



- Introduction
 - Lord of the Rings
 - Frodo at the council at Rivendell – “I’ll take the ring to Mordor.”
 - Although the decision was made in a moment of emotion, it involved much, much more than that moment alone.
 - Summer Camp Planning Session
 - Caught up in the moment, I volunteered to write the camp curriculum.
 - However, I quickly discovered that the commitment I made was so much more than a moment.
 - In our text for today, Jesus makes the same point about following Him—it is so much more than a moment.
- Read Luke 9:57-62
- Pray
- Chronological Context
 - As we have said before, the Gospel of Luke is arranged for teaching purposes, not always chronological purposes.
 - The chronological context of these events is related in Matthew 8:1-18, just before the parallel account of Matthew 8:19-22.
 - (Turn to Matthew 8:1-18 and summarize it.)
 - Note: Matthew 8:19 – “*Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’*”

Thus, from the context provided by Matthew, we see that the first would-be disciple seems inspired to call out to Christ because he is mesmerized by miracles.

He has likely just witnessed three astounding miracles of Christ, and in a moment of enthusiasm and emotion, He cries out, “*I will follow you wherever you go*” (Matthew 8:19, Luke 9:57).

In and of themselves, those words are certainly some of the most excellent words any person could possibly speak. This statement is the very picture of a passion that is pleasing to God. However, was it sincere? You and I have likely professed something similar, have we not? Whether in an emotional moment of prayer or in the heartfelt singing of ambitious lyrics (such as “I will give you all my worship; I will give you all my praise”) have we not made such a profession of devotion? However, how sincere have we been? How sincere was this potential disciple? That question inspires our Lord’s response, and it frames the lesson to be learned from our text today.

Indeed, in these six verses before our attention this morning, Jesus uses three brief conversations with would-be disciples to emphasize that true discipleship requires so much more than an emotional moment. And this is a lesson that all of us need to hear, for in both the world at large and in the misguided church salvation in Christ is often presented as little more than an emotional response to an emotional moment.

- Examples of the modern-day call to salvation.
 - Stirring up emotions and then calling for a prayer.
 - Joel Osteen’s extremely simple call to salvation.
 - But is that all it really means to come to Christ?
- Not only that, but many people and many churches behave as though the entire Christian life is about feeling something emotional.
 - The charismatic movement, aspects of “the emerging church”
 - Although there is nothing wrong with emotion in Christianity, if emotion is all we have, then we do not have Christ.

As we will see in our text today, Jesus was very careful to make it very clear that salvation involves so much more than emotional moments. Indeed, as we think our way through the Gospels, it becomes abundantly clear that our Lord wants much more from us than warm fuzzy feelings. You see, it’s simply not enough to have emotion when Jesus is asking us for everything. Feelings fall short of a Savior who wants forever. And mere elation is empty when our Lord demands a lifetime.

For anyone who would come to Him in faith, Jesus Christ desires careful, conscientious, and complete commitment, not just careless confessions and emotional devotion.

True repentance from sin, genuine confession of Jesus as Lord, faithful obedience to God's Word, and sincere submission to the Holy Spirit—these things are forever; they are eternal; they are for *life*... and our Lord wants us to be fully aware of this foundational fact of faith. Throughout the Gospels, it could scarcely be clearer that Jesus had no place for the fickle follower or the short-term disciple. In fact, Jesus made following Him so intense that many would-be disciples just said “Forget it!” and gave up. We see this in John chapter 6:66, where John records, “*Many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*” The price was just too high. The standards were just too strict. The requirements were just too demanding.

In the ministry of Jesus, following Him always meant complete commitment to Him. And that thought brings us to our **Big Idea** for this morning, which is this: **Sincere discipleship requires supreme devotion to Christ.**

That is the main point that Jesus is making in our Scripture text for today, where we find conversations between Jesus and three would-be disciples whom He encounters along the road. Yet, in order to understand these interactions properly, we must first be aware of one crucial fact about the earthly life of our Lord, which is this: Even during His ministry on earth, Jesus had flawless insight into the content of human hearts. In other words, we witness over and over again that Jesus could see the innermost ambitions and deepest desires of the people to whom he talks and ministers. The Scriptures constantly tell us that Jesus knew what people were thinking and feeling, and in John 2:24-25, we read, “*Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*” In other words, even though hoards of people were coming to Jesus after His miracles, He “*would not entrust himself to them*” because He knew their hearts and, therefore, had no faith in their faith.

Furthermore, not only does Jesus see what is in the hearts of individuals, but He usually speaks right at it as well. Such is the case with the three conversations we will examine this morning. In each one, Jesus knows the hearts of the three would-

be disciples, and, knowing their true desires, He speaks to each one according to the stumbling blocks He knows are there.

Thus, as we hear Jesus' tough words to each of them, we ought to realize that He is not trying to create a bunch of new laws that all disciples and missionaries are all supposed keep. He is not, for example, saying to us, "Thou shalt give every penny you have!" or "Thou shalt never sleep in a bed!" or "Thou shalt forsake thy father's funeral!" or "Thou shalt never say goodbye to thy family." Rather, the truth of the matter is something much more profound.

