

South Africa Pastors' Conference

2013

Pastor Lars Larson, PhD

Session 3

Making Disciples: Three Would-be Disciples

Luke 9:51-62

Introduction:

Let us read **Luke 9:43-62**.

⁵¹Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" ⁵⁵But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, ⁵⁶for the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

⁵⁷Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." ⁵⁸And 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." ⁵⁹Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." ⁶¹And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." ⁶²But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

In this portion of Luke's Gospel we read of how God has used the onset of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to press upon us the urgency of surrendering our lives fully to the Lord Jesus. Let us first consider **the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:43-56)**.

Just prior to the departure of Jesus and his disciples for Jerusalem, the disciples again were informed by Jesus of the fate that was awaiting him (9:44). Jesus again announces His death to His disciples (9:43-48). Here the fact of His betrayal was emphasized. This is recorded in **9:43-44**.

⁴³And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marvelled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁴***“Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”***

The result was **confusion among His disciples**. The ignorance of his disciples was expressed by Luke in an aside. **Verse 45** reads, ***“But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.”*** The disciples were shown to be quite uninformed at this point in the story. The notion conveyed is that they were willing followers of Jesus but as yet not fully aware of the nature of their relationship or the fate that awaited them. They did not

understand Him. How ignorant were these poor disciples! But further, how alone must have been our Lord. It is true He had followers. He had persons with whom He confided. But ultimately, He had a course that He alone could tread, one which no one else could take.

Notice, they *could not understand* Him. In a measure they were not to be blamed. God had not revealed the implications to them concerning Jesus' sufferings. They would not know until after the events, only then would the meaning of His crucifixion be made clear to them. They were afraid to ask for understanding. They should have asked Him, but they did not. There is much of God's Word we will not understand unless we humbly ask our Lord to reveal Himself and His truth to us. Many are in ignorance not because the subject matter is too hard for them, but they have no real interest in knowing. God reveals Himself and His truth to those who truly desire to know Him. These disciples should have at least pondered the matter, taking to heart His Words and seeing the gravity and implications of his announcement to them. But rather, they reveal that they are quite insensitive toward their Master and what He would soon endure.

We read of *the ignorance and error of His disciples in 9:46-56*. With the importance which is stressed in this passage on the mission of Jesus, one cannot but help but be struck with the crass ignorance of His disciples. In the next few verses we see a total failure on their part to understand how they are to regard and relate to themselves and others about them. We see in 9:46-48 their faulty attitude toward one another, in 9:49-50, their wrong attitude toward an outsider, and in 9:51-56 we see their wrong attitude toward unbelievers.

First, let us consider **their wrong attitude toward one another (9:46-48)**. In **verse 46** we read that upon Jesus telling His disciples of His death, a dispute arose between His disciples.

⁴⁶Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. ⁴⁷And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, ⁴⁸and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."

They were characterized by petty jealousy and crude insensitivity. They were unconcerned about their Master's fate; rather, they were each concerned about their own place in the kingdom which they thought would soon appear. They did not understand the necessity, meaning, or significance of the Lord's death, but they did know that He was the Messiah and that at Jerusalem it was going to all come to pass. Here, they were arguing as to who would have the place of honor.

The Lord knowing their thoughts, rebukes them and instructs them in three ways, first by an action, and then followed by two words of instruction. First, He sets the child "by His side", thereby honoring the child (9:47). Second, He told them that whichever of them would be willing to "receive the child in His name, receives Him"; that is, whichever of them would be willing to "welcome and care for this child", just as Jesus Himself had just done, that disciple would be receiving Jesus--welcoming and caring for Jesus. That is, to serve this child would be regarded as having been done unto Jesus Himself. And to render service unto Jesus was regarded by the Father as having received Him, having rendered service unto Him. [Be encouraged by this Sunday school teacher]. Finally, Jesus tells them that in His sight *the greatest is the least*. The least in their midst was the child. They were arguing which among them was the greatest in honor or regard. Jesus pointed out the child as being the greatest object of His concern, and therefore the child should be the object of their concern, not themselves.

