

June 27, 2010
Luke 10:51-62
What's It Going to Cost?
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Well, who's ready to sign up?

It sounds like a good deal, doesn't it?

Head into hostile territory.

Face rejection by all sorts of people.

Get rebuked by Jesus.

Have no place to lay your head.

Leave your dear loved ones to be buried by someone else.

Take off to follow this Jesus without even saying goodbye to your family.

Good?

Given this “job description” set before you this morning, how many of you are ready to sign up?

Or are at least really excited?

Or at least feel like this is something that maybe you could want eventually?

How many of you are troubled?

How many of you, as you listen to Jesus words, maybe feel angry?

How many of you are afraid?

How many of you wish Jesus never said this?

Friends, whatever else they are, these words – spoken by our Lord - *are* troubling words.

Kids, if these words weren't spoken by Jesus, but instead, your teacher said something like this to you (“Leave your family, don't even say goodbye, and follow me, with no place to live”), you would probably ask to be moved to a new class. (And your parents would probably transfer you to a new school...and report your teacher.)

Adults, if your boss said something like this to you, you would probably report him, or quit, or – depending on the kind of temper you have – do something you would later regret (and might make your hand hurt).

But these words don't come from a teacher, or a boss, or anyone else. They come from *Jesus*, so we can't request a new teacher or simply ignore what he's said. The trouble is, we have to *do* something with this. We've got to respond somehow.

Jesus is talking about discipleship. He's talking about what it means to follow him. And in case you're wondering (and hoping!), this isn't something different from being a Christian. This isn't about about what you do that's above-and-beyond being a Christian. According to Jesus, this *is* what it means to follow him. Discipleship *is* basic Christianity.¹

But this doesn't sound like basic Christianity, does it?

¹ I owe this thought to Dallas Willard in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, as quoted in *Devotional Classics*, pp.14-16.

This sounds hard.

This *following Jesus* sounds like something that could ruin a person's life.

Think about all the people who encounter Jesus in our passage this morning. As Jesus calls them to follow him, we don't hear their responses. So, what would have happened to them if they said, "Okay"? Imagine what their lives could look like.

It's possible that following Jesus could have ruined their lives.

Think about James and John, and the rest of the Twelve, who followed Jesus into Samaria. He's purposely leading them through hostile territory. (The *quickest* way to get from Galilee to Jerusalem was to go through Samaria; but the *safest* way – and the route most Jewish people preferred – was to go *around* Samaria.) The relationship between Samaritans and Jews was not a good one. They have a shared history and lineage, like people who are half-brothers or half-sisters. But there were enough differences and problems in their history that now, in Jesus' time, Jews hate Samaritans and Samaritans hate Jews. If you're a Jew traveling through Samaria, you're not going through a good neighborhood. And Jesus has no problem taking them there.

And if there is a bad relationship between Samaritans and Jews, no wonder Jesus is rejected in Samaria! So, in Jesus' defense, James and John ask permission to do something that seems to make a lot of sense: "Jesus, since they don't recognize who you are, why don't we call down fire on this nasty place?" (You know, take care of 'em.) And what they get from Jesus is nothing more than a reprimand.

Oh, and remember, too, that *Jesus knows* that he's going to Jerusalem to die. So, Jerusalem is hostile territory, too. As they follow Jesus, this is where he leads them.

Do you ever think they felt that following Jesus ruined their lives?

And think about this man who tells Jesus, "I'll follow you wherever you go." What if that's exactly what he does? Imagine what will become of him. He'll become a homeless vagabond, just like Jesus is a homeless vagabond. He would go from having a home – which he maybe even worked long and hard for - to having no home.

Does that count as having a ruined life?

And what about the man who wanted to go and bury his father and *then* follow Jesus? Jesus' blunt reply is, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." What if he listened? (Now, there was a waiting period of about a year from the time a person was first anointed for burial, and the time their bones were buried for good. But even so...) What would it do to his grieving process if he picked up and left? What would that do to his family relationships? Can you imagine?

I wonder if there are aspects of his life that would have been ruined.

And speaking of family relationships and ruined lives...what would have happened to that last person if he really did leave his family behind to follow Jesus, and not even say goodbye? Even if he comes back a year later (or even a couple weeks later), things are *not* going to be okay at home. And if you're

one of the lucky ones left behind, imagine what that would do to your life, too. And imagine this: if that man *did* leave his family...(and especially if he left without saying goodbye)...if he did what Jesus told him to do...where would his mind be? Would he be able to concentrate fully on anything? He would probably feel pulled in one direction toward following Jesus, and pulled in the other toward his family. Maybe some of you know what that feels like, and that is *not* a fun way to live.

It's possible that following Jesus could have ruined his life.

Now, there are a number of things we don't know in these stories. For those who offer to follow Jesus - or for those Jesus calls - we don't know what their final decisions are (and we'll come back to that).

But we also don't know what they *know*:

 If they truly recognize who Jesus *is*.

 If they understand what the kingdom of God is.

We don't know if they *get* what Jesus is doing, and what he's calling them to.

For these would-be disciples, this is what they need to know:

Jesus is the Son of Man. He calls himself that in his passage. He's the one whose coming was prophesied (all throughout their Scriptures). He's the Promised One, who's come to bring an end to evil and make things right in this world.

And the Son of Man hasn't come to call down fire and destroy people's lives, but to save them.

