



Potomac Hills
Community Church, PCA
RELEVANT • RELATIONAL • REAL

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The Cost of Following Christ

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke
Luke 9:57-62

INTRODUCTION: *Walking a straight line*¹

Well, it appears that walking a straight line is hard to do unless you really focus on doing that. If you're distracted, or looking behind you, it's really hard. And Jesus talked about that in today's passage at the end of Luke 9.

You see, Jesus insisted that following Him isn't a matter of merely imitating Him, but entering the very conditions of His life. He just finished talking to the disciples about mercy, but now He immediately shifts to talking about commitment because in Jesus' eyes, mercy and commitment go together. It was the mercy of Christ towards us and His steadfast **commitment** to **obeying** the Father's will that led Him to the cross.

Remember, back in v. 51, we read that, “*As the time drew near for His return to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*”

So as they are now on the road, Jesus moves from teaching about mercy to teaching about commitment. And He does so by answering three would-be disciples who don't seem to have their whole heart in following Christ.

To each one, He points out the cost of following Him.

v. 57-58: The 1st Cost: HARDSHIP^{2 3}

“As they were walking along someone said to Jesus, “I will follow You no matter

1 I got this idea from Scolding the Snakes: Kids Sermons from the Gospel of Luke by Ruth Gilmore, pages 84-85.

2 The exposition of the text has been adapted from Preaching the Word: Luke, Vol. One by R. Kent Hughes, pages 371-374 and Christ's Call to Discipleship by James Montgomery Boice, pages 126-134. For an extensive treatment of this subject, see The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

3 The story of Dr. Brian Fikkert was found on www.PCANews.com, 10/10/01.

where You go." [58] But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of My own, not even a place to lay My head."

As they began to travel, one of the group glibly announces, *"I will follow You no matter where You go."* Words like this sound like commitment, but in fact they usually reveal ignorance and inexperience.

I remember a chorus we used to sing ... when I was in high school, I think ... but the words were;

*I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back
No turning back*

And we thought we were on fire for God!

Now there's nothing wrong with the words, but the tune was light and airy and sounded more like Dorothy and the Tin Man skipping down the Yellow Brick Road on the way to see the Wizard of Oz.

Like following Christ was a stroll in the park.

And perhaps this man thought that following Christ wasn't going to be all that hard.

Now, before we beat up this man too much, we need to understand that there are a lot of people who have heard God's Word and heard about Christ, often persuasively, but who have never gotten as far as this man with his offer to follow Christ.

Many people hear the Gospel and are indifferent to it.

Many people are moved by the words of Christ, but never follow Him.

Not this guy. He had heard Jesus teach, knew who He was, believed His message and wanted to follow Him.

And it seems that he was sincere and that he was moving in the right direction, but he hadn't taken the time to count the cost. What does it mean to follow Christ? What will it cost in terms of money, time, effort, and doing without? He hadn't counted on giving stuff up and living with hardship.

He was ready for the Kingdom, but not for the cross.

And Jesus, who knows the heart, knew that that kind of shallow commitment would never make it. So He sharply replied, *"Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of My own, not even a place to lay My head."*

The fact is, Jesus sometimes did have a place to lay His head both before and after He said this. He stayed at Peter's home in Capernaum and with Mary,

Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany.

So what did He mean by such a strong reply? He meant that at times those who followed Him would sometimes be homeless, that sometimes they would be uncomfortable, that sometimes they would be displaced. But even more than that, Jesus was saying that if you are going to follow Him, then ultimately you will sense that the world is not your home. There will be a certain dissonance that will come into your life as the world rejects you again and again.

And it's this disconnectedness that you will have to ... not only learn to live with ... but come to appreciate the fact that this is not as good as it gets and the best is yet to come.

No one who commits to following Christ lives a life of complete ease.

No one.

If your Christianity hasn't brought discomfort into your life, then something is wrong. Because a heart that's committed to following Christ knows the discomfort of loving difficult people,

the discomfort of giving until it hurts,

the discomfort of putting oneself out for the church,

the discomfort of a life out of step with the modern culture,

the discomfort of being disliked,

the occasional sense of having nowhere to lay your head.

