

Topic: “Was Jesus a Radical?” – The Cost of Discipleship

Victor August 30, 2015

Subtopics:

- ï **Nowhere to Lay His Head**
- ï **Let Me Bury My Father**
- ï **No Looking Back**
- ï **Greet No One Along the Road**
- ï **Conclusion**

Body of Teaching:

Nowhere to Lay His Head

Jesus has been framed as a radical in His teachings and we are about to look at four extreme statements regarding the “cost of discipleship” in Luke 9 and 10 that need to be decoded a bit to understand what Jesus was saying, and what the heart of God is behind it.

Luke 9:57-62

57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”

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.”

59 Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”

But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

61 And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go

and bid them farewell who are at my house.”

62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The context of this passage, if we read the whole of Luke 9, shows Jesus heading toward Jerusalem for His crucifixion and on His way there, He comes across these three men.

Luke 9:51 reads:

Luke 9:51

51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,

So in the context of these three conversations, we understand Jesus is steadfast in His heart and mind, heading toward Jerusalem where He knows He will give His life for the sins of mankind. Jesus knew, on His way that day, that this was the last stretch of road before His impending death. The death He had known about for the past thirty three years. This was the reason He had been sent to Earth. To fulfill His Father’s will of death on the cross as a human sacrifice, for these very men He encounters on the road.

It’s no wonder His tone is intense and His message is simply “Follow Me.” It’s almost as if Jesus is counting the steps and stops before the cross, calling out the importance of responding quickly to the call of the Master, as He was literally doing.

With this understanding, we reread the passage which begins with a man approaching Jesus, offering to follow Him wherever He goes.

Luke 9:57-58

57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to

Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”

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.”

One reading this may think, “Wow! What a kind offer this man is making to Jesus, and at such a good time too. What faith this man is professing in Jesus! Jesus must have been so encouraged!”

But Jesus responded much to the contrary. Jesus actually turned down this man’s offer, in essence saying, “I don’t have what it would take to support you. Even animals have a place to sleep, but at this point, I cannot even guarantee that.”

How intense was Jesus’ reply and so direct! Knowing Jesus could see men’s hearts and discern their motives, and that Jesus’ time was of essence, Jesus cut to the chase and released this man from his open-ended offer of lifelong service.

Jesus knew what He was about to do, how difficult it would be to follow Him at that time and that only those truly called of the Father would have grace to “do the ministry” and follow Him.

Look at Peter a few chapters ahead (Luke 22:54-62), one who had walked with Jesus and was considered not only His disciple, but His friend. And Peter himself denied Jesus three times at the cross.

No, Jesus was discerning this man’s heart. Almost as if to say, “I have no pillow for you. This ministry calling is not for you. Keep doing what you are doing.”

In the Byzantine culture, “a pillow” represents a comfortable place to stay, eat and dwell. Jesus knew He could not make that promise to this man. Jesus was on the move, trusting His Father for everything. Even a rock to be used for a pillow if need be.

This man may have seen Jesus feeding the thousands in the days before and considered Jesus to be a provider of employment.

But Jesus had no time to discuss benefits of employment on His path that day and was simply saying, “I don’t even know where I am going to sleep tonight. Sorry man.”

The Message Bible puts it this way:

Luke 9:57-58a (MSG)

57 On the road someone asked if he could go along. “I’ll go with you, wherever,” he said.

58 Jesus was curt: “Are you ready to rough it? We’re not staying in the best inns, you know.”

It does seem strange then for Jesus to turn to another man along the path and command him to “Follow Me” after denying the first man that option. But again, Jesus was now testing this second man’s heart.

Let’s look at the second man’s response below.

Let Me Bury My Father

Luke 9:59-60

59 Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”

But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

Many have criticized Jesus for such a radical statement. What could be

wrong with allowing this poor man to bury his father and finish the funeral services before coming to follow Jesus? Others have described Jesus as uncompassionate toward this man and inconsiderate toward his family obligations. Others have seen Jesus as disrespectful toward the culture of that time.

This passage can be better understood by examining the Byzantine culture of that day and various scriptures around it.

In that time period, there was a saying fathers would use to try and persuade their sons to stick around and help them take care of their families. To a son who wanted to spread his wings and forge his own path in life, a father would say, “Bury me first and then you can go fulfill your dreams.”

Now, this father obviously would not be dead at the time this statement was made, and this father was not asking his son to kill him either! What this father was saying was simply this: “Wait until I am gone and then you can be free to go on your way.”

But many times, in this culture, that would not happen. Once the father was dead and gone, or even sick or disabled, the oldest son (or an older responsible child in the family) would have to pick up the responsibilities from the father’s lack or absence. This would include providing education to all the younger siblings, making sure they were able to marry, paying for their weddings, etc. Many times, after fulfilling these paternal duties, this child would not be able to find the opportunity or time to fulfill his own dreams.

