

## Barriers to Faith

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What would you give in exchange for your life (just an easy question to start the morning)? When it comes to matters of faith, we need to remember that's what we are talking about. Back in 9:23 we're told by Jesus that we gain our lives when we follow him and we lose our lives when we don't. We're talking about our very lives.

Think of that; we lose our lives when we refuse to follow Jesus; following Jesus is truly what's best for us now. Not for our wallet necessarily; not for our personal comfort or our safety or our prestige. But that stuff is like cotton candy. It's great now; we even have cravings for earthly stuff. But they don't last; they are gone in a moment. They leave you empty, waiting for more.

We also lose our future life. We lose our destiny. Our present course determines our future home. Jesus' way leads to a future destiny, a life after death forgiven and whole. If Jesus is clear about anything, he's clear that the future is bleak and miserable those those who turn away from him.

So, that should lead us to a conclusion; follow Jesus. Follow Jesus and get life; turn away from Jesus and miss out on life. And we see that's the call Jesus has for us in our passage this morning. But there are barriers to following Jesus; there are obstacles. It's not a foregone conclusion that people will follow Jesus; even after they learn that he promises life for those who do and death for those who don't. Some still won't follow him. Why? Why would some turn away from following the Lord? Today, we learn why. Today, we discover reasons why people turn away from Jesus even though they know he's where life is found (READ Luke 9:57-62).

Did you notice how following Jesus is the focus? All three anonymous individuals either want to or are presented with the opportunity to follow Jesus. The first person says, "I will follow you." Jesus invites the second person saying, "Follow me." And the third person again says, "I will follow you." I bring this to your attention because the picture or the motif of following Jesus as a picture of our faith is a biblical one; God gives us that picture, which should mean that it's an accurate one. It would be wise of you to use that metaphor as a way of describing your faith. The big idea of this passage are the barriers to following so that's going to be our main focus. But let's spend a few minutes thinking about following and what we learn from this passage.

Here's the first thing I see: the kind of following Jesus demands is one that transforms our presents steps for a different future. Jesus is going somewhere; do you remember where he's going? He's going to Jerusalem to suffer. And to follow him, these individuals are called to forfeit the future they were planning for the one Jesus has for them. It's a future that repudiates the comforts of life, it's a future that alters our responsibilities, it's a future that bids you to say

farewell to things and people that you treasure and value. If you're early in your faith, or maybe you're still thinking about or examining Jesus' call to follow him, know right now that it's a call that will transform your future. You'll begin taking different steps today, but it will lead you to a new future. Following Jesus will take you down a path that you weren't anticipating and that will require sacrifice. But don't forget the reward, it's where you'll find your life.

The second thing I notice is that Jesus doesn't sugar coat the call to follow. Could you imagine some of our friends, our co workers, our neighbors walking up to us and saying, "Hey, I'd like to follow Jesus." That's what we've been hoping for! We've been wanting to find a way, a time, just the right words to help those close to us understand how great Jesus really is. And now, they come to us and say, "I want to follow Jesus?" Jackpot! How might you respond? I know I'd be tempted to celebrate; I'd want to throw a party. I'd be tempted to wrap my arms around them and declare them my new brothers and sisters in Christ. What does Jesus do? He doesn't do that, does he? He warns them. He tells them to count the cost. He challenges their resolve. He keeps the party favors in their packaging and doesn't celebrate just yet.

That should be a lesson to us, friends. A lesson for our own faith, but a lesson in how we interact and share our faith with others. Following Jesus is such radical transformation, it's such a high cost that it takes some time to process the implications. I remember hearing this story when I was in my studies: some international students studying theology in America were asked about some of the differences between the Christian faith in America and in their home country. The first thing they mentioned was the differences in inviting someone to follow Jesus. They said, "If someone said they wanted to follow Jesus on the day they first heard about him we'd send them home to think about it some more." When asked why they'd do that they said, "Because they had not properly counted the cost." There's a word in that for us, friends. Jesus *demand*s that we forfeit *all* of our life. Listen to those words. Demands. All of life. There is great joy in heaven when one person turns to Jesus, but we can't get ahead of ourselves and forget to count the cost.

Take some time, friends, and analyze your faith; take a look at how you're following Jesus. Are you ready for a new future? And are you counting the cost? Jesus is ready to help us count the cost now by helping us examine barriers to faith.

The first barrier is the desire of comfort and ease. Look at vs. 57-58 (READ). Following Jesus calls you to forfeit comfort and ease. When Jesus says, "Foxes have holes; birds have nests," he's saying even the critters have a home; even they have a bed to lay down in. It shouldn't be much to ask for somewhere to sleep, right? If God even provides wildlife a den or a bed of straw, shouldn't God provide a comfortable place for his children following his mission? There must be a readiness to forfeit even the most basic of desires. I mean, we're talking about our well being here, right? Jesus says, "You have to be ready to give that up."

Do you know why Jesus goes here? It's because this strikes right at the heart of man. Our love and desire for comfort is a test of our love of self. Very little rivals our love and

commitment to ourselves. God's word says things like, "Love your neighbor as yourself." When Paul instructs husbands to love and cherish their wives he says (Eph. 5:28), "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies." Our love and commitment towards ourselves is a given; we all do that instinctively. We feed ourselves the things that we think are best for us (whether those are snickers bars or rice cakes). We clothe ourselves with the best our money can afford. We work really hard to take care of our own selves. The modern movement of "loving yourself" is misidentified; the movement should be called loving yourself *more and more*.