Secondly, we see that no sooner was this issue dealt with than another incident arose which betrayed their **wrong attitude toward outsiders (9:49-50)**.

⁴⁹Then John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." ⁵⁰But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is for us."

Here was one who was going about and casting out demons in Jesus' name, but apparently did not have Jesus' sanction to do so. The disciples wanted him to stop it. The Lord, however, would not discourage him. "Anyone who is not against us, is for us." They may not walk with us, nor agree entirely

with us, but if their desire is to promote the Lord Jesus and His kingdom and they do so with a message which is not contrary to a biblical message, we should not forbid them.

But no sooner did this matter seem to be resolved that one more issue arose which revealed the disciples' ignorance. And so, third, we read of their **wrong attitude toward unbelievers (9:51-56)**.

⁵¹Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" ⁵⁵But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

What should be our attitude toward those who do not respond to us and are antagonistic to us? Write them off? "We gave them their chance, Lord, divine retribution is now in order!" No. We are to grieve when people do not respond to our message. Who knows, maybe later they will respond. And in fact, we know that in this case, the Samaritans did just that (cf. Acts 8).

We next come to the place in which three men are addressed by Jesus. We might describe them as *three would-be disciples*. They are described at the outset of our Lord's journey to Jerusalem where He would be crucified, buried, and then rise again.

The travel narrative of Luke's Gospel (Luke 9:51-19:28), in which the Lord Jesus and His disciples travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem, serves as a literary and theological framework to enhance and illustrate the nature of true discipleship to Jesus Christ.

At the outset of their journey, Jesus engages three men who could have become His disciples, but seem to have failed to do so. Our Lord's interaction with these men illustrates the nature of true discipleship.

This encounter of Jesus with these three occurred shortly after Jesus and His apostles began their journey to Jerusalem where Jesus would suffer and die and be raised the third day. This event that would soon take place in Jerusalem was the culmination of His work as the Messiah, the anointed Saviour of Israel. Jesus had stressed this to His disciples. In **9:44** we read, "***Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.***"

As they journeyed, some desired to follow Him. But they did not know the fate that awaited Jesus, nor did they understand what following Him would involve. But our Lord would let them know what it was they would encounter before He would number them among His followers. Our Lord dealt with each one so as to probe his true spiritual condition. He spoke to each one according to his spiritual need.

Let us consider the context of the account. The Lord has now started on His journey to Jerusalem where He was destined to be rejected, suffer and die, and rise the third day. Some desired to follow Him, but they did not know the fate that awaited Jesus. Had they known that He would be opposed by all of the leaders of religious Judaism, and had they known their own fate if they were to follow Him, they might have been a little less eager to enlist and be numbered among His disciples. But our Lord would set them straight. In contrast to many evangelists today who present only that which might be received as desirable benefits for following Jesus, Jesus made known the costs of following Him. He did not have as many "converts" as many modern day evangelists, but He did not lose any of His, except the son of perdition, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

Recognize that during His early ministry, it was relatively easy to follow Jesus. These were the glory days for His followers. Their Master was seen as healing every diseased person and delivering every demon-possessed soul. Jesus was immensely popular. Jesus was the man of the hour. He was an easy One and a desirable One to follow. Well, here before us, we have three men, three would-be followers, would-be disciples of Jesus. Each was dealt with by our Lord so as to probe their true spiritual condition.

First, let us consider that which was *common* to all three. (1) They all expressed a desire to follow Him. They were believers in Him; they desired to become His disciples. These were not unwilling men, who had no desire to know the Lord Jesus. Each of them had some measure of “faith” in Jesus. Now, it was a faith that was not grounded on much knowledge, but they were “believers” in a measure. And yet, we will see that the kind of faith which they had was not the kind that characterizes true disciples. And only true disciples of Jesus have salvation; they alone will share in the life and glory that is Jesus Christ’s. Each one of these men had a measure of faith, but whether or not they had saving faith was quite another matter.

