

“Truly Following Jesus”  
by Rom A. Pegram (11/26/17)

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” That’s what it says in Luke 9:23—Jesus’ invitation to all to become followers of his... Last week, you got the unedited version of what that really means! But even so, some of us still have a tendency to read it as simply poetic—*maybe safer that way*. But, as we step across the line and commit to being a true FOLLOWER of Jesus, we find that it’s important to consider everything—to think through the personal & practical implications of what being a FOLLOWER really means...

At the end of Luke, Chapter 9, we meet three people who do just that. After Jesus offers the invitation to FOLLOW, these three individuals initially seem eager to be FOLLOWERS. However, as they process how this decision might change their lives, they begin making excuses ... and sometimes we’re pretty good at that, too, aren’t we? I want to dive right into our scripture for today, then unpack it together as we close our fall worship series—“Fan or Follower.” **PLEASE PRAY WITH ME (AND PRAY FOR CLARITY FOR ALL OF US, WOULD YOU? WE NEED TO HEAR FROM GOD TODAY. I BELIEVE OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT...)**

As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

<sup>58</sup> But Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of

Man has no place even to lay his head.” <sup>59</sup> He said to another person, “Come, follow me.” The man agreed, but he said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.”

<sup>60</sup> But Jesus told him, “Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.” <sup>61</sup> Another said, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.” <sup>62</sup> But Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

– Luke 9:57-62 (NLT)

Folks, *if we are truly following Jesus, our answer to his invitation will be wherever, whenever, and whatever ... with no reservations!* Let’s take a look at the first of those things we’re to have no reservations about, shall we? We meet the first FANS in verse 57 of Luke 9. He approaches Jesus and his disciples and wants to commit to tell Jesus:

**WHEREVER...** Can we say that to Jesus? I believe that most of us *WANT* to say to Jesus, “I will be a FOLLOWER of yours ... WHEREVER!” Here’s what the man says in verse 57:

“As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus,  
‘I will follow you wherever you go.’”

WHEREVER. Those words certainly sound impressive, don’t they? Even today, he seems to get what Jesus is looking for. He seems to know the right words to say. He tells Jesus point blank: “I will follow you *wherever* you go.” Now, that sounds like a

FOLLOWER, doesn't it? WHEREVER. No restrictions. No boundaries. No borders. WHEREVER. But, look at verse 58...

“But Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.’”

Jesus turns to the man, and I'm just imagining with a bit of a smile, and says something like, “Dude, I'm homeless!” In other words, he was implying ... “So you want to FOLLOW me, do you? Well, how does this reality grab you?” “I'm homeless!”

My guess is that making this clear, up front, was often a deal breaker for would-be FOLLOWERS of Jesus. He makes it clear that if you're going to be FOLLOWING him, that won't mean going from town to town staying at the Hilton and ordering room service! ‘Not going to happen. Many of us WANT to say to Jesus ... WHEREVER ... but when he says ‘THERE,’ we back off...

When I was young, my dad would go and do revival services at a variety of churches during the week, and he would ask me to go along with him—for company or for song leading, or both... One of the songs that would be sung at the end of the service or a series of services—a real call to decision—would be “I Surrender All.” One night, when I was at someone else's revival with Dad and they sang this song, I was one who went forward to ‘surrender all’ ... but I soon found out what FOLLOWING Jesus was really all about and I may as well have been singing “I Surrender ... Some.” I soon found out ... I didn't surrender my pride; that was part of it. I didn't surrender a few other things either! It was O.K. for Jesus to take the co-pilot's seat in my life ... but I was going to continue doing the steering...

It wasn't long until I realized that ... it just doesn't work that way with Jesus! I WILL FOLLOW YOU ... WHEREVER! What about there? You can't hold on to part of your life, if you want to have the new life Jesus has just for you! *He's got to be the One in the driver's seat of your life!*

The FAN'S response to Jesus in v. 57 reveals some of the reasons WHY it's hard to tell Jesus ... WHEREVER. First, *it's going to be a journey of risk and uncertainty—a real adventure!* If he decided to FOLLOW Jesus, he didn't know where he'd be going ... or if he'd have a place to stay. Whenever we're afraid of what a commitment might lead to, our instincts will always lead us to say ‘NO!’ Another reason this man in Luke seems to say ‘NO’ to Jesus is because *he's calling him to something that might be ... uncomfortable!* As soon as we say ‘YES’ to Jesus, we can almost be assured that he'll take us ... *out of our comfort zone!* And ‘out of our comfort zone’ could be defined in this way: “The places where I say yes to God may mean saying *no* to me!” Then, later on in Chapter 9 of Luke, we see a second individual do their best to say ‘YES’ to following Jesus ... and this has to do with the reality of...

