

Two Questions for Disciples of Jesus

I. What kind of follower am I?

II. What kind of Savior is Jesus?

<sup>51</sup> As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them<sup>ld</sup>?" <sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then he and his disciples went to another village.

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

<sup>59</sup> He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup> Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Tell me, do we have any baseball fans here today? How many of you root for the Brew Crew? Raise your hand. Now, just for a minute, I'd like you to do a little self-analysis. I want you to rate your passion for the Brewers on a scale of 1 to 10. 10 means you hardly ever miss a game. You know the names of almost all the players. And one means, well, if they make it to the playoffs you might tune in. What number are you? That's often the case with sports fans. There are some people who are absolutely passionate about their team. Totally committed. There are others who are, well, not so much.

You realize that the same thing is true when it comes to people's relationship with God. There are some who are passionate about their spiritual life. They are totally devoted to the Lord. They're all in. Totally committed. And there are some who say they are followers of Jesus, but only when it's convenient, or when it doesn't crimp their style, or when they have nothing better to do. The question is, which are you? Our text for today gives us the perfect opportunity to ask ourselves that question—and then an even more important one. Our theme for today is simply this:

Two Questions for Disciples of Jesus

I. What kind of follower am I?

II. What kind of Savior is Jesus?

The opening verse of our text marks a bit of a turning point in Luke's gospel. Up until this time, Luke had been recording the miracles that Jesus had done to prove his identity as the promised Messiah. In fact, Jesus had just finished asking his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter spoke for the 12 when he said, "You are God's Messiah" (Luke 9:20). From that point on,

Jesus begins to show his disciples what that would mean for him and for them. For him, it would mean that he would suffer and die at the hands of his enemies in the city of Jerusalem. For them it would mean that if they were going to be his disciples, they would have to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.

With that in mind, Luke begins this section with the words, *As the time approached for him to be taking up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)* Literally, Jesus “turned his face toward” Jerusalem. In other words, he knew what he had to do. He knew where he had to go. He was committed. He was dialed in. He was like a Tomahawk missile zeroed in on its target. But before he arrived in Jerusalem, he still had some teaching to do, starting with two of his closest disciples, James and John. Luke records the event with these words: *Jesus sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him because he was headed for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village. (Luke 9:52-55).*

It seems that James and John were part of what we might call “the advance team” that went ahead of Jesus to make arrangements for food and lodging for Jesus and his companions. But in this particular Samaritan village, the people wanted nothing to do with Jesus. And these two disciples took offense at that. They didn't like that these foreigners were dissing their savior, not showing him the respect he deserved. In fact, James and John think that the proper response for such disrespect would be for them to call fire down from heaven on them. You might say that these disciples were very passionate about their Lord, but very intolerant of anyone who felt otherwise.

Tell me, can you relate? Are there times when, in our eagerness to be followers of Jesus, we end up coming off as intolerant, or judgmental? You know, we're quick to criticize those we perceive to be not doing or believing the right thing? That's the trap that James and John fell into. They were quick to condemn those that Jesus still had a plan for. That's why here in our text, Jesus doesn't rebuke the Samaritan village. He rebukes his disciples.

But James and John weren't the only ones who needed some correction—so did a few other fellows that Jesus met on the road to Jerusalem. Luke tells us, *As they were walking along the road, a man said to (Jesus), “I will follow you wherever you go.”* At face value, that sounds like a good thing. The man is committing himself to be a follower of Jesus. But Jesus has the ability to do something that we can't do. Jesus can read the man's heart. And Jesus' response implies that the man had failed to take into account the sacrifices necessary for being a follower of Jesus. Apparently, this man thought that living his life as a Christian would be no trouble at all.

It kind of reminds me of the teenage boy who's watching a 4th of July parade when the soldiers walk by. He sees the uniforms and the medals and the weapons and he says, “That's what I want to be. That'll be fun—without realizing the sacrifices he may have to make, namely, the deployments, the time spent away from family, the trauma, or the potential loss of life and limb. Jesus says that being a soldier of the cross may bring with it similar sacrifices. I mean think about what Jesus had to endure. Think of what Jesus went without. Jesus tells the man, *“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* In other words, if you think that being a follower of Jesus guarantees you a comfortable life on this side of the grave, think again.