We should always remember there is a kind of faith that one may possess that will not save. This *deficient* faith may in some ways be regarded as great faith--even to the extent of moving mountains. Yet as great as that faith appears, it will not result in salvation. Only upon those who have true faith in the Son of God does the Father grant deliverance from His damnation upon sin. They only receive the gift of eternal life. True faith, that is saving faith, is that which believes on Christ and His work, which leads one to follow Christ in obedience, and which continues to lead a person to follow Christ in faith and obedience throughout life. In other words, true saving faith perseveres.

(2) The Lord dealt with all of them directly, calling them to full discipleship. They were willing to follow Him, at least at the present, or so it seemed by their profession. But would they be willing to follow Him fully, without reservation and without giving up at some point along the way? They really did not know what their commitment would cost them. They did not know the difficulty that they would face. But the Lord knew what lay ahead for Himself and His disciples. He did not need persons to begin following Him, who would later abandon Him. So He made sure at the outset that only fully dedicated followers would be received into His ranks.

Again, how different were His methods from our methods today! We would never discourage a volunteer; but Jesus did all He could to discourage them. We seem to offer an easy path, present the glowing promises so as to swell our numbers; Jesus made it seem to be an impossible feat to be one of His followers. Our Lord never refused anybody who came to Him and who ought to be accepted by Him, those being of a broken and contrite heart. His own words encouraged coming: “He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” On the other hand, He did not “shovel” His followers in indiscriminately. He did not accept anybody and everybody in order to increase His numbers. “He knew how to shut the door, as well as open it” (Spurgeon). He knew how to warn and discourage the pretentious, and accept only the penitent. He was ready with an open heart and hand to receive the needy. But He was also faithful to the self-deceived, those who professed to have what was not really there--true faith and resolve to follow and obey Him regardless of the cost or consequences.

How different we are today! When we offer Jesus, we are concerned about offending people or discouraging people in any way. “Withhold the hard sayings, present the promises, that will gather a crowd.” But we must deal with souls as our Lord modelled before us. We must exercise judgment and not count as converts everybody simply because they say, “*I believe. I believe. I assure you that I believe.*” If one is not willing to follow Jesus, obey Jesus as his Master, mark it down, he is not a believer in Jesus, regardless of what he tells you! We must watch, try, and test, lest we assist self-deception and be servants of Satan bolstering the delusions of mistaken men and women.

(3) There seemed to be a deficiency common to each. There is no mention or hint here of some vital things which should characterize disciples of Christ--a sense of *personal guilt*, a *repentant spirit*, and a *sense of humility*. There seems to be no expression here on their *need for a Saviour*. But when the Lord deals with people these things become evident. The seed of the gospel springs to vital life only where there has been a deep plowing of one’s heart, revealing one’s sin and need for forgiveness. The house which God builds is only built on a foundation that has been securely and deeply set. The Saviour heals the soul only after the wound has been deeply probed and cleansed of all corruption.

The one with true saving faith must be keenly aware of personal sin. There must be a sense of *my* sin, *my* guilt, *my* condemnation before God. I must know of *my* need for a Saviour and I must know and believe that Jesus is *my* Saviour. That will lead one to abandon all and follow Him regardless of obstacles or consequences.

And so, the Lord spoke to each of these men, seeking to reveal to each one his own deficiency. And He knew precisely in each case where the weakness was.

Next, let us consider that which is *unique* to each. Each one seemed to have a specific deficiency. We might describe them as follows:

1. The Resolver (9:57, 58)

⁵⁷Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” ⁵⁸And 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.”

We read of the **condition of this man (9:57)**. This man, the Resolver, was resolved to make a commitment to the Lord. If we used modern day language we would say he was willing to make *a decision* or *a commitment* to Christ. He would give his heart to Jesus. Just ask him to do so, he will resolve to do so readily. We would never throw a road block before someone like this. But our Lord did.