You need to know that merely hearing about Jesus and being attracted by the person of Christ isn't going to save anyone.

Christianity is not a life of ease ... the health and wealth gospel is wrong.

Just this week I read a fascinating article at PCANews.com.

It was written by Dr. Brian Fikkert, Director of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development and Professor of Economics at Covenant College.

He writes,

"I have a confession to make: I just discovered that I have always believed in the "Health and Wealth Gospel." As a life-long, conservative Presbyterian, this discovery naturally came as a bit of a shock. Now mind you, I didn't realize that I believed in it. In fact, I have always been quick to denounce it as a heresy. But God recently showed me that I believed in it nonetheless.

Perhaps you do too.

At its core, the Health and Wealth Gospel teaches that God rewards increasing levels of faith with greater amounts of wealth. When stated this way, the Health and Wealth Gospel is easy to reject on a host of biblical grounds, and I have always refuted it in my teaching. Still, I recently discovered to my horror that at some unconscious level I have internalized this heretical gospel's central teaching. Let me explain.

About two months ago I was walking with some staff members of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development through one of Nairobi's slums. The conditions were simply inhumane. People lived in "huts" constructed out of cardboard boxes. Foul smells gushed out of open ditches carrying human and animal excrement. I had a hard time keeping my balance as I continually slipped on oozy brown substances that I hoped were mud but feared were something else. Flies feasted on people's open sores. Children picked through garbage dumps looking for anything of value. As we walked deeper and deeper into the slum, my sense of despair increased. "This is what hell must be like, for this place is completely God-forsaken," I thought to myself.

Then to my amazement, right there amongst the dung, I heard the sweet sound of a familiar hymn. "Must be foreign missionaries conducting an open air service," I rationalized. As we turned the corner my eyes landed on the hut from which the music bellowed. Every Sunday, thirty, Kenyan slum dwellers cram into this 10 foot by 20 foot "sanctuary" to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It wasn't pretty, but it was a church, a church made up of some of the poorest people on earth.

But it soon became apparent that these folks' economic inferiority did not imply their spiritual inferiority. For example, on paper, I have always believed in the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Yet, when I heard these folks, who have no access to healthcare, call on Jehovah Jireh to heal them, I realized that their level of trust in God's sovereignty well-surpassed my own. And I suspect that when these folks pray the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer—"Give us this day our daily bread"—their minds do not wander as mine so often does.

And then there was John, the twenty-two-year-old worship leader who miraculously managed to get through high school but could not afford to go to college. Filled with compassion for the children in the slum, he started a school in the church in which he personally teaches fifty kids spanning all the elementary grades. When I asked how he was supported financially, he just smiled and said, "There is nobody to pay me a salary. I just trust the Lord to meet my needs."

I am not fit to carry John's shoes.

Yep, right down there in the bowels of hell is this Kenyan church, filled with spiritual giants who do not know where the next meal is coming from. I was shocked to find a vibrant church in this setting, which shows that—at some level—I believed in the Health and Wealth Gospel.

Perhaps you do too.

Think about it. If anybody suggests to me that the poor are poor because they are necessarily less spiritual than the rest of us—which is what the Health and Wealth Gospel teaches—I am quick to rebuke them. I immediately point out that

the poor could be poor due to injustices committed against them. Yet, all of this notwithstanding, at some level I was still amazed to see people in this Kenyan slum who were simultaneously so spiritually strong and so devastatingly poor. At some level I had implicitly assumed that my economic superiority goes hand in hand with my spiritual superiority. This is none other than the lie of the Health and Wealth Gospel: Spiritual maturity leads to financial prosperity.

I am in the process of repenting of this sin, which is clearly rooted in arrogance. My fear is that I am not alone in this sin. My fear is that the middle-class, American church is full of people like me, who assume that the poor necessarily need us to bring them closer to God.

Perhaps just the opposite is true.

I am in the process of repenting.