**WHENEVER...** For this scenario, we see Jesus going to this man and saying, “Come, follow me,” but then this man starts in with ... *excuses!*

Did you guys know there's a website called "Mother of all Excuses?" It was set up so people could share excuses they've used in the past and others could take advantage of them. There are over 400 excuses listed to be used on your job. There are more than 500 excuses for cutting classes at school. There are several hundred excuses for breaking dates, cheating on a diet, and—of course—excuses for when you get pulled over in your car. There's some good ones on there! You should check 'em out!

The truth is, we don't know much about this second man who Jesus offered his invitation to, other than the excuse he gave for not following Jesus (vv. 59-60):

"He said to another person, 'Come, follow me.' The man agreed, but he said, 'Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.'<sup>60</sup> But Jesus told him, 'Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.'"

Jesus spoke the same two words to this man that he spoke to his other disciples: "Follow me." This man's response was quite different, however, than say Matthew's ... who got up and immediately followed Jesus! This man's response was basically, "Lord (he got that part right), I want to follow you ... but now's not a good time!"

When you first hear Jesus' response to this man, he seems a bit harsh, doesn't he? Let the guy go bury his dad, for Pete's sake! But, what's said here is a bit tricky to translate into English; here's what he was really saying: "When my parents die, I will follow you." There's more to this story than meets the eye...

- Would his parents be upset that he's following this unconventional rabbi?
- Was he afraid of telling them that he'd not be taking over the family business?
- Was he waiting to receive his share of a sizeable inheritance?

All these are possibilities—for him and for us! How many times have we said, I'd love to be more committed to Jesus—more active in His Church, but *now's not a good time!* The most common answer among FANS—to committing to FOLLOW Jesus ... is *tomorrow!* But, you need to know this: *On the invitation Jesus gives us to FOLLOW him there is an RSVP date and it reads: TODAY. The word tomorrow's not in the Holy Spirit's vocabulary.* When Jesus says FOLLOW, he means right now. He means TODAY (because the truth is ... tomorrow may never come)... And finally...

**WHATEVER...** Verses 61-62 tell us about the third man: "Another said, 'Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.'<sup>62</sup> But Jesus told him, 'Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.'" Apparently, this guy missed out on the conversation Jesus' just had with the man who wanted to bury his father. This FAN, like the other, agrees to FOLLOW Jesus, but just not at this moment!

Again, a knowledge of language and culture comes into play here. The cultural practice of saying goodbye to your family, if you were to leave the area, meant numerous

farewell parties; this could've lasted a period of weeks, if not months. This is why Jesus seems annoyed that the man would even make such a request; does that make sense?

As true FOLLOWERS of Jesus, however, we have to be ready to FOLLOW him with no reservations; that's the only way. We have to say yes to Jesus with the understanding of WHEREVER, WHENEVER, AND WHATEVER! We have to commit, right now, to anything that comes our way once we say 'yes' and trust God for the rest. It's kind of like the idea of 'for better or for worse' when you get married...

When I sit down to talk to a couple before performing their wedding, I try my best to give them an unedited version of marriage. Instead of just having 'stars in their eyes,' I think they need to know what they're really committing to! Here's how another pastor describes this process:

I try and paint a picture of what the vows they speak to one another look like once they're married for a year or so. I tell the wife, "About a year into your marriage you are going to be ready for bed and come into the family room and realize your husband has gained about 15 pounds. He'll be sitting on the couch watching *Sports Center* and slurping a huge bowl of cereal. Between bites he'll take the spoon and use it to scratch an itch on his back." And then I turn to the soon-to-be-husband and say, "About this time she is going to start sounding a lot like your mom, telling you not to slurp and to eat your cereal at the counter. Then you'll look at her and she will look like your mom. She'll be wearing the most modest nightgown ever made and have zit cream on her face." He says, 'I want them to understand what they're signing up for...

- *For Better or For Worse...*
- *For Richer or Poorer...*
- *In Sickness and in Health...*

And if you've been married for awhile, you know what all of these things mean. *The reality*; its super important to know what you're getting into—especially when it comes to FOLLOWING Jesus! But, as a friend of mine said just the other day, "Rom, I know some of this sounds hard, but if they only knew the JOY of saying 'Yes!'" That's what's on the other side of the decision...

Folks, don't kid yourselves today, please! *Trading all that we have for all that Jesus offers ... is the best deal we could ever make in life.* Or, as Jim Elliott—that great missionary to the Auca Indians of Ecuador—once put it:

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep  
to gain that which he cannot lose."

WHEREVER, WHENEVER, WHATEVER. 'Best deal you'll ever be offered; so let's take that deal today, shall we? Let's decide to be FOLLOWERS ... right now!