This man, by professing his desire to follow Jesus, would be regarded in these days as a true convert to Christ. *He was a believer*. And there would be no doubt about this man, for not only did he believe, but he believed enough to be willing to follow Jesus. Surely, this is a genuine inheritor of the kingdom! Who could doubt it? Well, the Lord did. Again, how different were His ways of dealing with souls than our ways!

Matthew’s account tells us that this man was a scribe, a teacher of the Law (cf. Matt.8:19). This man knew the Scriptures. And he must have been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, although he probably had a faulty concept of the nature of the Messiah’s work. But he knew the Scriptures. But sadly, he really did not know himself, nor did he know what following Jesus would mean.

Many in the heat of emotion make commitments to Jesus. They say, “I believe!” “I will follow Him!” “I declare to you that I will!” They are so resolved to do so, that they will make it as public as you like, signing a commitment form, standing up and telling it, coming forward in a meeting. Any where and in any way they are willing to make known their resolve. And we frequently encourage that sort of thing. And I am not saying we should not do so. But just because someone claims he is a Christian, does not make him a true Christian.

We could say this man *gave his heart* to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go!” Surely, this man was a true disciple of Jesus. But the Lord says, “Not so fast.” Our Lord knew immediately the problem with this man. But he had all too much confidence in himself. “I will follow you!” This man knew the Scriptures. He was a teacher of the Law. But he did not know much about himself. Had he come with a tear in his eye, broken and humble, just as willing, but with less confidence in himself, he might have been received differently. There was not the attitude, “Lord, I am willing, but I am unable to follow You unless You hold me up and teach me in the way.” Or, “Lord, I am willing to follow You, but I realize I am not worthy to be received into Your ranks. But will You allow me to tag along just the same?” No, it seemed rather there was an announcement made here.

“Jesus, here I am. I am resolved. I will follow you wherever you go! I am a scribe! I have great understanding! I have much to offer. I, even, I will follow you wherever you go. I have made up my mind to do this and I am man enough for the task. I am a strong-minded person and able to carry out what I resolve to do. I will follow you!”

Just because someone resolves to follow the Lord does not make him a Christian. One must be born again. God must place a new heart within you. You need the Spirit of God to guide you, instruct you, and empower you. Your resolve really is meaningless in and of itself. This says it well,

“Go write your resolve on water, and then return tomorrow to read the phrase you inscribed; and when you have done that, then trust in your own determinations. Go, and say that you will pluck the moon

out of her orbit, or stop the sun in its blaze at mid-day, and when you have done those things, then you can so control your own self as to be ever faithful to the Lord without His help.” (Charles Spurgeon)

We read of our **Lord’s treatment of this man in 9:58**. “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.” So how do you deal with a person who seems to exhibit this kind of presumptive, shallow belief, this notion that says, “Of course He will accept me, and certainly I am able and I will follow”?”

He needed to hear of the cost of Christianity. We do people a disservice if we misrepresent Christianity as a solution to all their problems, or that it will bring about a resolution of all conflicts. Now becoming a Christian will end one major conflict: the one we had with God and He with us. And obviously our lives will not be experiencing the kinds of things that some people encounter who are fighting against God and He against them. But when you enlist on His side, new conflicts begin to arise which you never encountered before-- waging a never-ending battle against sin within, dealing with and enduring through conflicts with non-Christians as you are seeking to order your life according to His will. To become a disciple of Jesus in that day, within the context of unbelieving official Judaism, it meant a forfeiture of comfort, an exclusion from one’s own family, and even an alienation from the community.

“I will follow you wherever you go!” said the man. The Lord responds in effect, “Are you aware of the full consequences of your resolve? Are you willing to follow Me, believe and obey Me if it means you forfeiting your comfortable home, your secure position as a scribe? If it results in deprivation, rejection and suffering, will you continue to have resolve?” I wonder how many would come forward in our evangelistic crusades if the cost of Christianity were presented to would-be followers of Jesus?