Care to join me?"

For most Christians, in most places, at most times in church history, hardships have been part and parcel of the cost of following Christ.

The next exchange, this time at Jesus' initiative, raises the cost of following Christ a bit higher. And we see in ...

v. 59-60: The 2nd Cost: IMPORTANCE

"He said to another person, "Come, be My disciple." The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father." [60] Jesus replied, "Let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead. Your duty is to go and preach the coming of the Kingdom of God."

This is another strange statement of Jesus, which seems, at first glance, to contradict the 5th Commandment to *"Honor your father and mother."*

This includes, at the very least, showing them respect, giving them consideration by remembering them, being kind to them, and providing for them. In fact, Jesus had harsh words in Matthew 15 for religious leaders who didn't take care of their parents. In fact, of all the ways of showing respect for your parents, making sure they received a proper burial was considered the most important.

So how could Jesus tell this would-be follower to neglect the burial of his own father?

To put it very simply, his father wasn't dead yet.

If his father had been dead, this guy wouldn't have been on the road with Jesus, but home taking care of the details and the service. Apparently, the would-be disciple's father was elderly, and the man was asking Jesus' permission to put off following Him until after his father died. The request revealed that he had no idea of the importance of the task to which Jesus was calling him.

Jesus tells the man, *"Let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead. Your duty is to go and preach the coming of the Kingdom of God."*

In other words, if you're a man alive to God, with the call of God upon your life, then you must do the greater work of preaching the Kingdom. Not to do this would ultimately mean being faithless to your father's deepest need ... that of the Gospel.

If you really are on the road with Jesus, then life is short, and since you have the words of life needed by so many, you must tell them ... especially those you're closest to. Don't let what you consider to be urgent, like burying people who aren't dead yet, get in the way of what is most important.

And the Gospel is of first importance.

Paul said as much in **1 Corinthians 15:3**, "*I passed on to you what was **most important** and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said.*"

Again, so many of us are just like this guy. We are way too willing to put off real commitment to Christ until all our circumstances are taken care of.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the great preachers of the 18th century, had this to say about putting off following Christ.

"You are only young apprentices at present, and when your time is out you think it will be early enough to attend to matters of soul-interest. Or you are only journeymen at present, and when you have earned sufficient money to set you up in business then will be the time to think of God. Or you are little masters and have just begun business; you have a rising family and are struggling hard, and this is your pretense for procrastination. You promise that when you have [reached a level of] competence and can quietly retire to a snug little villa in the country and your children have grown up, then you will repent of the past and seek God's grace for the future.

All these are self-delusions of the grossest kind, for you will do no such thing. What you are today you will probably be tomorrow, and what you are tomorrow you will probably be the next day, and unless a miracle happens – that is to say, unless the supernatural grace of God shall make a new man of you – you will be at your last day what you now are: without God, without hope, and a stranger to [God's people]. Procrastination is the greatest of Satan's nets; in this he catcheth more unwary souls than in any other."

And once again, for most Christians, in most places, at most times in church history, putting first things first has been part of the cost of following Christ.

The last exchange raises the cost of following Christ even higher.

And we see in ...

v. 61-62: The 3rd Cost: FOCUS

"Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow You, but first let me say good-bye to my family." [62] But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then

looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.””

Now a third man on the road commits himself to Jesus ... but with a condition. He wants to follow Jesus' on his terms rather than on Jesus' terms.

The request seemed minor, *“let me say good-bye to my family.”* But again Jesus comes forth with what seems to be a hard statement, *“Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”*

There would be time later for goodbyes; a true commitment to Christ doesn't come with conditions ... even ones that sound okay. If you're called to follow Christ, that comes first ... no ifs, ands, or buts.

It was a pretty common proverb in ancient cultures that one couldn't look back while plowing and drive a straight furrow. As we saw earlier, it's hard to walk straight ahead when you're looking back.

And those who pine after what they left behind, who always remember how good it used to be, who dream about what life surely would have been like if they hadn't chosen to follow Jesus, who keep looking in the rearview mirror, will not do well on Jesus' road.

