

The Difference Between Admiring and Following

Luke 9:57-62

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Stephen Davey

God ordained several divine encounters for Jesus as He walked along the road with His disciples. These encounters come in the form of three men, who either volunteer or are invited by Jesus to follow Him. Their three different responses illuminate three of the primary excuses the Israelites had for not following Jesus. These excuses haven't changed thousands of years later. We need to be aware of them in our lives today.

Beginning in 2011, an organization was created with a mission in mind: to establish a permanent settlement on planet Mars. They began in earnest, raising funds, working with existing aerospace companies around the world, and they developed a training program that would eventually send the first four pioneers to Mars by the year 2027. These pioneers would be trained and totally committed to everything needed in that settlement; they would serve as chefs, farmers, doctors, engineers, and everything in between.

The project attracted global attention and interest. More than 200,000 people from around the world immediately volunteered, going through a rigorous application process to be among the four chosen voyagers. They agreed to give up

everything and everyone for a chance to pioneer life on Mars.

But what made this even more striking to me, as I read about it, was the simple fact that their journey to Mars would be a one-way trip. The cost to get one person to Mars was a fortune; once there they would be indispensable; so, there were no return flights. They were volunteering to die on planet Mars.

There's obviously a big difference between admiring these people and signing up to go along. It's one thing to watch the news reports and send congratulations; it's another thing to buy a one-way ticket to Mars.

The philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, put it well in the early 1800s when he wrote that there is a vast difference between admiring the truth and following the truth.

Which is why Jesus Christ, Kierkegaard wrote, never asked for admirers, He wanted followers.

Let me tell you that to this day, it's possible to admire Jesus without following Jesus. It's possible to admire the resurrection of Jesus and buy a new outfit and some chocolate candy, to enjoy the setting and the ceremony but have nothing to do with the resurrected Savior.

I can't think of a better text for Easter Sunday than the text we arrive at today in our study through the Gospel by Luke.

We are about to listen in on some conversation between Jesus and three admirers. And we will watch the Lord cut to the heart of the issue in His response to each one of them.

We're now in the last paragraph of **Luke chapter 9** and I want to outline these three conversations by putting them into what I'll call the three most common excuses to following Jesus.

In fact, as I've talked to people over the years about what it means to follow Jesus, I know the truth of 2 Corinthians 4:4—that unless the Spirit of God opens their eyes and their minds that are blinded by the god of this world, Satan himself. The light of the glorious gospel of Christ won't shine upon them.

Unless that new birth of spiritual life occurs in someone's heart, I can predict that I'll hear one of these three excuses.

These three excuses basically say the same thing: "I will admire your Jesus, just don't ask me to follow Him."

And the first excuse sounds like this:

"I will follow the Lord, but not for *nothing!*"

In other words, I'll follow the Lord if He gives me what I want in return.

Now notice verse 57:

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Luke 9:57

In the original language, you can expand it to understand that this man is literally promising here: "I will follow You wherever, at any time, to any destination, no matter what the distance might be."

R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 559

Sounds like he's willing to go to Mars!



Where has God asked you to follow Him that has placed you outside your comfort zone? How did you handle that situation? What was God trying to teach you by making you uncomfortable in those moments?

When the early church is created, in a matter of months from this point there in Jerusalem, this guy would be a top candidate for leading deacon or elder—he will fly through the interview process.

Not so fast.

Matthew's Gospel account tells us that this man was a scribe. He was an expert in the Scriptures; the scribes were the scholars of Old Testament law during these days.

Matthew tells us that he approaches Jesus by calling Him "Teacher" and this provides a clue to his true motive and attitude.

Every time in Matthew's Gospel someone called Jesus "Teacher" (διδασκαλε), and it happened five times in Matthew's Gospel, that person had no real interest in becoming His disciple.

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew* (Crossway, 2013), p. 213

It was customary during the days of Christ for followers of a teacher, rabbi, or prophet to travel along with him, to live with him, and to learn the law from him.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume One* (Baker Exegetical, 1996), p. 977

But this man is a scribe already; he's already got his graduate degree hanging on the wall in his study. He's already anticipating the prophetic fulfillment of the coming Messiah.

And if Jesus is indeed the Messiah, it was assumed that He would free Israel from Roman tyranny; He will usher in economic prosperity; He will bring in the Kingdom of God and He will more than likely give his

favorite students the best positions in the kingdom.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 255

Teacher, I'm ready to follow you there; strike up the band; load up the rocket fuel; let's do this!

What sounds like a wonderful decision to become a follower of Christ is really an offer that is hiding self-centered desire and pride.

In his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, Sean O'Donnell does a wonderful job paraphrasing this man's offer that reveals his true motive:

This scribe came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, as one Bible expert to another, I've noticed who's on your team thus far—some fishermen, a converted tax collector, some political zealots—perhaps You could use someone with a theological head on his shoulders and some religious respectability. Someone like me! I will follow you wherever You go, and You and I can bring in this kingdom. ... Teacher, this is your lucky day."