What is the cost of Christianity? Essentially, the Lord said,

Life will be tough if you follow me. You will have to follow a friendless man who has no place he can really call home. At night time when families gather together in their homes, and even foxes go to their dens, birds have nests to return to, we will have no place.” No wealth will be gained if you follow Me. You will not be extended sympathy or kindness, people will not open their home to you. Those who now know you, will desert you. Those who now admire you will abhor you. Those of your own house will regard you as an enemy. Will you follow Me then?”

That doesn’t sound like the kind of appeals made at invitation time. But it is what we need to hear. You will be asked to do things by family, friends, and employers that you cannot do because your Lord tells you to do otherwise, and your refusal to do so will cost you. Yes there is a crown to be gained for every child of God, just as our Lord received His crown when He rose from the grave and was bidden to sit down on His Father’s throne. But there was ***first a cross to be endured and a crown of thorns to be worn*** before He could be ***seated on His throne in heaven and wear the crown of glory***. And so it is with the Christian. Paul could say, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). But many, when they discover there is a cross to bear and a crown of thorns to wear, will forgo the crown of glory, for it costs too much. But this is the only path to eternal life--faith, obedient faith, persevering faith, no matter the consequences.

We next read of a second man came to the Lord Jesus, He was different from the first. We might describe this man as...

2. The Qualifier (9:59, 60)

This man was greatly blessed of the Lord (9:59a). This man was more advantaged than the first. The first announced to Jesus his willingness to follow Him. But the second was requested of Jesus Himself to follow Him. The first was ***enlisting***; the second was being ***drafted***.

What a great privilege it is for a person to have the call of God upon His life! He does not hear an audible voice, but it could not be more clear if it had been voiced. The words are made real to the soul, “Christ has singled out me and is bidding me, to follow Him.”

Every true child of God hears a call from God, although he may not recognize at the time that is what it is. And it is often referred to in scripture -- 1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Peter 1:11. Abraham heard the call of God when he was an idolater living in the Chaldean city of Ur (Heb. 11:8), and he responded by following God to the land of promise.

This call of God to faith is described as a "heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1). When one knows that he has heard this call it becomes a basis of hope (Eph. 1:18). This calling also results in the aspiration to live a holy life (2 Thess. 1:11).

But there are some who are called by the Lord very clearly, who never receive salvation. They hear clearly God's general call, but it is not an effectual call that secures full surrender and willing compliance. But God has graciously invited them to come to Him, but they fail to do so for one reason or the other. They might forthrightly refuse. Or, they just postpone a response, until the voice is no longer heard. Or, they may respond in following Jesus, but they are as this man; *they determine to do so on their own terms.*

This man would follow, but on His terms (9:59b). There was something more important, more pressing to him. There was an urgent matter that he felt was more urgent than to begin to follow Jesus. And it seemed like such a reasonable request--he desired to bury his father. Now, does that not seem to be a reasonable request? It would seem so. After all, to bury one's father was an important task. It was the supreme way which one might honor one's father and thereby fulfil the 5th commandment of honoring father and mother. This seemed to the man to be a legitimate reason to postpone obedience to Jesus' directive to him. Surely, he could not be expected to obey the Master's directive if it meant ignoring this other important matter!

The Lord responded to him very directly (9:60) It was a simple request, a reasonable request, was it not? Well, apparently not, for Jesus responded with the words, "Let the dead (spiritually dead) bury their own dead (physical dead), but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." What the Lord was saying was that non-followers of him were spiritually dead, let them bury your father.

And so, how do you deal with a person who seems to want to set aside the clear commandment of God and he feels himself fully justified in doing so? You do not allow any excuse to be presented as a basis to set aside the commandment of God. You reaffirm the word of instruction in very clear strong terms.