So what was Jesus meaning when He said: “Let the dead bury their own dead”?

Another point to bring up in this section of the study was the Byzantine’s preoccupation with death, then and in many ways, still today.

Because of the many wars, rampant diseases and infant mortalities, there were burial services being conducted every single day.

In the Byzantine culture, when somebody in the family or neighborhood would die, people in that community would come and visit the family for three full days. The body would be buried within three hours, but the funeral proceedings would go on for three days.

Because of the intense heat, the absence of mummification processes and because it was socially considered disrespectful to display a dead body for viewing, the dead person was buried quickly.

On the way to the burial site, the dead body would be carried in a coffin on the shoulders of neighborhood men, family and friends.

In Islam, it is actually counted a good deed to carry the coffin, so when a burial procession passed by, men from each neighborhood would volunteer to carry it.

With daily funerals, daily processions and daily wakes, people became preoccupied with death.

And the wake observances did not stop after the initial three days. Forty days after the person passed away, the family of that deceased person would host an anniversary and open their homes once again to remember their loved one. There would be food, visitation time and a trip to the gravesite. Some family and friends would offer sacrifices or unsweetened cookies or give to the poor. All of these good deeds would be in an act of intercession for the deceased person's soul.

Then, every year after that forty-day anniversary, the family would again host an annual wake observance and the same rituals would be repeated.

Jeremiah 9:17-18

¹⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts:

“Consider and call for the mourning women,

*That they may come;
And send for skillful wailing women,
That they may come.
18 Let them make haste
And take up a wailing for us,
That our eyes may run with tears,
And our eyelids gush with water.*

In the Byzantine culture and in certain villages still today, in mourning for a deceased relative -- especially for a husband or male child -- women wailers will come, cry and scream to “comfort” the family and join what they would call “the wailing party.”

The wailers are women who are hired to attend the funeral. They come and sit with the women, chanting certain words that increase the sorrow of the people, encouraging them to cry and scream more. They even have certain music they play to increase the wailing, pain and sorrow. It is a very sad scene.

Today in the newspaper, there are “Death or Wailing Pages” that are dedicated to honoring the deceased family or friend. So those who were not able to attend the funeral observances could write an ad and pay their condolences that way.

It’s very interesting the words .“we pay condolences” are interpreted “we wail or cry with you.” So really, there is no real hope or comfort offered in these rituals. They just seem to increase the pain!

(IN ARABIC?)

Yes in Arabic , I’ll type the Arabic words used in the whole book in Arabic text before formatting, Word doesn’t type in Arabic, I will type it in Pages , copy it to Word

Today, in many countries, especially in Egypt, the government has appointed a Minister of Condolences. This Minister is most likely the village or town’s mayor, and he goes around and visits the funeral homes, shaking hands,

staying for five or ten minutes to show that the government cares.

So it makes sense that Jesus would say, “Let the dead bury their own dead.”

Understanding the time and culture, we can hear Jesus saying: “If you want to stick around and bury your father, you will have to endure many more deaths in the meantime. Death will continue to be a daily observance and it will become a consuming thing.”

Let’s study a few more passages to help understand Jesus’ intent even more.

In Matthew 19, we can see the call to follow Jesus is one that should not be taken lightly or without counting the cost.

Matthew 19:29

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

In this passage we see a priority set on following God’s mandate above cultural mandates or family obligations.

In Genesis 12, we see God’s direct call to Abram.

Genesis 12:1-3

12 Now the Lord had said to Abram:

*“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;*

*And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Again, the mandate of God to Abram is severe and detailed. “Get out of your country, leave your family, and I will give you a new family that will become so great, they will call you a nation!”

So, in looking at just these two passages above, they seem to confirm Jesus’ extreme responses in Luke 9.

But then we read 1 Timothy 5:

1 Timothy 5:8

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

So here in 1 Timothy 5:8, God *is* telling us to provide for our own families and it appears God is in agreement with the Byzantine culture by telling us we actually do have a holy responsibility to take care of our own!

What?

Is there a contradiction here?

Are we even talking about the same faith?

We read Jesus’ command in Luke 9:59 where Jesus tells a young man to follow him and forget about burying his father. Then we see in Matthew 19 an actual blessing of a hundredfold measure when one does leave his family to follow Christ. Then we read about Abram’s personal call in Genesis 12 to specifically leave his father’s house and get out of the country to follow God to a land he doesn’t even know about yet!

What is God really saying to us through all these Old and New Testament passages?

Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18 tell us that God cannot lie so let's piece together these passages to find the truth of God's heart.

Let's read Luke 9:59-60 again in the Message Bible.

Luke 9:59-60 (MSG)

Jesus said to another, "Follow me."

59 He said, "Certainly, but first excuse me for a couple of days, please. I have to make arrangements for my father's funeral."

60 Jesus refused. "First things first. Your business is life, not death. And life is urgent: Announce God's kingdom!"

We see here, in the Message Bible, Jesus is not asking this young man to divorce his family, deny his earthly responsibilities and hide out in a cave. Jesus was uncovering this man's heart and priorities amidst his earthly responsibilities.

Jesus was emphasizing the cost of being a disciple. He was testing this young man's heart to follow His Heavenly Father's call over his earthly father's call. Jesus was speaking of a mandate to pursue life, not death. To seize the day. To fulfill God's call without question. Just as He was doing, on His way to Jerusalem to offer His life.

Jesus was encouraging this young man to ask His Heavenly Father for help to understand his earthly family obligations, while fulfilling the call of His kingdom family.

Only with God's help can we fulfill both anyway, but we always have a choice.

Whose voice will influence us the most?

The voice of tradition, culture, our family or God?

No Looking Back

The third man that Jesus meets that day extends the same offer as the first. And Jesus responds similarly.

Luke 9:61-62

61 And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."

62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

This third man actually set stipulations on his offer up front. It doesn't seem that he overheard Jesus' conversations with the first two, does it?

Now, one could think again, "Jesus, why are you being so extreme?"

But Jesus was saying more in His response than what it appears. Again let's look at the Byzantine culture to gain more understanding.

A simple goodbye in the Byzantine culture was anything but simple.

A goodbye could entail a farewell party where relatives, friends and neighbors would come, say their goodbyes and send him off. There would be food, drinks, music and dancing. This farewell party could last up to three days. In that time span there would be much opportunity toward unsolicited advice and investigative questioning. The community would want to know where this young man was going, who with, what he would be doing there and if he would be making adequate wages.

Many would discourage him from leaving his family, as in that culture, boys

were especially needed for support in case the father passed away or became ill. Shame would be placed on this young man in attempt to influence him to stay home. Cultural and religious reasons would be offered and this young man would be severely tempted to change his mind and not leave.

With that cultural understanding and the intensity of Jesus' own mission, it is easy to see why He responded in that direct and intense tone, almost as if to say, "No farewell parties allowed. If you are going to follow Me, do it now, this is your chance. Don't look back."

Greet No One Along the Road

After speaking to the three men in Luke 9 about counting the cost of discipleship, Jesus continued to speak to His disciples in the next chapter, telling them how they should fulfill that call, once accepted.

Let's look at Jesus' further instructions in Luke 10:2-4:

Luke 10:2-4

2 Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road.

Now, was Jesus radical and rude in this statement as well? Was He really saying to "greet no one along the road"?

No. In the Byzantine culture, we can see what Jesus really meant. The word "greet" should be translated from the Arabic word "salaam" or the Hebrew word "shalom" -- which both mean "peace be to you" -- and comes from the root word "salema" which means "to surrender." **Jesus is saying Do not greet, is do not Surrender of submit yourself (IS THIS CORRECT – SALAAM AND SHALOM COME FROM SALEMA?)** actually the root is "salema" where many meanings merge, such as salam,

meaning peace, I'll type the Arabic text in Arabic

So, if we read this passage translated accurately from the root word for “greet” in the Arabic language, we can see to “surrender, or submit” oneself is much different than simply greeting someone along the road.

In the Byzantine culture, greetings along the road can get quite lengthy and time consuming, just like the farewell parties.

To paint the picture, when a man would meet a friend along the road, first they would say “Salaam” in Arabic or “Shalom” in Hebrew and then they would hug and kiss each other on the cheeks. They would exchange conversation about each other’s families and any new community news. This local friend would feel obligated, according to culture, to invite his friend into his home and continue the fellowship time.

If the traveler accepted that request, he would in essence, be “surrendering” himself to his host. The now host would be obligated according to culture to have his wife or mother put a meal together (which could take hours as the meal would most likely be made from scratch) and then if it would get dark outside, this host would be obligated to offer his home to the guest for an overnight stay. This street greet could actually become a multiple day stay at this host’s home!

By reading Luke 10 in the Message Bible, it’s easy to see what God is saying through Jesus’ words to His disciples.

Luke 10:2-4 (MSG)

1-2 Later the Master selected seventy and sent them ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he intended to go. He gave them this charge:

“What a huge harvest! And how few the harvest hands. So on your knees; ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands.

