

'Go and Proclaim the Kingdom of God'

This is the second in a short series of articles from Luke 9:57-61 in which we're looking at counting the cost of following Jesus. Following Jesus Christ in obedience to his word in scripture is never without its challenges. We have a natural fallen tendency to want things our own way, the easy way, i.e., something that doesn't take us out of our comfort zone. And yet, contrary to this, the scriptures teach that following Jesus in obedience to his word will require grace driven effort and sacrifice.

In my last article we saw that following Jesus must take priority over worldly comforts. Throughout the gospels we hear from Jesus how his life on earth will not be an easy one in many ways, including the fact that the worldly comforts that many enjoy will not always be available to him and his disciples (Mt. 12:1). He will often have "...no place to lay his head." Luke 9:58 Today we come to our next point from this passage. Following Jesus must take:
—Priority over Earthly Wealth

Obviously there's some overlap in these first two points but, as we'll see, there's an intentional focus on the fact that we can, far too often, place a priority on our material well-being rather than seeking to follow Jesus. This is what Luke wants to show us from the next portion of this passage. Let's look at the text again, beginning in verse 59: "To another [Jesus] said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'" At first glance this request seems reasonable. In fact, the proper burial of a Jewish father is supported by scripture (Genesis 25:9; 35:29; 50:13). We're certainly called to care for the needs of our family (1 Timothy 5:8). What, then, is Jesus referring to? To fully understand this passage we must ask what this would have meant to a first century Jewish audience. Implied in the statement of this 'would be' disciple is that his father is not actually dead at the present time. If the man's father were dead, the man would be attending to the burial rather than listening to the teaching of Jesus at that moment. The Jews generally buried their loved one on the same day of their death—or at least within twenty four hours.

This being true, some biblical scholars suggest that Jesus is calling attention to the fact that the son wants to go home and stay with his father until his father dies (an indefinite delay) at which time he will receive his inheritance. One passage that seems to lend support to this, also from Luke's gospel, is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:12). In that parable the younger of two sons asks for his inheritance prior to the death of his father which, clearly, was not commonly done. This would have placed a hardship on the father to sell, at least, a portion of his estate to give the son his inheritance. It seems, then, that the man in our particular passage wants to see how things turn out with the receiving of his earthly inheritance before he decides to "follow Jesus."

Jesus' response is that there's no time for delay. There are others who can take care of the process of burial when the father dies. Notice verse 60: "And Jesus said, 'Leave the (spiritually) dead to bury their own (physically) dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the

kingdom of God.” Although this verse may seem insensitive to our twenty-first century ears, Jesus is merely pointing out that this man is clearly placing a priority on getting his earthly inheritance. By his attempts to delay, he’s showing that he doesn’t really want to bear the cost of following Jesus.

Sadly, in our materialistic Western culture there are far too many who allow acquiring more wealth to dictate their commitment, or lack thereof, to following Jesus Christ. Many in America have been abundantly blessed materially and yet, we must realize that earthly riches are always uncertain. Rather than our bank account, our genuine hope must be in God. In 1 Timothy 6:17 the apostle Paul writes, “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”

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