The point here is this: Our Lord knows the idols that each of us harbor in our hearts; He sees the stumbling blocks before our faces. The point is that Jesus is fully aware of every desire that competes with—or even overshadows—our affection for Him. The point is that, even as we sit in this sanctuary this morning, Jesus is looking straight into our souls, and as he looks upon us, He sees right into the deepest parts of our hearts. He knows our every idol. He perceives everything that hinders us from surrendering every aspect of our lives entirely to Him. Moreover, He is calling us to rid ourselves of every idol and entirely embrace His entire Lordship over our entire lives. In short, through this text, God is asking each of us a pair of critical questions. The first is this: "What is hindering your heart from unbroken devotion to Jesus Christ?" And the second asks, "Will you lay it aside for the glory of God?"

In our text today, these two questions are powerfully illustrated in the examples of three would-be disciples. In each case, Jesus lays bare an idol of the heart that is keeping each man from supreme devotion to Him.

1.) The first would-be disciple valued comfort above Christ. (v. 57-58)

- In a moment of emotion, this man cries out, "*I will follow you wherever you go.*"
- v. 58 – Knowing his heart, Jesus challenges his idol of personal comfort by revealing that He didn't even allow Himself the primitive accommodations common to wild animals.
- Although the man's response is not recorded, it is clearly implied that such a sacrifice was too high a price to pay.

2.) The second would-be disciple valued riches above Christ. (v. 59-60)

- In contrast to the first man who called out to Jesus, it is Jesus who calls out to this man and says *“Follow me!”*
- This man responds with a condition (an “O.k., but...”). He says, *“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”*
- v. 60 –Challenging his deepest desires, Jesus responds, *“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* (Let the *spiritually* dead bury the *physically* dead.)

To really understand that this man’s motivation it is helpful to realize that it is extremely unlikely that this man’s father was father was lying around somewhere dead. You see, according to the Jewish custom, burials took place immediately after death. They didn't embalm, and they certainly did not just leave decaying corpses lying around. Instead, they wrapped bodies and put them immediately in the grave. Thus, if the man’s father were already dead, he simply wouldn’t have been there because it was the son’s particular responsibility to make sure that his father was well cared for in death.

No, what this man most was most likely after was his inheritance. If he had just up and left to follow Jesus, he would have been forfeiting the inheritance he was due... the property he loved... the financial security that gave him hope for the future. He probably wasn’t totally opposed to following Christ, but not at so high a cost. Thus, he responded to the call of Christ according to the idol of his heart—personal riches and worldly security. Because he came to Christ with a condition, he probably never came to Christ at all.

3.) The third would-be disciple valued family above Christ. (v. 61-62)

This man is brave indeed. Even after watching Jesus lay bare the incomplete devotion of the first two, He still calls out to Jesus, saying, *“I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”* And in truth, there is really nothing at all wrong with this man’s desire itself, for being devoted to our families is truly a good thing. It is something that Scripture commands us to, and it brings glory to God. In fact, next to our relationship with the living God, our relationship with our families is of utmost importance.

O.k., then, what *is* his problem? His problem is not so much his desire, but his priorities. Therefore, in verse 62, “*Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’*” Looking back here implies *longing* back, and the one who longs back is one whose commitment is incomplete. // Desiring our families is a perfectly good desire, but, no matter how much we love them, they must still come second.

Jesus speaks to that point in Luke 14:26, when He speaks these challenging words: “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.*” Now, of course, this doesn't mean that we must despise our families with vitriol. To do so would violate the whole counsel of God's Word. Rather, Jesus is using a common idiom of the day used to make comparisons between two interests. He means that our love and devotion to God must, in an absolute sense, supersede our love and devotion for even our families. He is speaking of an undivided heart, knowing that when we love Him best, we will inevitably love our families better.

-- We cannot plow a straight course for Christ if we are looking back upon competing desires.

Now, to really see the power of Christ's response to this third would-be disciple, consider again the manner in which this man initially comes to Christ in verse 61. Much like the second man, he comes with a condition. Notice, he says, “*I will follow, but...*” You know, after listening to the first two guys, he probably should have known better than that. Now we might say, “Well, he just wanted to say ‘Goodbye’ to his family. That seems like a reasonable condition.” And it might, except for the fact that true discipleship is never a negotiation! Hear it again, if we come to Christ with conditions, we never really come at all, because any condition that we would put on our devotion to Christ is, inevitably, an idol of our hearts.

-- Jesus must not be second to anything, even a good thing. John Calvin once said that “The evil in our desires typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much.” How true. When he made that insightful statement, Calvin

could very easily have been discussing this very passage of Scripture, because Jesus is definitely *not* saying that the things these three would-be disciples wanted were bad. Rather, He is showing them that they wanted them too much. If we are willing to sin to get it, we want it too much. If we will sin because we do not get it, we want it too much. If we want anything more than we want Jesus Christ, it is a detestable idol in our hearts and a wicked stumbling block before our faces, no matter how good a desire it may be.

True discipleship is not usually a question of desires; it comes down to devotion. It comes down to the self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-submission proclaimed in Luke 9:23-24, where Jesus makes it plain, saying, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

With that said, consider our two questions once again:

- 1.) *“What is hindering your heart from unbroken devotion to Jesus Christ?”*
- 2.) *“Will you lay it aside for the glory of God?”*

Please understand that our devotion to Christ will never be perfect in this fallen world, and, because of that there is abundant forgiveness in the mercy of Christ. However, it is equally true that the life to which Christ calls us is so much more than moments of emotion. Sincere discipleship requires supreme devotion to Jesus Christ, and supreme devotion to our gracious Savior will never disappoint.

With that said, let me close with two brief parables of Jesus found in Matthew 13:44-46 – *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”*

Let this be our response to the matchless love and grace that God has revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us, likewise, passionately pursue the complete commitment to which we have been called by Christ.

