

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## Being a servant of God: Let me go first and bury my father - Counting the cost and is it worth it?

Welcome to *Truth for Today*. This is the fifth talk in our series, "Being a servant of God". Our talk today is quite distinct from the others in the series. The heading, "*Let me first go and bury my father*" (see Luke 9:59) seems to be, at face value, rather harsh and challenging. This talk also has the sub-heading of, "Counting the cost and is it worth it?" At this point I would like to read from Luke 9:57-62. The verses cover three challenging situations where three people come to the Lord Jesus either offering to be a follower or, as in the case of one person, the Lord Jesus asked him to come and follow. Let us read the verses.

*"Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:57-62).*

It is the second of the three 'follow me' situations from where we have the heading for our talk. As all six verses go together to form a trilogy of challenges, I think it will be as well to consider all three together.

### Background

We often think of the Lord Jesus travelling around the land of Palestine, mainly Judah, Galilee and Samaria, with His twelve disciples. In fact, there were often many other followers and it is probably to this latter group that the challenges of the Luke 9:57-62 are directed.

### Commitment to follow the Lord Jesus

It is as the Lord is on a journey that the first person speaks, "*Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go'" (Luke 9:57)*

Here we have someone who is attracted to the Lord Jesus, whether it is His teaching or His miracles we are not told, but he wants to be a follower. It is a good thing to desire to follow the Lord Jesus. Today this is what Christians are, followers. We follow the teaching of the Lord Jesus by serious study of the Bible and then endeavour to put into practice what we have learned. The man makes a tremendous statement, "*I will follow You wherever You go*" (Luke 9:57) The "*I will*" and the "*wherever*" are huge commitments. This is dedicating one's whole life to a journey into the unknown, it is in a sense, the journey of faith. Abraham made such a commitment as we find in Hebrews 11:8, "*He went out, not knowing where he was going.*"

This person was focused upon the Lord Jesus and wherever the Lord would lead, he was prepared to follow. As we know from the Bible and 2,000 years of church history, following Jesus in this way sometimes leads to conflict with non-believers and even to martyrdom.

### Reality of following the Lord Jesus

It is at this point that the Lord Jesus brings home the reality of what is being proposed, "*And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'*" (Luke 9:58). The Lord Jesus does not talk about martyrdom, but a different aspect of being a follower, that of this world no longer being our true home. We live here, we might own our house, we have an occupation in this world, we gain our education here, our family is here and much more could be said as to our relationship with this world. But our home is not here! So, we turn to John 14:2 and read the following words of the Lord Jesus, "*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*" The Christian's real home is the 'Father's house'. The Lord Jesus Christ has prepared our eternal home in this house. If we were to read John 14:1-6, we would see that the Lord Jesus is going to come for us and personally conduct us into that heavenly home. It is the Lord's promise and the

Lord does not fail to keep, and will not break, His promise. Just as the Lord Jesus did not feel at home in this world of sin so we also should not feel at home here.

### **The Lord's invitation and the "but"**

In Luke 9:59 the Lord Jesus turns to someone else and says, *"Follow Me."* There are many people who hear the invitation from the Lord Jesus. This might come through reading the Bible, listening to the Gospel being preached either in church or from a friend, or alternatively a Gospel tract or booklet might be given to them. Regardless of the way a person hears the message of salvation, if it raises a 'but' in their minds, such as, *"But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father'"*, then there is not a 'whole hearted' response. Luke 9:59, which is the title for our talk, seems a very reasonable request. We have responsibilities and this is a very sensitive and emotional issue. Did this person mean that his father had just died? Or did it mean he wanted to wait until his father had died before committing to be a follower? He had heard the Lord's statement about being 'homeless' in this world. Was he looking for a way out because he thought discipleship was too challenging when the Lord Jesus asked him that simple question?

We know the Lord Jesus, because He is God, can read the mind for unspoken thoughts and thereby He understands motives. So, the response from the Lord Jesus, which we might think is rather heartless and uncaring, is designed to challenge this person. What are our motives? Today we could be challenged as to why we "go to church" and maybe have never truly accepted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. I preach in several places and yet the majority who listen do not see the need to read God's word for themselves. Where is the appetite for spiritual nourishment? Unbelievers may see no need to read the Bible but Christians should see that it is essential that we read the Bible.

### **The Lord responds to the "but"**

The Lord's response is as follows, *"Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God'"* (Luke 9:60). Let me start with what the Lord saw as priority, *"you go and preach the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:60). The Lord Jesus no doubt saw in this man the necessary ability for an important work of service that he could do. The Lord Jesus always wants believers to have the Lord and His work as the priority in their lives. The Lord was not being uncaring in any way, but the man was being challenged. There are so many legitimate and lawful things in our lives, such as education, employment, caring for family members and so on but all these are secondary to the Lord. It is not that we neglect such responsibilities, but the Lord and His service must be held as important and given sufficient time in our busy daily schedules of responsibilities.

Preaching the kingdom of God is to bring the message of life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. This is a very important work for all Christians, especially those who feel as though they have been called to Gospel work.

As to family responsibilities, the Lord states clearly that there are plenty of others who would be able to handle family situations as and when they arose. Until the time that an important family situation occurred, then the disciple needs to be focused on the more important issue of Christian service.