Adapted from O'Donnell, p. 213

Now what's interesting is that Jesus doesn't turn him down, but He does tell him the truth.

Here in verse 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."*

Luke 9:58

In other words, “I have no real estate, there’s no palace up ahead, I have no street address.”

The word Jesus used here for nests—***the birds have nests***—is from a word family that can refer to everything from pitching a tent, to having a dwelling, to having the cover of shade.

Ivor Powell, [Luke's Thrilling Gospel](#) (Kregel, 1984), p. 241

Jesus is effectively saying that to follow Him means you won’t even have the benefit of a shade tree.

Jesus sees through this scribe, who happens to be an early proponent of prosperity theology—that God always pays off His disciples while they’re alive.

No, Jesus says, “You follow Me, and foxes and birds might have it better off than you; you might not even have a shade tree out back where you can prop your feet up and rest for a while.”

Now we’re not told what this man’s response was—if he continued or turned back. We’re just not told.

I think Luke leaves it open ended because God’s Spirit wants you to answer the question for yourself. If following Jesus didn’t seem to pay off, would you press on?

Or would you say with this scribe, “I’ll follow you, Lord, but not for nothing.”

Now with that, the Lord encounters another man; and this man will deliver

what I consider the second common excuse to following Jesus Christ.

Here it is:

“I will follow the Lord, but not right *now!*”

Now notice verse 59:

To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Luke 9:59-60

Again, at first glance, this man seems sincere, and the Lord seems rather severe.

It sounds like he’s telling this young man to skip his dad’s funeral and get on with preaching the gospel.

What’s going on here? Well, first, it was the duty of the first-born son to serve as the executor of the father’s estate. He was the heir to his father’s business and homestead.

But more importantly, the text doesn’t actually tell us that his father died. Had he died, this young man would have been ceremonially unclean for the following seven days, not here on the street talking to Jesus.

And in this part of the world, in the first century, the deceased were typically buried within 24 hours.

Adapted from Powell, p. 242

What he says to Jesus can be understood to mean, “I will follow you after my father is buried—or after my father has died.”

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 131

“Let me bury my father” was a Near-Eastern figure of speech. We use them all the time when we say things like, “It’s raining cats and dogs” or “I’ll give you a piece of my mind.”

O’Donnell, p. 215

Let me bury my father was an expression for taking care of the family business. And in this case, it’s an easy excuse to stall for time.

It also reveals this young man’s priority in life. *Let me first take care of business. Let me first get my inheritance. Let me first get some financial security.*

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 263

I will follow you, Lord, but not now.

Have you ever wanted the Lord to hold off His return for just a little while longer? Maybe you wanted to reach some milestone, you wanted to enjoy some experience first.



What is your honest view of Heaven? Is it something you look forward to regularly? Do you think about it daily? Or do you feel apathetic, or even reluctant, to go to Heaven when compared to your situation here on earth?

If the rapture is going to happen, at least wait until you get your driver’s license and experience the thrill of driving; perhaps it’s getting close to graduation, you would like to march down that aisle before Jesus comes.

I will admit having that thought around the time I was getting married. I remember hoping that if the Lord was going to rapture the church, He could at least wait until after the honeymoon.

I remember wanting to see our twin sons born—what a milestone, what an experience!

A few months *after* they were born, my wife and I were both *praying* for the rapture. *Please come quickly, Lord Jesus.*

Now here in His response in verse 60, Jesus says to this man, ***“Let the dead bury the dead.”*** This was also an expression of speech not intended to be taken literally. And we know that because dead people can’t bury dead people.

So, Jesus can’t mean here that dead people oversee funerals.

More than likely, the Lord is using the first reference to dead people in a spiritual context. That is, they are spiritually dead. People who have no spiritual life will focus only on what happens during their lifetime, with no thought of the life to come.

Now Jesus is exaggerating His response to make a point. The Lord often did this in conversations where He exposed the heart of someone by giving them an exaggerated command.

For instance, later in Luke's Gospel, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks how to become a follower; and Jesus tells him to go and sell all his stuff and give all his money away.

Jesus wasn't saying that it was wrong to have money or possessions, and that in order to follow Him you had to be poor. This was an exaggerated demand that Jesus used to expose what this man treasured in life *more* than following Jesus.

So here in this conversation, the point Jesus is making to this man isn't so much about attending funerals, or rights of inheritance, or what to do with your family business.

His point is dealing with this very common excuse to postpone a commitment to follow Christ—whatever it is!

“Lord, I'll follow you, but not right now!”

Kenneth Clark, internationally known for his television series Civilization, wrote in

his autobiography that while visiting a beautiful church building, he believed he had an overwhelming religious experience that filled him with joy. However, it created a problem. If he allowed himself to be influenced by it, he knew that he would have to change; his family might think he had lost his mind. He concluded, “I was too deeply embedded in the world to change course.”