Now, this response of Jesus seems all too harsh. It shocks the sensibilities of most of us and it must have done so to this would-be follower. Some see this as being so insensitive a response that they try and interpret it in a way which diminishes its harsh tone. For example, some say that the man was really asking to care for his dying father, and that he would be free to follow Jesus afterwards. This diminishes the severity of Jesus' words. But I do not think if a man was asking to care for his dying father he would ask if he could first bury his father before following Jesus. No, I think it is best to leave the text as it stands, and then try and deal with the difficulty as best we can. The Lord Jesus told this man that others could bury his dead father, he must go preach the kingdom of God. *The duty of following Jesus takes precedence over all other concerns.* And if the Lord would not accept this man's reason for failing or refusing to respond to his call, he will not accept yours. If you hear Him calling you to follow Him in faith and obedience, do it. Don't hesitate. Don't procrastinate. Do It. "But I don't know, pastor, it sure seems insensitive to me!" Let me try and explain why I think our Lord responded to this man in this way.

The Lord Jesus had a sense of urgency about preaching the kingdom of God that others about Him did not sense. And if we have a problem reconciling what He said, it is because we too, do not recognize the sense of urgency pressing upon Him. Let me give you a crude illustration. Suppose you and I were walking along a road to go to the funeral of my father who just died. My heart is filled with grief. No other thing is more important to me than my grief and the task before me. But as we are walking, we pass near a river. And as we do you hear the screams of a person. You see at once a person who is drowning and is desperately calling for help. You begin to run to her aid, calling me to help you rescue her. Now suppose I were to respond to you, "let me first go and bury my father and then I will come and help you." Absurd? Yes. But that is exactly what we have here. Our Lord was on His final journey to Jerusalem where He was to be rejected of men, suffer and die. He knew that the entire nation, His beloved nation, would soon be under God's wrath for having rejected Him. This was the last time that He would be through this area. They must hear the news of salvation. Nothing, not even burying one's father, is more urgent! He was filled with

concern, with a sense of urgency, and He was attempting to draft proclaimers of His message that He might warn as many as possible before judgment fell.

That was the historical situation. But the principle remains the same. You cannot follow Him on your terms. You cannot qualify your discipleship. You cannot pick and choose what you determine is important and leave the rest undone. If you hear and know the command of God you must do it. He is the Lord. You are His follower. You must follow His directives.

The third would-be follower of Jesus, we will call...

3. The Quitter (9:61, 62)

Consider the **condition of this man (9:57)**. He, like the first, would follow the Lord, but on His terms (9:61). This man, like the first, volunteered, "I will follow you, Lord." He was like the first in that he too, **resolved** to follow the Lord. And sadly, he also, was all too confident in himself and his ability. And as with the first, there is no mention by him of a sense of personal sin, guilt, or humility.

We also can say was like the second man; he would qualify his discipleship. "**Let me first go back and say good-bye to my family.**" But the Lord said "**No.**" For **this** man to have done that would have been as a man plowing who kept turning back, looking at where he had come. He would not be "fit" for the kingdom of Heaven. The NIV has the words of our Lord reading that a man who is plowing who keeps looking back is not "fit for service" in the kingdom of God. Some may think, therefore, that he is not speaking about discipleship in terms of whether or not a man has salvation, but whether or not he will be productive or successful in his service of the kingdom.

Since some may wrongly think this, I think it is important that we repeat something here. We have mentioned it in the past, but it is a matter which can cause continual confusion if it is not again and again reinforced. The theme that dominates much of Luke's Gospel is the matter of discipleship to Jesus--what it means and what it involves. Over and over again this is stressed. And, contrary to much of what is taught and assumed by evangelical Christians, **a disciple is not a special kind of Christian**. It is not as though one can be a Christian and not be a disciple, or that in some way a disciple is but more spiritual or dedicated kind of Christian, that a Christian refers to anyone who is forgiven, but a disciple is one who is actively serving in the kingdom. No, rather, in the Scriptures a Christian is a disciple and a disciple is a Christian. [To reinforce you may look at some verses in Acts of Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1, 19, 25, 26, 14:20-22, 28; 18:23, 27; 19:9; 11:26.] If you are not a true disciple of Jesus, you are not a true Christian. The Scriptures refer to disciples as Christians and Christians as disciples.