Earlier in the Gospel of Luke, we read, *"Then He [Jesus] said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'"* (Luke 9:23). The Lord is clearly stating the necessity for daily commitment to Himself. Taking up the cross is being dead to the world system and totally focused on following Christ. Notice the strong words in the verse, "desires", "deny" and "cross" - three pre-requisites to following. The life of a disciple of Christ is a life of discipline. Discipline involves hard work, dedication and total obedience. These qualities are brought before us in Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-7, *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And, also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things."*

### **The third man's commitment**

We now come to the third person in our trilogy (Luke 9:61). He has listened to the previous two and their brief conversations with the Lord Jesus. He may well have understood the Lord's statement about having no home in this world. Also, he may have seen the need for the Lord to have priority over someone who had died and that the Lord's work is more important. But would the Lord not be sympathetic to those who experience sorrow? Think about the sorrowing home at Bethany and the Lord's care on the occasion, as found in John 11:1-57.

*“And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’”* (Luke 9:61-62).

Once again, we have the prospective disciple approaching the Lord Jesus with good intentions of commitment but again we find that he also has a ‘but’. He wants to say goodbye to the people at home. They may well have been a wife, children, parents and possibly other close relatives that this person feels a responsibility towards. Not being unkind, but relatives, however close or distant, can be a hindrance to a life that is fully committed to serving the Lord Jesus. Relatives may not have the same commitment or vision to follow the Lord Jesus and there may well be genuine concerns relating to stepping out on the pathway of faith.

The Apostle Peter knew something of the necessary commitment when he said, *“We have left all and followed You”*, Matthew 19:27. When Peter made this statement the Lord Jesus had been speaking about the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God. This had alarmed Peter and maybe he thought he was not going to enter God’s kingdom and he, and others, had given up everything to follow the Lord. So the Lord explains that those who truly follow Himself will not lose out. Let us read from Matthew 19:29, *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”* The Lord’s promise was a blessing that was a hundred times more than what had been left behind plus the additional inheritance of eternal life.

Now we know that Peter did not desert his wife as 1 Corinthians 9:5 indicates. Peter and his wife were both together as they travelled on the Lord’s work. So the Lord is not saying that we abandon our responsibilities but we seek to set our priorities right in relation to the Lord Jesus. That is why a wife and husband both need to have the same outlook on life as Christians. Having the same spiritual interests, goals for Christian service and much more.

Over the years, I have witnessed the difficulties where a husband wanted to serve abroad with a Christian organisation but his wife had not the same enthusiasm, so it never happened. Then there was the disaster of a marriage break up while husband and wife were in a foreign country resulting in both going their separate ways and the mission field abandoned.

### **The plough man**

The seemingly hard responses by the Lord Jesus test the commitment of the prospective disciple and, as Christians, we all need to be sure about our discipleship. This applies whether we are in our own countries occupied with secular employment and we devote our spare time to the Lord’s service or whether we are full time on the mission field, at home or abroad. The Lord in His response to this man uses a farming illustration. *“No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9: 62). Those who understand ploughing will know that it is essential to look forward and not to look back. This was especially so with horse and plough.

### **Is it worth it?**

So far, we have considered the issue of counting the cost in our sub-heading to this talk. We should now spend a little while considering the second part of the sub-heading, “Is it worth it?” It is so easy only to see the problems and negative issues. We have already indicated from Matthew 19:29 that there is a promised blessing. Let us read the verse again, *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”*

Whatever we put aside, as secondary in our lives, we must do so *“for My name’s sake”*, that is putting the Lord first (see Matthew 10:22, 19:29, 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:12, 17; John 15:21; Acts 9:16, Revelation 2:3). We know that God is no man’s debtor by what follows. There is the promise of reward that compensates a hundred times over for what was given up plus the promise of eternal life.

From the moment that we give our life to the Lord and He becomes our Saviour then we receive so much blessing it is almost beyond telling. The more obvious blessings are:

- Our sins are forgiven;
- No charge of sin can ever be raised against us;
- We are set right with a holy God;
- We are made righteous and suitable for our heavenly home;
- We have been given a new life which is eternal in character and duration; and
- Joy and peace are permanently ours no matter what circumstances we go through.

There is a hymn written by the Reverend WO Cushing, the words of which are very interesting.

*Down in the valley with my Saviour I would go,  
Where the flowers are blooming and the sweet waters flow;  
Ev'rywhere He leads me I would follow, follow on;  
Walking in His footsteps till the crown be won.*

*Down in the valley with my Saviour I would go,  
Where the storms are sweeping and the dark waters flow;  
With His hand to lead me I will never, never fear:  
Dangers cannot fright me if my Lord is near.*

*Down in the valley, or upon the mountain steep,  
Close beside my Saviour would my soul ever keep;  
He will lead me safely in the path that He has trod,  
Up to where they gather on the hills of God.*

Chorus:

*Follow! follow! I would follow Jesus!  
Anywhere, ev'rywhere, I would follow on!  
Follow! follow! I would follow Jesus!  
Ev'rywhere He leads me I would follow on!*

Verse 1 of the hymn presents a picture of ease and tranquillity where following the Lord Jesus is not difficult; no tough challenges.

Verse two presents a different picture of storms and darkness where following is more of a challenge to the Christian. Bringing the two verses together presents a picture which would be normal Christian experience. Sometimes life has easy moments and sometimes in life we are presented with dark and challenging experiences.

Verse three is a kind of summary, whether we are in the easy valley or on the steep mountain, we have the certainty that the Lord Jesus is with us. Part of the blessedness of knowing Christ as our Saviour is that He never expects us to experience anything in this world that He has not experienced. And so it is with a joyful heart we can sing the chorus that we are happy to follow our Lord and Saviour wherever He may lead.

So the trilogy of Luke 9:57-62 is the Lord Jesus painting a word picture of what commitment means. Following the Lord may mean being homeless in the spiritual sense that our true home is the Father's house. We must be sure in our hearts that when we decide to follow the path of faith to be a disciple, we are not harbouring doubts or butts.

In closing I would like to read from John 12:25-26, *"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour."*

May the Lord richly bless and encourage you. Thank you for listening.

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