As Jesus calls people to follow him, he *is* calling them to sacrifice. But do they know the magnitude of *Jesus'* sacrifice?

They might not know this, but the one who calls them is the Son of God. He *is* God. And he left his throne in heaven to be a homeless vagabond in this world he created. He's come to save his people, but just about everywhere he goes, they misunderstand and reject him.

They might not know that he's going to Jerusalem to suffer and die because that is the plan of God. And the plan is that Jesus die for the sins of humanity so that humanity be saved. And so that people (sinful, broken, sometimes nasty people) will have peace with God.

Do these prospective disciples know the magnitude of the kingdom of God? That it's not some religious "pie-in-the-sky", but that it's about the inbreaking of the Spirit of God *everywhere*...into even the tiniest and most personal cracks and crevices of their lives.

Do they know what Jesus said just a little while earlier, that:

 The one who wants to save her life will lose it.

 But that the one who loses her life for the sake of Christ and his kingdom will save it?

The Son of Man doesn't come to destroy people's lives, but to save them.

So, given who Jesus is, and what he's all about in this world, what would happen if these people said, "Yes. I'll follow you"?

For James and John, we know that they did continue to follow Jesus. (They wrote letters that are now books of the Bible!) And you know what? They came to learn what kind of spirit they are of: that now, at the core of their identity, they are people born of the Spirit of God. So then, *they also* share in God's work of saving lives.

And man who tells Jesus, "I'll follow you wherever you go"? When Jesus says, "You'll have no place to lay your head," what if the man said, "I'll follow you anyway"?

Maybe his life would have more substance. Maybe his concerns would go deeper than maintaining his home. If he agreed to follow Jesus wherever he went, he would have walked in the footsteps of the Son of God. He would have faced rejection along the way, same as Jesus. But the rejection – or acceptance – he receives would be the same acceptance or rejection that God himself receives.

If he was so closely aligned with God...that might have saved his life.

What about the man who says, "I'll follow you after I bury my father," and Jesus replies, "Don't wait; go now. And proclaim the kingdom of God."

Imagine...if he decided to wait a year, Jesus would have gone into Jerusalem, died, resurrected...and he might have missed all that. But think about what could have happened if he listened to Jesus' call and followed him right away? He might have seen Jesus die...and he might have witnessed the resurrection. He might have been so quickened by that that he couldn't help but proclaim the kingdom of God. And can you imagine what that kind of hope would do for his grieving family?

That could have saved all their lives.

And while we're imagining...

What about the man who was willing to follow Jesus, but wanted to say goodbye to his family first? We're just imagining, but *what if*...what if the man went home, brought his family with him, and they all followed Jesus? What if following Jesus wasn't in competition with caring for his family, and he didn't have to look in two directions at all? Maybe that would have united them. Maybe their family would go deeper, and be more purposeful...and maybe be filled with more suffering...but also be filled truer and deeper joy.

Following Jesus might have saved their lives.

So, what about you? What about us?

Luke tells us about three people here who had the opportunity to follow Jesus, but first needed to know the cost. He doesn't tell us what their response is. And he does that on purpose, because it's up to the listener to respond. And that's me. That's you.

Clearly, following Jesus today isn't going to look like it did two thousand years ago. The "mechanics" of it are different today.² For one thing, Jesus isn't walking around like an itinerant preacher anymore, and it's harder to follow him, in that way. But I think the Christian thinker, Dallas Willard, gets it right

² I owe the thoughts of this paragraph to Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

when he says that what's the same is: the *desire* to be like Jesus and the *decision* to rearrange everything else in your life so that following him takes first priority. At base, that's what Jesus is getting at. It means knowing Jesus, and doing what he says.

It means having the character of Christ.

It means living lives defined by:

mercy,
and service,
and sacrifice,
and love,
and truth.

And it means that *every single thing else*, no matter how important, takes second place. Everything flows out of our commitment to first follow Christ (It doesn't mean, say, that we should stop caring for our loved ones. But it *does* mean that our care needs to be filtered through obedience to Christ, and thankfulness, and the work of the kingdom.)

Will that ruin your life?

Well, God does call you to lay down your life.

And he might smash your prejudice.

Or lead you to spend time with people you wouldn't otherwise talk to.

He might call you to be like one family I know, who – whenever they're surprised with extra money – they give it away.

He might call you to be like a suburban mom I met in Grand Rapids, who once saw a young man get shot. Instead of staying safely in her car and driving away, she got out of her car and held him, and didn't stop holding him until the ambulance came.

He might be calling you to give up a position of high authority and humble yourself.

Or, he might be calling you to have courage, and serve in a position of high authority.

He might be calling you this morning to tell the truth.

He might be calling you to forgive someone.

He might be saying to you, "Trust me."

He might be saying, "I want you to know me."

And you know, that won't break relationships, but heal them. That won't break *you*, but will make you who you were created to be.

As he leads you, he will make you loving, and joyful, and courageous.

In God's mysterious ways, he'll always provide what you need.

He'll use you to point others to him.

And unlike anything this world can give, he will give you rich, abundant life.

The promise of God is that he will *not* ruin your life. He *will* do whatever he wants, but he's good. The Lord doesn't come to destroy lives, but to save them. And he says, "Whoever loses their life for me

will save it.”

Brothers and sisters, these may be hard words...and mysterious words...but they are *true*.

And they are words of grace.

Receive them.

Go home and pray about them.

Them them.

“Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

Thanks be to God!