

Osaka International Church

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Key Verse Luke 9:23

Totally Committed

Luke 9:23–25, 57–62

“Follow me.” These may be the simplest yet most difficult words Jesus ever spoke. Jesus spoke these words to many people in the Bible and He still speaks them to us today. Today I want to talk to about being a totally committed follower of Jesus. Now I know some of you have already decided to follow Jesus and think this message won’t apply to you, but it does. Because I am afraid there are some people who say they follow Jesus, but if they looked closely at their life they would see something different. They would see that they are more of an admirer of Jesus, than a totally committed follower. Jesus does not call us to be his admirer he calls us to be his committed follower. I want to look at what it really means to follow Jesus. Wherever. Whenever. Whatever.

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:23–25

³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

I want you to notice two things in this passage. First, the invitation to follow Jesus is open to everyone. Jesus says “if anyone”. Anyone is an inclusive word, it leaves no one out. Jesus does not care where we are in life, he doesn’t care what we have done with our life up to this point, he doesn’t care what sins we have committed. He wants us to follow Him. Jesus is calling us to follow him. The book of Revelation tells us that Jesus is standing at the door of our heart knocking and calling us into a relationship. You may be sitting there thinking that is easy thing to say, but I can’t follow Jesus. You don’t know the things I have done. You don’t know what sins I have committed. You don’t know what I am struggling with right now. You are right I don’t know what you have done or what you are struggling with, but Jesus does and He still invites you to follow Him. Jesus loves you no matter what you have done or what you are struggling with.

The second thing I want you to notice is that following Jesus is not a onetime decision. Notice that Jesus says that we must daily take up our cross and follow him. The requirement for following Jesus is that we make a daily decision to follow Him. Following Jesus is not something that is done just on Sundays. Being a true follower of Jesus means we choose to follow Him every day. Following Jesus each and every day takes true commitment. That commitment means we take up the cross and chase after Jesus.

What does picking up our cross mean? It means that we die to our human nature every day. We die to our self, to our ambitions, to our desires, to our plans; we give them up and follow Jesus. We give these desires over to Jesus and make the decision to daily follow His ambitions, His desires and His plans for our life.

Jesus never told us that it would be easy to follow Him. He tells us to expect bumps along the way. There are going to be days that are easier than others when it come to following Jesus. It is on those difficult days that our commitment to following is tested. Are we willing to continue our pursuit of Jesus during these times? Or do we want to stop and give up because it is too hard?

In Luke 9:57–62 we are introduced to three people who receive personal invitations to follow Jesus. They receive the invitation directly from Jesus. How great would that be? To have Jesus stand there right next to you in person and say “follow me.” I wonder what thoughts went through their heads. I wonder if they thought, “Wow, the Savior is giving me a personal invitation to join Him. If I do this I get to walk with Jesus and talk with Him. I get to go where He goes. I get to see and hear everything the Master does.” What would you say if Jesus was to walk in here right now and say “Hey, come on follow me?” Would we jump up and say “Let’s go, I can’t wait to start this journey.” Or would we sit there and think about it. Would we say, “Well, that sounds good but I have to consider my options.” I hope we would all get up and go with Jesus, but I am afraid some of us would resist following Him because we know that it will cost us something. There is a good story in the Bible about following Jesus that I want to look at. Let’s read this passage.

Luke 9:57–62

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “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 To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ And Jesus^[a] said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹ Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

We don’t know the names of these people so I will call the first guy Mr. Wherever. This man comes up to Jesus and says “I will follow you wherever you go.” That sounds pretty impressive. He says he is ready to go with Jesus no matter where Jesus is going. No matter where Jesus calls him to go. It sounds like Mr. Wherever is ready to be a true follower of Jesus. He sounds like he is committed to going the distance with Jesus. That is until we see what Jesus says in vs. 58. Jesus turns and looks at him and says, “Hey man, I’m homeless.” That stops Mr. Wherever in his tracks. I’m guessing Mr. Wherever says, “Excuse me. Can you repeat that? It sounded like you said you were homeless. Jesus would have replied, “Yea, I wander around from place to place, with no place to call my own. Are you sill ready to follow me? It turns out Mr. Wherever was not really willing to go wherever to follow Jesus. He was not ready to give up his comfortable house and warm bed at night to follow Jesus. He was not ready to live the life of a homeless man. Now I want you to understand this. Jesus is not saying that we all need to give up our homes and go live on the street. What

Jesus wanted was for this man to come out of his comfort zone. He was testing this man to see if he was really willing to follow anywhere. When we decide to follow Jesus we will be tested as well. Jesus calls us to follow him in every aspect of our life. Are we willing to follow Jesus anywhere?