After this man, Jesus encounters two more men who have something in common. They

both have an excuse for why they can't immediately follow Jesus. When Jesus says to the first man, *"Follow me,"* the man's response is, *"Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* Sounds like a legitimate request. To be excused for your father's funeral. Or maybe more likely, to go and take care of your aging father until he dies. But notice Jesus' response, *"Let the dead bury their own dead. In other words, 'Let the spiritually dead take care of the spiritually dead. But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God'—while you still have time."*

The next man makes a similar request. He says to Jesus, *"I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."* Again, it sounds like a reasonable request. But by his answer, Jesus diagnoses the malady in both of these men. They both had something more important to them than God. In their case, it was their family. Although Jesus was calling them to go on one direction, their hearts were being tugged in a different direction. They were looking back, kind of like Lot's wife who looked back with longing towards Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the end, was turned into a pillar of salt. That's what Jesus meant when he said, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62)

Again, can you relate? As you consider the Lord's call to follow him, what's competing for your attention? Maybe, it is your family, just like those two men in our text. Now, don't get me wrong. Jesus is not anti-family. Jesus puts us into families to bless us. As believers, we have a responsibility to love and care for and spend time with our family members. But when we let our commitment to our families take precedent over our devotion to our God, when we let our spouse or our children take that #1 spot in our hearts, instead of Jesus being in that #1 spot, we become guilty of the sin of idolatry. And idolatry will separate us from God forever.

Or maybe what's pulling you away from an undivided devotion to God is your job. You've got no time to be regular in worship, no time to volunteer at church, because you're scheduled to work. It's one of those, *"I'd love to follow you Jesus, but not right now. When I have time, or after I get married, or after the kids start school, or after they're out of the house, or after I retire, or when I get a little closer to the end—that's when I'll start to really follow you."*

My friends, if we think that Jesus should be happy if we give him any time at all, if we think that Jesus will be satisfied with any devotion we show him, we'd better think again. Jesus is not looking for half-hearted followers. In fact, what did Jesus say about those he calls lukewarm believers? In Revelation 3:16 Jesus says, *"Because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I'm about to spit you out of my mouth."*

When I think about the temperature of my passion for the Lord, when I think about these men in our text who all said they wanted to be followers of Jesus but were not fully committed to him, when I think about that first question, *"What kind of follower am I?"* I have to admit, *"I'm not a very good one."*

But you realize, in this section of Scripture, Jesus is not only teaching us what it means to be his disciples and what kind of commitment it takes. He also reveals what it is that works that commitment in our hearts. And the fact is, it's not you or me that works that commitment. Rather it's Jesus—which brings us to the second and even more important question for disciples of Jesus. It's not I. What kind of follower am I? But rather, II. What kind of Savior is Jesus?

You see, this is what creates a true and lasting devotion to Jesus. It's Jesus himself. The better we know Jesus. The more devoted we will be to him. Here in our text we learn three things about Jesus. We learn he's committed; he's compassionate, and he's the one who calls us to follow him.

First, we learn that Jesus is committed. We see that in the very first verse, don't we? Luke writes, *Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.* Right? Jesus knew full well that what awaited him

there: the mockery, the flogging, the cross. Yet, he was committed to carrying out the mission of rescuing a world full of sinners from the fires of hell forever. And that means, he's committed to you. For all the times that you and I have hesitated, for all the times that we've failed, all that times that we've run away from God, or tried to take the easy way out, Jesus did not. Jesus proved his love and devotion, not only to his Father's will. He proved his love and devotion to you. Nothing was going to deter Jesus from rescuing you and me from the mess that sin has made in our lives.

But not only was Jesus committed. Jesus is also compassionate. I mean, isn't that evidenced here in our text? Rather than fulfilling the request of his disciples to rain down fire on the unbelieving Samaritan village, he had compassion on them. He forgoes judgment and gives them all a little more time of grace to come to know and believe in him as their savior. That, my friends, is a God of compassion, the same God who continues to show compassion to habitual sinners like you and me.

Jesus is committed. He's compassionate. And now he is the one who calls us to follow him with an undivided heart. To follow him not as a duty or an obligation, but as an expression of true freedom. Jesus has set you free from the guilt of your past. He's set you free from the lust for more stuff. Set you free from the bondage to the things of this world that really don't matter. Jesus has set you free by making you members of his kingdom. He's given you the riches of his love, his forgiveness, he's given you the promise of his presence in life and the assurance of paradise in the life to come. And ultimately it's all these gifts of grace that turn our hearts from being self-centered, to being Christ-centered. It's what transforms us being halftime or quarter time followers of Jesus to being full-time, all in, committed disciples of Christ. Does that mean that we have to be rabid fans wearing a rainbow colored wig and John 3:16 on our t-shirts? No. Rather, it means that, in every aspect of our lives, with God's help, and by his grace, we will experience a more fervent devotion to the Lord, who was 100% devoted to us first. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.