This is not in contradiction with a person being instantly forgiven of all sin and granted eternal life, upon one's faith in Christ, a gift bestowed once for all time, never to be revoked or forfeited. But simply claiming to be a believer, does not necessarily make you so. And even if you or I can state with precision all of the right doctrines regarding salvation, and you are able to articulate the teaching of the Scriptures about God and His Triune nature, about Christ and His nature, about His substitutionary sacrifice and that you only have an interest in that sacrifice through faith alone, even though you may be able to state all that, and claim to believe and rest in all that, you might still not be a true Christian.

The genuineness of one's faith, the proof of saving faith, is seen in the life, and the nature of that life may be summed up in this idea of discipleship to Jesus--a fully committed, and on-going life of faith and obedience to Christ and His Word. Even to the danger of sounding like a defective record, I reinforce this. In is the great danger of the day. The basis of salvation is faith in Christ alone; the way of salvation is repentance toward God and faith and obedience to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you might be an weak and struggling disciple, and you might be grossly ignorant of what it means fully to be a disciple, and you may even be a disciple subject to frequent failure and stumbling, but mark it down, if you are not a disciple of Jesus, you are no true Christian, and you do not possess eternal life, no matter what you claim to believe no matter how well you can articulate truth, no matter how glorious a experience you can testify as having experienced. I do not know how I can be more clear or straight forward.

We do not trust in our obedience, we do not trust in our commitment or level of commitment, for that matter, we do not trust in our faith; rather, we trust our case alone to Christ. But our obedience, our

commitment, our may be a legitimate ground of assurance. “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3). “Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God is perfected. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5). And so we do not trust in our commitment, in our obedience, but our commitment and obedience are a means by which we may receive assurance that we have an interest (or part) in Christ. Not simply by our claim of what we believe, which any hypocrite can offer, but because we have the evidence of the grace of God working in our lives.

Let us again look at our text, and the man we have referred to as *the Quitter*. Here is a man who was willing to follow Jesus, but it is apparent by our Lord’s response that this man was not fully committed to do so. He voiced the same resolve as the first man (9:57), but it must not have been with the same intensity or with the same degree of commitment. His loyalties were divided. He would follow the Lord, but all the while doing so, have his heart divided with other matters. Not fully committed to following the Lord, he would do so to a degree, but fail to do so completely. And this was revealed to our Lord by this man’s request, “but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.”

There is nothing wrong in and of itself with returning and saying good-bye to one’s family. There is Old Testament precedent for doing just that. Elisha returned first to bid his family farewell: cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21. But the Lord must have known that if this man went home to say good-bye, he would have probably never have left home. Perhaps his parents and family would have persuaded him to remain at home. Urging and pleading him not to be over zealous. After all it is not good to be carried away the enthusiasm of a moment, or persuaded so readily by some young Rabbi from Galilee.

Now, specifically, it does not say this man quit following the Lord, although we have called him the Quitter. And even the plowman referred to in verse 62 does not quit his plowing, and so, we might better describe this man by saying that he was a potential quitter. He was one who you could never rely upon because you would never know if he would be with you tomorrow. It would have been better for this man never to have started out than to follow filled with regret and with longings to return. Better not to begin, than to quit at a later time. But again, it never says specifically that he does not actually quit, he is just simply not fully dedicated to his task. And so, perhaps better than describing him as the Quitter, or the Potential Quitter, so then, we might best say...

