? Following Him is a primary calling- coming before all else! As Peter said in Luke 18, we have left all to follow you. And Jesus answered, whoever has left house or parents or children for the kingdom of God will receive many times more in this time and in the age to come. You may lose your earthly family, but you will gain a lasting one! Christ's Spirit helps us learn to let go of what is passing- to gain what is lasting!

III. A Whole-Hearted Following

Yet there is one more man found in v. 61- he confesses his faith by saying I will follow you- but then goes on to say- but first. Just like the previous man- the call to follow is answered with- but first. He has a higher priority- something more important than immediately following Him. The call to follow Jesus is not one that can be made with reservation. You cannot be half-hearted! Wanting to say goodbye to his family- Jesus gives us a

lesson from the farming world. Following Jesus must be your enthusiastic and committed decision. The cares of this world seek to strangle and distract- to choke the seed and its fruit. But the disciple of Christ is one that keeps their eyes forward. The illustration in v. 62 is of a farmer plowing his field. If you look back, your row becomes crooked. Like trying to drive a car while looking over your shoulder, you will soon find yourself in the ditch. I remember cultivating my dad's corn when I was younger, when you look behind you kill what is ahead. The point is that the call to follow Jesus must fill your view at all times. He is to be ever before you- not looking back on what you have lost- or pining over the days have gone by- or by being stuck in the old way of life. Rather we are to be always looking up- our eyes on Christ in glory. Our heart on the things that are above. As Heb. 12 says- fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith- laying aside what can hinder and entangle. Like in baseball- you need to keep your eye on the ball- right! Well, in the Christian life you need to keep your eye on Jesus- and not worry about what others might think or say. Remember when Elijah cast his mantle around Elisha in I Kings 19- Elisha asked for permission to go and say goodbye to his family. Elijah said- what I have done to you- so Elisha went back and said goodbye. Here Jesus said- don't go back- the call to follow Jesus in the Kingdom is more radical and demanding than being an OT prophet! Love Him with all your heart! There is no cheap grace here- becoming a Christian means you have to believe and do- following Jesus and obeying His word. As Jesus said, you are to continue in my words! We are to believe and practice His words!

To conclude, following Jesus is demanded of all who would call themselves His disciples. Why follow Jesus? The road is difficult and the calling consuming? It is not for the faint of heart and it cannot be entered into lightly! As Luke 14 says- count the cost! However, those who follow Jesus have the hope and the promise of life everlasting! Jesus has gone before us- not only to the cross but also to the place of glory! Jesus followed the will of His Father- with no regrets and never looking back. Because Jesus was faithful to the end, we can have life in His name! We follow Him from victory to victory! Let us all remember the high demands placed on those who follow Christ- and give thanks that He has made us fit for the Kingdom of God by His Spirit!