3 *“On your way! But be careful—this is hazardous work. You’re like lambs in a wolf pack.”*

4 *“Travel light. Comb and toothbrush and no extra luggage.”*

“Don’t loiter and make small talk with everyone you meet along the way.”

Here we read Jesus saying, when God calls you to a ministry, job or other obligation, set your face toward that goal and let no one distract you. Use common courtesy and be polite but don’t let good manners and political correctness distract you from your God-given goal or destination.

Here are some examples from the Old and New Testament about not greeting anyone along the road.

In Genesis 24, we see Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for his son, Isaac. After the Lord led his servant to the house of Rebekah, Abraham’s servant did not hesitate to be on his way, fulfilling his task successfully.

Genesis 24:55-56

55 But her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she may go.”

56 And he said to them, “Do not hinder me, since the Lord has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master.”

In Judges 19-21, the story is not as pleasant.

Judges 19:1-4

19 And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months. 3 Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him.

4 Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

In this case, the Levite being detained by his father-in-law ended up costing the life of his wife and a civil war ensued between the tribes of Israel. You may want to read the whole story for yourself, but to warn you, it is not an easy read.

I Kings 13 tells another story of dire consequence. A prophet of the Lord was sent from Judah to Bethel to deliver a message to King Jeroboam. The Lord specifically told this prophet this:

1 Kings 13:9

9 For so it was commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.'

On his way home, the prophet was able to turn down an invitation by King Jeroboam, but when an older prophet from Bethel came to meet this young prophet, he allowed himself to be detained.

1 Kings 13:11-19

11 Now an old prophet dwelt in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; they also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king. 12 And their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" For his sons had seen which way the man of God went who came from Judah.

13 Then he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled the donkey for him; and he rode on it, 14 and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?"

And he said, "I am."

15 Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread."

16 And he said, "I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. 17 For I have been told by the word of the Lord, 'You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.'"

18 He said to him, "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" (He was lying to him.)

19 So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water.

Now this accepted invitation actually resulted in the young prophet's death. He stood strong against the king's invitation but was deceived by the older prophet's.

1 Kings 13:20-24

20 Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back; 21 and he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, 22 but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the Lord said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.'"

23 So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back. 24 When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse.

Jesus is really the best example about this principle of obeying the Lord and staying focused on the mission at hand. In John 12, we find Jesus entering Jerusalem in a triumphal entry, on his way to the cross.

John 12:20-23

20 Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. 21 Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

22 Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

23 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

One would logically ask, "Why did Jesus refuse to meet with the Greeks? What would the Greeks have needed from Jesus?"

First of all, we can see that Jesus was starting to prepare for His crucifixion journey. He was sensing it was time for Him to accomplish what God had sent Him to do in the first place -- die on the cross for our sins -- that we might live through Him.

Paul offers a few more answers as well as to Jesus' invitation refusal.

Acts 17:21

21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

1 Corinthians 1:22

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

Could it have been that Jesus knew these particular Greeks were not serious about what He needed to do, and He was on a serious mission and He could not be distracted?

When Jesus knew it was time to go to the cross, He “set His face” and would not be detained (Luke 9:51). He knew where He was headed. He was serious about redeeming mankind and paying for the sins of the world.

Jesus was surely invited to dine and fellowship in many families’ homes as He made His way to Calvary. But having “set His face” He declined their invitations and may have upset many people, as this refusal went directly against the hospitality of the Byzantine culture.

There is a time to be friendly, and there is also a time when we cannot seek please everyone. Sometimes our lives truly do depend on it.

Jesus stayed focused, steadfast and would not allow distractions as He headed toward the cross.

In Luke 18 we hear the intensity of Jesus’ mission toward the cross.

Luke 18:31-33

31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

Conclusion

The lesson we can learn here from Luke 9 and 10's parables regarding the cost of discipleship is that we must listen to the Lord's voice above all else, so we don't get sidetracked, stuck in sin or find our lives in jeopardy.

God assures us that we can hear His voice in Isaiah 30:21.

Isaiah 30:21

*21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,
"This is the way, walk in it,"
Whenever you turn to the right hand
Or whenever you turn to the left.*

God is extreme when it comes to life and death issues. We cannot serve two masters and through the study of this chapter, we can see that there is a price to pay to serve the Lord.

Matthew 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

In each of these four examples, Jesus is creatively and directly expressing the cost of discipleship and testing each heart to see who is ready to fulfill the call. The cross cost Jesus everything, and He continues to ask us today, "Will you too pick up your cross and follow Me?"

It may cost us everything, but we will gain everything.

Luke 9:23-24

23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let

him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

Matthew 19:29-30

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

There is a hundredfold reward for those who follow the Lord and give Him everything.

The cost of discipleship is everything, but the rewards are out of this world!