He was a waffler. To waffle is to fail to be fully committed to something, or to be committed for a time, and then be uncommitted at other times; or, to be a follower in regard to this and that, but not in matters at of the kingdom. The problem is that this man could not be depended on. He says he will, but you never know whether he will, or see it through. This man, apparently, was as a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:8), and as such, he could not expect anything from the Lord (James 1:7).

If you are to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be fully committed to being so. You must be fully committed in your service in the Kingdom and to your Lord. Nothing must be allowed to interfere or take precedence over you being a disciple. This is your preeminent concern which governs all of life.

Again, perhaps a word of explanation is needful. By saying this we are not trying to describe service in the kingdom as religious duties in contrast to so-called secular things. I have known a number of people, particularly Christian wives and mothers, who think that serving as a disciple of Jesus is only done when they are passing out tracts, praying, reading the Bible, or are in some kind of meeting with other Christians. But their duties and concerns of the family seems to so limit them and consume them that they feel guilty they are not able to do more things for the church or others. This is not what we are saying. What we are saying is that regardless of what you do, whether you are at home or in the work place, you are fully committed first as a disciple of Jesus Christ, that you will consider, act and react, in a manner befitting and circumscribed in the Scriptures as a disciple is to live.

The problem of the one reflected here is that this one would in one situation do what is right, but in another he will compromise. In one situation or setting he will order his life one way, but in another situation or setting he will abide by different principles. No. The true disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to the kingdom whether at home or on the job. His Christianity is not as a change of clothes which he puts on for a day and then takes off, but he is committed fully wherever he/she finds herself to live as Christ

would have him/her live. Apparently, this man was not willing to order his life in this fashion. Our Lord knew fully the heart of this man, and so He spoke to him in this very direct manner.

In verse 62 we read of the treatment of the Lord toward this one. Just as one who is plowing in the field must give full attention to his work to produce a straight furrow, so a disciple must be fully committed to the kingdom of God. If a man plowing looks continually back rather than looking forward to his work, he makes a mess of the field. He may think he is plowing, but he is actually only making so many ruts in the ground.

So it is with one who begins to follow the Lord. If his attention is on other things, if he is diverted from his faith and obedience, he is bringing a reproach to his Lord, and making a mess of his faith. Once a man begins to plow, he needs to keep at plowing and give his full attention and energy to plowing. So it is, once a man begins to follow Christ, obeying Him and serving Him, keep on doing so. Obey Him. Trust Him. Follow Him. Do so fully and don't quit until the work is done.

Some have failed here and have proved themselves "unfit" for the kingdom. They allowed themselves to be diverted. They allowed themselves to be caught up with other cares and concerns. The fact is that they have other concerns to which they will make their priority in life. Other people or other things are at times more important than Christ and His cause. May God give us grace to persevere in our course and be fully focused on what He has called us to do.

Conclusion:

And so, we see these three would-be disciples. We really do not know how these three responded to our Lord. Whether or not they adhered to Him is not disclosed. We do not know whether or not the first was willing to suffer hardship for following Jesus, whether or not the second was willing to be fully committed to obey Christ regardless of what other matters called him, whether or not the third would be fully committed to his task and continue in it. *How they responded is really not clear, but **how they were to respond is quite clear***, and the Lord has left these words for us today to challenge and confront us to the end that we might follow Him fully and lastingly.

And this is what we want for each of us, that every man, woman, teenager, or child, will say "I am for Christ, I resolve to live for Him regardless of what is required, regardless of the cost. Straight ahead I am committed to this matter and, by His grace, I will not be diverted or deterred. With all my desire and all my strength I will plow this course, straight ahead toward the end of the field." This is the description of a simple convert to Jesus Christ--nothing more, nothing less. He has come by simple faith in Christ, and has simply put away a self-directed life, having laid aside self-righteousness and worldliness, having turned from self-indulgent sins of the flesh and mind, and has come to Him who alone can make sinful men to be His true disciples. This is what it is to be a Christian.