Vernon Grounds. “*Changed Lives Are Possible*” Our Daily Bread (10-01-05).

This young man was saying to Jesus, “Look, I plan on following you Lord, but now I'm deeply embedded in other things, and I can't change course; but I will eventually. I can't tell you when, but I will get around to following You some day.”

Is that you? Is there something in the way of you walking with the Lord right now?

I will follow the Lord, but not for nothing in return.

I will follow the Lord, but not just yet.

And now another common excuse appears in this third and final conversation. It sounds like this:

“I will follow the Lord, but not *entirely!*”

Verse 61:

Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”

Luke 9:61

Now again, don't get hung up on Jesus suggesting that you can't go home and say goodbye to your parents before you sail off to some mission field.

It isn't wrong to tell your family goodbye.

That's not the point of this conversation. In fact, Jesus makes it clear in his response, **verse 62**:

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:62

Jesus uses a farming analogy to deliver a warning to this man and to the rest of the world.

In the days of Christ, the plow was nothing more than a piece of wood with a handle at one end and a metal tip at the other end. It demanded constant attention.

J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ (Zondervan, 1981), p. 272

But Jesus again exaggerates His response in this illustration; He says something here that no one would ever attempt to do if they were serious about plowing the ground.

He says here that the farmer is attempting to plow while looking back.

The present participle tells us here that this man isn't glancing back every now and then, he's constantly looking back; he never looks forward.

Lenski, p. 563

No one can plow forward while looking backward. You can't farm that way and you can't follow Jesus that way.

And that's at the heart of this man's excuse. He says he wants to go tell everyone in his old life goodbye, but in reality, his heart doesn't want to leave his old world—his past, his old way of life.

Bock, p. 983

He sounds like he wants to leave it all behind, but if you talk to him, he will tell you all about how much better his old life used to be, how many friends he used to have, how much money he used to make, how happy he used to be.

Sure, I'll follow Christ, but not entirely. My heart is back there where I used to live.

How many would say today, "Lord, I want to follow you, but truth be told, there's something holding me back, something else I prefer."

I'd like to buy that one-way ticket into Heaven with you, but earth is where I'd rather live.

I find it interesting that Luke doesn't tell us what decisions these three men make following the Lord's challenge.



Which of these three excuses is the most common in your life? How do you discipline yourself to not make these excuses to Jesus?

We're not given their responses to the Lord.

You don't know their decision, but you do know yours! What's your decision?

Lord, I'll follow you, but not entirely.

Lord, I'll follow you, but not for nothing in return.

Lord, I'll follow you one day, but not now.

In 1904, William Borden was the heir to the Borden Dairy estate. For his high school graduation present, his parents gave him a trip around the world.

His mother had already had a profound influence in his life. She had become a Christian when William was 8 years old and had begun taking him with her on Sundays to a church in downtown Chicago we know today as Moody Memorial Church. By the time he graduated from high school, he had given his life to Christ.

As a 16-year-old, traveling through the Far East, he was overwhelmed with a burden for the lost. He wrote home to say, "I have decided to give my life for the mission field." At the same time, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves."

Most people thought his burden would go away, but it only intensified. When he began his freshman studies at Yale University, he started a small prayer group that would eventually transform campus life at Yale. By the end of his freshman year, 150 students were meeting weekly for Bible study and

prayer. By the time Borden was a senior, 85 percent of the student body were attending.

After graduating from Yale, with business prospects pouring in, Borden kept to his vision to preach to the unreached people overseas. He wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: "No retreats."

No reserves; no retreats.

Borden would turn down every lucrative position offered to him—including the reigns at the vast Borden enterprise—and instead enrolled in seminary. After completing his studies, he traveled to Egypt to learn Arabic to prepare for a lifetime ministry among the Muslims of China.

But he would never make it there. To the shock of the western world—who were chronicling his decision to leave his inheritance behind—he became ill. While in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and within a few weeks, William Borden died at the age of 25.

Newspapers headlined the news of Yale's most famous graduate. Reporters and business leaders alike speculated on the tragic waste of such a promising life.

It's as if he anticipated the news that would spread abroad about his decision. So, just prior to his death, William Borden opened his Bible and where he had earlier written those statements of commitment, he wrote two more words. They were discovered after his death, underneath the words "No reserves" and "No

retreats,” he had scribbled down the words, “No regrets.”

Our Daily Bread (12-31-1988); The Yale Standard (Fall 1970); Mrs. Howard Taylor, Borden of Yale (Bethany House, 1988)

That kind of decisiveness in follow Christ has a way of reordering all your priorities and decisions in life.

Where will your Bible be this coming week?

How will you respond when someone asks you if you’re a Christian?

How will you handle temptations as they relate to integrity and purity and humility?

What part does will the Lord play in major decision of life?

Here’s a simpler and final question: where will you be next Sunday morning?

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