The demand for us to repudiate comfort tests two things. 1) First of all, it tests us to see if we really believe in and want the eternal life that Jesus promises. Do we want Jesus so much that we'd sacrifice our most basic desires? 2) It also tests our faith Jesus' provision for our needs. Jesus said in Matthew 6, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things (the things that we really need) will be added unto you." Do we believe that? Do we believe Jesus will provide for our needs, or do we believe we need to do that for ourselves?

What's somewhat ironic about this is that we live in the most comfortable country during the most comfortable era in all of history. At the push of a button, we set our climate control to the most comfortable temperature, set our posturepedic to the most comfortable sleep setting, and can turn on with the touch of a button soothing, sleepy music on our ipod to drift off to a comfortable night's sleep. So, how should we understand this call? I hinted at it before: we need to have a readiness to forfeit comfort and ease. Having a nice comfortable bed won't keep you from inheriting the promises of God; refusing to give it up for Jesus will keep you from inheriting the promises of God. Are you ready to give it up? Here's how we can train ourselves today in our comfortable culture to repudiate comfort for Jesus: voluntarily give up comfort Jesus. Give some things up voluntarily, even if it's for a season. Deprive yourself a taste of the worldly comforts to prepare your soul for the day when Jesus calls you to give up more.

The second barrier to following Jesus is earthly responsibilities. When Jesus invites another person to follow him, he has a pretty good reason in at least taking a rain check on the invitation. Look at vs. 59, "But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'" I read one pastor who said that money and possessions prove to be the barrier here since the man's inheritance is tied up in his father's estate; he doesn't want to leave that. I don't think that's the case. Jesus seems to be addressing responsibility. He looks at the man in vs. 60 and says (I'm paraphrasing here), "Let someone else take responsibility for burying your father, I have another, more important, responsibility - go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

You know, there are some responsibilities that you find (do you know what I mean by that?) You assume them. You didn't need to take that job, you didn't need to be on the town board, but you saw the importance and voluntarily assumed the responsibility. Other responsibilities find you. And it's almost like you don't have a choice in the matter. You must do them. Your brother needs help; you're compelled to come to his aid. He's your brother! I couldn't imagine *not* being a part of my father's funeral. I must go. I'm my father's son; it's my duty!

So, consider the stakes of following Jesus. Make your commitment, your sense of responsibility, to the kingdom your most fundamental responsibility. Your commitment to God, his kingdom, his church, is so central that nothing else takes priority before it. There are many who are not and will not follow Jesus because of this call. That's why it's a barrier.

And again, like I mentioned (or implied) with the first barrier, this is something you must train yourself for. Because you won't go from zero to 100 with this. I think God implies this in the scriptures; here's an example. You may recall God leading his people from Egypt into the wilderness and keeping them there for 40 years. And during those 40 years, God fed them every single day with the same food - manna. Now, on the one hand, this was a gift. God was providing for his people. Yet, on the other hand, I mean come on, manna again! But God was up to something and that something is spelled out in Deut. 8; it says this (vs. 2-3), "And you shall remember the whole way the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

What's the point? God had eternal, generational plans and responsibilities for his people in the Promised Land. And for them to assume and live up to those responsibilities, they would have to learn radical dependency. So, these 40 years in the wilderness, the trials, the tests, the manna, were all designed to help them see who they really were on the inside. What they really valued, what they really treasured. So that when they get into the Promised Land and are given more significant responsibility, they are up to the challenge.

Friends, it's the same with us. Do you think you will follow Jesus to Jerusalem neglecting your most significant earthly responsibilities for the eternal one's of the kingdom if you refuse to the most basic of faith steps today? Don't bet on it. I don't mean to say these things to make you feel guilty, but to challenge you: some of you have turned basic and necessary responsibilities like weekly worship, regularly Bible reading and learning, even humbling receiving the help and correction of brothers and sisters into an optional *only if I feel like* thing. If you neglect the most simplest responsibilities, do you you really believe you'll lay down your biggest to follow Jesus to Jerusalem? God is training your faith with the small, daily routines and responsibilities to prepare you for the big ones.

Finally, the last barrier is our most valued relationships. Look at vs. 61-62 (READ). I see this last barrier as somewhat as a mixture of the first two. Our family, our dear friends, surely are a source of comfort and pleasure for us. And in addition, they are also a responsibility, too. You could almost call our family and close friends a responsibility we are glad to assume. Bidding farewell to family will be a barrier to some in following Jesus.

And Jesus' words are so stark; it's almost like he doesn't sympathize with the dilemma. He says in vs. 62, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Why doesn't he say with a quiet, affirming voice, "I know it's really hard, you can do it." It's just, "You're unfit!" Just to make sure you know that this isn't some obscure, one-time command, we see in Matthew 10 (vs. 37), "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Friends, Jesus demand of loyalty is so high it will be a barrier to some.

I know there is more to explain; I'd be happy to explore that more with you. But I want to let these things sit with you for a while. I want you to feel the weight of these demands without me trying to massage them away. And here's the question I want you to ponder: Do you believe that inheriting eternal life is so important, so precious, that you'd be willing to press through the barrier of comfort, to press through the barrier of responsibility and even your treasured earthly relationships? I'm telling you: it's worth it. Jesus is worth it. And here's the good news: Everything you lose in this life for Jesus you gain back 100 times more in this life and in the next.

Key vs. Luke 9:62

#### Questions for the week

- Why is it important to count the cost of following Jesus? How might that benefit you (or another person)?
- Which barrier to faith and following Jesus poses a particular challenge for you? How come?
- What are some things that you need to see and believe to help you push through the barriers of following Jesus?