



March 19, 2023 – “No Excuses”

CONTEXT

In Luke 9:51 Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem. He will follow God’s plan and by being in Jerusalem, he will initiate the events that will lead to his arrest, death, resurrection and ascension. As he makes his way, he talks about the cost of discipleship with people who say they want to follow him. Jesus makes it very clear that he must be the number one priority for anyone who wants to follow him. Family and friends and work and other commitments must be secondary. As Jesus calls people to follow him, excuses are made about “why” they cannot follow him right now.

Jesus’ demands of discipleship are quite stringent. There is no wiggle room. The first conversation warns that following Jesus may make you feel like an exile and a stranger on earth. Jesus has a different notion of success than the world. Following him may mean that you find yourself isolated from the world.

The next two conversations revolve around people who are asking for a temporary delay in following him. One man asks to bury his father and Jesus sees that his heart is not in the right place. The saying here about the dead burying their own dead is more than likely a word play by Jesus. “Let the [spiritually] dead bury their own [physical] dead” is what Jesus is really saying because the dead cannot bury anyone.

What Jesus is after, though, is making sure this man knows that if he follows Jesus, he must proclaim the kingdom of God to others. Jesus must come first, and the gospel must be proclaimed. Both things matter. Note that in the beginning of chapter 10 the seventy-two are sent out by Jesus to proclaim his message.

The final conversation is also about priorities and focus. Jesus says the kingdom of God is here and there is not time to go back home. To be a disciple requires a radical priority shift. Good things cannot take priority over the best thing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood this when he wrote The Cost of Discipleship and said, “*When Christ bids a man come and follow him, he bids him come and die.*”



Scripture and Quote from Dallas Willard:

Luke 9:57-62

⁵⁷As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” ⁵⁹He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” ⁶²Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰A man with leprosy^[a] came to him and begged him on his knees, ⁴¹“If you are willing, you can make me clean.” ⁴²Jesus was indignant.^[b] He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”⁴³ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Luke 14:25-35

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ ³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. ³⁴ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciples*

“Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring.”



Questions:

1. The title of this week's sermon is "No Excuses." What is an excuse? Where in the Bible do we see people making excuses for not following God's direction? What excuses do we use or hear others use today for not following Jesus or doing what He is calling us to do?
2. Throughout the New Testament we are told that salvation is a gift from God – free for all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. If salvation is free, why is there a cost of discipleship?
3. In Luke 9:57-62 Jesus identifies 3 different costs of following Him and becoming a disciple. What are they? Can you think of other costs of discipleship?
4. Why do you think Jesus wanted his followers to understand the true cost of discipleship?
5. Pastor Paul told us that Jesus' definition of success is very different from ours. What do you think is Jesus' definition of success?
6. Why is it important for us to understand the costs of non-discipleship?
7. In Luke 14:27, what does Jesus mean when He says we must carry "our" crosses to be His disciples?
8. In Hebrews 12:2, we are told to "fix our eyes on Jesus..." What does that mean to you? What are some things that can cause us to become distracted and lose our focus on Jesus? What can we do in order to stay focused?