And yet, before we beat up this guy, let's look at ourselves a moment.

One writer said that he thought the problem with most so-called Christians today is that they want salvation on their own terms. They say they believe the Bible. They acknowledge Jesus' lordship. But they will not make themselves accountable for how or when they actually obey Him. They want to control that response. If it is convenient, they'll obey. But if not, they don't want anyone telling them that they're being disobedient and are therefore not actually following Jesus.

Disobedience is really looking for something else from the world, and if we look back instead of looking at Christ, then we're looking for something else.

Those who **look back** ... want to go back.

And Jesus won't accept those conditions.

CONCLUSION: *So, What do you do?*⁴

That's actually a pretty easy question to answer.

You obey ... and you believe. That's all there is to it.

And it really does sound easy.

But it's not.

And it's not because the hard question is not 'What do you do?' but 'How do you do it?'

And if you've been hanging around here for any length of time, you've heard me say over and over again that the Christian life is a life of grace, not

4 Parts of the conclusion have been adapted from 31 Days of Grace by Paul Kooistra, pages 4-5.

works. But obeying Christ, doing what He says, sure sounds a lot like works.

So we have to ask ourselves ... “Where does our obedience come from?”

Is it coming because we’re trying to make ourselves look good before God ... and before other people?

Or does obedience come because we are so overwhelmed by God’s love, despite the tons of sin in our lives, that following Christ is the only rational response left?

Someone once asked Dr. Paul Kooistra, the head of Mission to the World, “Why is it that all you ever preach is grace?”

His answer was straightforward, “Because grace is all there is to preach.”

I preach grace because I need grace.

I earned a ticket to hell, but I am going to heaven.

I deserve death, but God gave me life.

The Son of God voluntarily gave His life for me.

That’s grace.

I preach grace because everyone around me needs grace: my family, my friends, even every driver of every one of the thousands of cars that frustrate me in traffic, and especially the millions still in darkness around the world.

I preach grace because I need grace.

Grace reminds me that I am a sinner. It rips my pride and magnifies the sin in my heart. It says to me, “You may think you are great, but you are nothing apart from Christ.”

God humbles me by grace. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, but astonishingly, there is nothing I can do to make Him love me less.

Martin Luther said, “To progress in the Christian life is to be always beginning again in the Gospel.”

If you consider yourself a follower of Christ, then you’ve experienced God reaching down to you in His Grace and mercy.

Once again Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us. These texts **reveal** God at work; and show us how God **reveals His power** in order to call people who sometimes refuse to do what He says ... to “Come, be My disciple.”

God takes people who are “outsiders,” **and who can’t get in on their own**, and makes them “insiders” ... people who are involved **in a relationship** with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has **poured out His grace** on those of us who realize that, apart from Christ, **we’re the lepers and paralytics and possessed and dead people and the lowly and the least and the weak**, and we’re not what we **too often** pretend to be.

In fact, our words and actions **far** too often are flat disobedient.

But Jesus comes to us anyway, and He touches us, and teaches us, and heals us, and saves us. And that's **grace**, because we're getting what we don't deserve.

Luke brings us that same essential message of grace over and over again.

We see it in Jesus' teaching.

We see it in Jesus' healing.

We see it when He casts out demons.

We see it when He calls undeserving people.

God set His love on us before the foundation of the world.

He sent His Son to live a perfect life and pour out His blood on the cross.

He called us and adopted us as His own children.

He is present with us by His Spirit.

He cleanses us, encourages us, and renews us every day.

He is preparing a home for us in the new heaven and new earth.

God's grace to sinners is the great over-riding them of Scripture.

Why? Because ...

It's all of grace from beginning to end.

And it's all of Grace because it's all of Christ.

Luke tells the story of how **Jesus revealed that grace**, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation. The church **must show what such grace looks like** ... starting by bringing that grace to those among us who often fail to do what Jesus' says and who aren't everything we pretend to be.

And all who act like that sometimes said, "Amen."