Are we willing to follow Him in our homes? Or do we leave the cross of Jesus by the front door? Do we say, "Hey Jesus, I love you, but you wait here while I go inside. I'll meet you again tomorrow when I leave." Do the lives we live inside our home reflect the life of someone following Jesus? Is our behavior at home the behavior of a Christ follower?

What about at work? Do we follow Jesus while we are at work? Or do we tell Jesus to wait in the car or at the train station while we go to work? "Sorry Jesus I can't have you with me at work; it makes things a little awkward for me." Do our co-workers know that we claim to follow Jesus? Do our work habits reflect something else? Are we honest in our business dealings? Do we show love to our co-workers? Do we respect our boss?

We can't say I am willing to follow you Jesus, but there are times when I want you to step to the side so I can do my own thing. Following Jesus is an all or nothing deal. Contrast this man's response to the response of Matthew. When Matthew hears the call to follow Jesus what does he do? He gets up and leaves everything behind and follows Jesus. This was not an easy decision for Matthew. He was a tax collector who made lots of money. He was an employee of the government. I am sure his job had good benefits. But he was willing to go wherever to follow Jesus. He was willing to give up his job and home; he was willing to take on the life of a homeless disciple. Are you willing to follow Jesus wherever he calls you?

After Mr. Wherever left, Mr. Whenever is called by Jesus. We don't know his name, but I bet we would if he had accepted Jesus' invitation to follow Him. Jesus calls him and says follow me. Notice in his response Mr. Whenever calls Jesus "Lord". Clearly, this man knew who Jesus was and was seriously considering accepting the invitation to follow. Except there was this one, tiny little thing that held him back. That particular moment in time was not a good time for him to start following Jesus. He first wanted to go and bury his father. That sounds reasonable. Surely, Jesus would not object to this man burying his father. Yet, Jesus does object to this. Why? Because, this was just an excuse, a good excuse, but an excuse none the less. As good as his excuse was Jesus was not interested in hearing it. As important as this excuse was, it came up empty in the sight of Jesus.

The things we see as important are really not that important to Jesus. Our excuses for not following are weak and shallow in Jesus sight. The funny thing about this conversation is that Mr. Whenever's father was most likely not even dead. It was his way of saying, "Let me wait a while before I follow you. Maybe I will follow you once my Dad is dead." I need more time to do my own thing before I follow you. He was looking for a more convenient time to start following Jesus. Jesus never tells us that following him would be convenient. We need to be aware that following Jesus will be inconvenient at times.

Compare Mr. Whenever's response to the response of Peter. When Jesus called Peter, what did Peter do? Did he sit there in the boat and weigh the pros and cons of following Jesus? Did he say "Jesus can you come back next week. We have been having really good days out

on the lake. We have never caught this many fish and I want to keep going until we stop catching so many fish.” No, he immediately left his boat and followed Jesus. Peter didn’t wait until the next day or the next week to decide. He got up at once and went with Jesus. I am sure this was not the most convenient time for Peter to be called. I am sure he would rather Jesus waited until the fishing season was over, but Jesus didn’t. He wanted to know if Peter was committed. Peter made the best decision and followed Jesus.

What about you what is your excuse for not following Jesus today? What is preventing you from following today? We have a tendency to treat following Jesus like a diet or exercise program. We say, “I am going to start exercising and eating right tomorrow.” Then the next day comes and we say the same thing again. And the next day and the next, and the next and guess what tomorrow never comes. The same thing happens when we say that we will follow Jesus tomorrow. When we say I will start following you tomorrow Jesus we end up missing out on so much in life. We miss out on the blessings that come with being a committed follower of Jesus. My fear is that if we continue to say I will follow you later Jesus, later will turn into never.

The invitation to follow Jesus has an R.S.V.P. of today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, but today, right now. Now is the time to surrender your secret sin to Jesus. It is time to give Jesus your struggles. Now is the time to decide to be generous to those in need. Now is the time to decide to meet your neighbors and tell them about Jesus. Now is the time to let your co-workers know you follow Jesus. Now is the time to join a Bible study. Now is the time to begin serving here at church. Now is the time to start following Jesus. It is time to stop making excuses and be a fully committed follower of Jesus.

After Mr. Whenever leaves, Mr. Whatever comes up to Jesus. Mr. Whatever says he will follow Jesus, but he too has an excuse. He wants to go home and say goodbye to everyone at home. In those days this was not as simple as going home and saying goodbye I am going to follow Jesus now. There would have been farewell parties that could have taken several weeks to finish. He too was looking for a way to put off his decision to follow Jesus. What is Jesus’ response to this man? He says “Don’t look back.” When a worker plowed the field he looked straight ahead. If he looked back then his plow lines would be crooked and the field would have been useless. His attention had to be on what was in front of him, not what was behind.

