

25. The disciples Jesus wants

“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 plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:57-62)

No one has ever been more surprising than Jesus was. Very often, he did the opposite of what was expected. Consider, for example, the text we have just read. We know that Jesus wanted disciples—men who would follow him, learn from him, be trained by him and spread his message. But here are three men who say they are ready to follow him, and what does Jesus do? He says discouraging things to them. He makes demands of them that seem unreasonable. It’s almost as if he is turning down their offer to become his disciples. Why would he act this way?

Another time, according to Luke 14:25-30:

“Great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish”?’”

Jesus does want all men to come to him, to follow him and be blessed by him. But no one should take this commitment lightly. Jesus does not want a crowd of people who follow him only when everything is easy and pleasant. He can do more with twelve true disciples than with 5,000 who are lukewarm and uncommitted.

So, what kind of person did Jesus want as a disciple?

THE KIND WHO ACCEPTS HARDSHIP (“...THE SON OF MAN HAS NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD.”)

First, Jesus wants his disciples to be ready to accept hard conditions. A moment ago we read in Luke 9:57,58, “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.’” Was this man expecting to receive a material advantage in following Jesus? We don’t know, but this much is certain, there are some who come to the church today as one would take out an insurance policy—to help them in case of illness, to bury them in case of death, etc. They are looking for a material advantage. There are churches that promise an easy life to their members. They preach messages like “Stop Suffering” or “All servants of God will be rich.”

But Jesus didn’t hide the fact that his disciple could know poverty and suffering in this life. Jesus himself was poor. According to an African proverb, “If you go to the frog’s house and find him squatting, don’t bother asking him for a chair.” Jesus suffered. 1 Peter 2:21 says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” His apostles, too, were familiar with all kinds of suffering. Here is what the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 concerning the life of an apostle:

“For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake... we are dishonored... To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless... We have been made as the filth of the world, the off scouring of all things until now.”

But the one who accepts suffering with and for Jesus will not lose out. After having said in Matthew 16:24, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me,” Jesus adds, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” In following Jesus, you may lose property, your place in society, or in certain countries, even your physical life. But Jesus promises that you will find life—true and eternal life.

This hope sustained Paul in all his sufferings for the Lord. He said in 2 Corinthians 4:17–5:1:

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent [that is, our body], is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

THE ONE WHO PUTS JESUS IN FIRST PLACE (“LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR OWN DEAD”)

Secondly, Jesus wants his disciples to put him in first place in their lives. Let’s go back to Luke 9 and look at verses 59–60: Jesus 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.’” It is possible that the father of this man was not dead yet. If the burial was already in progress, it is unlikely that the man would have been there talking to Jesus. If then his father was alive, his question could indicate either that he was afraid of his father’s negative reaction to his decision to follow Jesus, or that he wanted to put Jesus in second place, after his father. In either case, Jesus does not agree. He clearly says in Matthew 10:37, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

But suppose the man to whom Jesus spoke had just learned of the death of his father. It is true that the word of God orders children to honor their parents, and this would normally include giving them a proper burial when they die. Honor to parents, the burial of people with dignity and respect, hospitality—these are duties that God ordains under ordinary circumstances and that men also recognize as duties. But there are higher duties. Unfortunately, people do not always know which duties are more important than others.

The problem is that we allow less important duties to interfere with our spiritual duties such as worshipping God, listening to His Word, and other activities that contribute to the salvation of souls and the strengthening and growth of the kingdom of God, the Church. In Luke 10:38–42, Jesus was received by two sisters named Martha and Mary. Martha was busy with household matters such as preparation of

the meal that she wanted to serve the Lord. These were perfectly justifiable things to be occupied with. Mary, on the other hand, was sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to him. When Martha asked Jesus to tell her sister to help her, he responded, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” Preparing a meal is good. Listening to the word of Jesus is much better. Burying a parent is important. Following Jesus is more important.

Unfortunately, our actions often show that the things of God are not the priority that they should be in our lives. We know, for example, that a Christian must be faithful in participating in worship each Sunday and in other activities of the Church. But how many Christians give the following excuses for their absences: “I went to a funeral,” “I was invited to a wedding,” “There was a meeting of all the people from our village,” “I was tired,” “I went to vote,” “I had to do my laundry,” “I was traveling,” “I had a visitor”?

If Jesus said to the man who wanted to bury his father, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God,” what would he think of our excuses? It is important to recognize that Jesus must be everything for us or he is nothing at all.

THE ONE WHO DOES NOT LOOK BACK (“...HAVING PUT HIS HAND TO THE PLOW...”)

Finally, Jesus wants as his disciples people who do not look back after having made their decision. In Luke 9:61–62, we read, “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 plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Jesus may seem to us to be too hard here. What could be wrong with letting one say goodbye to his family before following Jesus? But this is not hardness on Jesus’ part. He surely knew the pressures to not follow Jesus that this man would encounter at home. Many of those who say, “I’ll speak to my family and then I’ll be baptized,” are no longer converted after listening to their parents. It is not that we must abandon our parents, but we must decide for Christ, whatever their opinions may be. If it is only with their approval that you follow Jesus, then they still occupy the first place in your life. Jesus is not a mean person. On the contrary, he speaks out of a perfect knowledge of what is best for us.

We must not look back. When working with a plow to make furrows for planting a field, one must look ahead or the furrows will not be straight. In spiritual life, also, it is necessary to look straight ahead toward the heavenly goal. Yes, Jesus calls us to leave certain apparent advantages and to suffer with him, but Paul says in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

CONCLUSION

What sort of disciple does Jesus want today? He wants one who is ready to accept hard conditions for his cause. Jesus did not have anywhere to lay his head. He did without many things for us. He wants disciples who will love him in return, who will see the greatness of his cause, and who will give up whatever they have to in order to serve him.

Jesus wants the one who is willing to give him first place in his or her life. If someone asked concerning you, "What is the most important thing in his life?", what kind of answer would be given? If you are a Christian, the people around you should know that your life is built on an absolute commitment to Jesus.

Jesus wants as a disciple someone who puts his hand to the plow and does not look back. He wants someone who has counted the cost and made the decision for Jesus and will not go back on his word. Someone who knows the world has given him nothing that is real or lasting. All his hope is in Jesus.

And you... does Jesus have the place in your life that he wants and deserves?