What Jesus is saying here is that nothing can compete for our attention if we are going to follow Him. If we are to follow Jesus then our sight needs to be set on Him, not on the things we left behind. You can’t try looking back and forth between Jesus and the world. A follower of Jesus needs to be fully committed, no looking back.

Many times people say they are ready to follow Jesus, but there is something they want to hold back from Jesus. They want to keep a part of their life separate from Jesus, something that they don’t want to surrender. They tell Jesus, “I will follow you with 90% of my life, but I want to keep the other 10% for me.” I read an interesting baptism story that illustrates this idea of holding something back from God. When the Knights of Templar were baptized they would be baptized with their swords, but they would not take their swords under the water with them. They held them up above the water when they were immersed in the water. In

other words they were saying to Jesus; I give you my life, but not my sword. I am going to use my sword however I want, whenever I want. I keep my sword but you can have the rest of me. Following Jesus does not work that way. We have to give it all to Him not just the parts we are ready to let go of.

Maybe it's not a sword we are holding back from Jesus today. Maybe it's our wallet, or computer, or our entertainment choices, our job, our family, our ministry or our thoughts. Jesus does not want followers who have divided affections or those who want to split their time between Jesus and the world. Jesus is looking at our life today, at what we value the most, what we believe is most important in our life and he asks, "What about that? Will you give that up to follow me?" He is asking, "Can I have your time? What about your money, will you give it to me? What about your kids? What about your job?" "What about your free time, can I have some of that?" Are we willing to give these up to follow Jesus?

In the Old Testament we find the stories of Elijah and Elisha. In 1 Kings 19 we find Elijah selecting Elisha to be his successor. When Elijah finds Elisha he sees him plowing the fields with 24 oxen. Having that many oxen is an indication of Elisha's wealth. What does Elisha do when Elijah tells him he is chosen to be God's prophet? He says; well let me finish working this field. Then I need to train someone to run the business. And then I have to go to the store to make sure my family has everything they need. Then I need to find a new home for my mother-in-law. Then let me finish my education. Why don't you come back in a year or two then I will be ready. That's what he said, right? Of course it's not. Here is what happened. He immediately slaughters his oxen and burned all of his farm equipment. Elisha did not try to keep his business going, he held nothing back. He gave it all up to follow the call.

When we accept the invitation to follow Jesus, we are not just making him the top priority in our life. We are making him the only priority in our life. Jesus wants our complete attention; he wants our complete commitment. Jesus wants more of our time than the office gets, he wants more of our devotion than our favorite sports team, he wants more of our talents than the world gets. He wants our best; he wants to be first not an afterthought. He does not want to be second place in our life.

I am not saying we can't do other things. Jesus understands we have to work, we have to care for our families, we need to be entertained, but if those things become our priority we show that we are not totally committed to following Jesus. For example, the apostle Paul worked while he followed Jesus, but that work never became a priority over following Jesus. He made tents, but preaching the Gospel always came first.

One of the big differences between an admirer of Jesus and a follower of Jesus is the commitment level. I want to tell you a story about commitment.

On February, 15 1921 something very interesting happened in a New York City hospital. A patient is complaining of severe abdominal pain. The Doctor quickly diagnosis the problem: an inflamed appendix. Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane is performing the surgery. In his 37 year medical career Dr. Kane has performed nearly 4,000 appendectomies. This surgery will be uneventful in every way except two.

The first uniqueness of this surgery is this will be the very first use of local anesthesia in a major surgery. At that time general anesthesia was used for all surgeries. Dr. Kane was against this practice and advocated for the use local anesthesia as he believed it to be a safer method. Dr. Kane was committed to seeing local anesthesia used in surgery. He was willing to go against the medical communities belief that general anesthesia was better. Yet, Dr. Kane could not find a patient willing to have surgery using local anesthesia. That is until that February morning. A patient is willing to have his appendix removed using local anesthesia. For the first time in medical history local anesthesia is used. The surgery went well. The patient only complained of minor irritation during the surgery. After two days in the hospital the patient was released and he lived a normal life. The use of local anesthesia was a success.

I said there were two unique aspects of this surgery. The first was the use of local anesthesia. The second was the patient. The patient was.....Dr. Kane. Yes, Dr. Kane operated on himself to show his commitment to the use of local anesthesia. Now that is commitment. He was so committed to seeing local anesthesia used that he was willing to operate on himself. Are we that committed in our desire to follow Jesus?

I want to close today by asking you to consider this question.

Am I willing to follow Jesus

Wherever? Even at home. Even at work.

Whenever? Even in inconvenient times.

Whatever? I'll give everything up to follow.