

Follow Jesus first

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- [0 : 00] Let's pray. Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. And so, Father, we come to you and before you this morning, not necessarily knowing what lies before us in the year ahead, but we know that your word is the lamp that we need.
- So we pray that you would, by your spirit, convict our hearts deeply as we hear from the lips of the Lord Jesus himself today, that we might believe what he says, walk the way he wants us to, keep looking at his cross, and find joy knowing that being part of his kingdom will always be better than anything in this world.
- All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. In 2010, an online gaming store called GameStation decided to play an April Fool's joke.
- Just for fun, they inserted a little extra clause into their terms and conditions. So, if you decided to buy anything from their store that day, and you click that little box that says you've read the fine print, this is what you've just agreed to.
- By placing an order via this website, on the first day of the fourth month of the year 2010, anno domini, you agree to grant us a non-transferable option to claim, for now and forevermore, your immortal soul.
- [1 : 28] Should we wish to exercise this option, you agree to surrender your immortal soul, and any claim you may have on it, within five working days of receiving written notification from GameStation.co.uk, or one of its duly authorised minions.
- And as it turns out, 7,500 people did voluntarily hand over their souls that fateful day. Now, this was just a prank, of course.
- GameStation doesn't really intend to harvest your soul. But here's the point. No one ever reads the terms and conditions. I mean, sorry lawyers, but who wants to read pages and pages of legal jargon in size 7 font?
- Today, we discover that Jesus also wants to claim our soul, our body, our everything. But unlike GameStation, he doesn't hide it in the fine print.
- Instead, he lays out his terms and conditions concisely in size 24 font. It's all spelled out for us in Luke 9, verse 57 to 62.
- [2 : 45] And I wonder if you were a little shocked by his words as you read it this morning. Jesus certainly says some very strong stuff, doesn't he? If I were team Jesus' marketing director, I might very well be wincing at this point.
- Hey, hey, hey, hey. Jesus, ah. We are trying to get people to follow you, right? You know, all this stuff is going to put people off. Hey, go easy.
- We are trying to win people here. If you have to say it, at least don't put it front and centre, right? Leave it in the fine print. Do as the lawyers do.
- This isn't the right strategy. But Jesus says, nope. Let's lay it all out. I want to make clear to everyone what being on team Jesus really involves.
- I want everyone to understand following me will be costly. But why? Why are the terms and conditions the way they are?

[3 : 51] Why should it cost so much? Well, that is why we shouldn't read Luke 9, verses 57 to 62 in isolation. We need to read it together with verses 51 to 56 and listen to Jesus' words in light of his actions.

So that's where we need to begin today. Let's find out what Jesus is doing as he lays out these terms and conditions for us. So to keep open your Bibles, Luke 9, listen and follow along.

But first, let me just recap what's been happening so far. The last time we were in Luke last year, Jesus has been going about his ministry in Galilee.

Having laid out his manifesto in chapter 4, he's been teaching and healing from chapter 5 onwards. In chapter 8 especially, he's demonstrated his mastery over the forces of nature, the forces of evil and the forces of disease and death as he calms the storm, casts out demons and raises the dead girl back to life.

And so when we get to chapter 9, it's beginning to dawn on the disciples who Jesus really is. They say, 9 verse 20, you're the Messiah, the Christ.

[5 : 19] And then in 9 verse 28 to 36, Peter, James and John follow Jesus up a mountain and watch in astonishment as Jesus, wrapped in glory, talks with none other than Moses and Elijah.

And we are told their topic of conversation in verse 31. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

And that brings us to the beginning of our passage today. And let's look at the first action Jesus does. You can see it in verse 51.

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. So the departure, Moses and Elijah spoke about, is finally happening.

You can see this emphasized again at the end of verse 53. He is heading for Jerusalem. He has a clear destination.

[6 : 27] But let's slow down a bit and ask, why is Jesus heading to Jerusalem? Verse 51 also tells us it's so that he will be taken up to heaven.

In other words, he's going to ascend to his rightful place in God's throne room and be enthroned as king. It's a bit like Simba in The Lion King.

You know, from the right beginning of this movie, we know that Simba is the anointed king. As a baby, he is lifted up by the baboon Rafiki before the entire animal kingdom who bow before him.

And the rest of the story, of course, is how Simba gets exiled. comes home, defeats his evil uncle Scar, and reclaims what has always been rightfully his.

And by the end of this movie, we get a scene that is similar to the one at the very beginning where Rafiki once again spotlights Simba. And this time, Simba, by this stage a fully grown lion, ascends to the very spot he was once lifted up as a cub and he roars.

[7 : 42] This is the moment of triumph and exhortation. He has always been king in one sense, but now it is undisputed.

And that is what Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is all about. He has always been the anointed king, but now he is heading towards his moment of triumph and exhortation, towards the moment when his authority over heaven and earth will be clearly demonstrated.

And so that's the first thing we're supposed to understand. Jesus will be king. And there is no stopping him. But that's not all.

We need to say more. So let's keep exploring and let's keep looking at Jesus and his other actions, but this time in contrast with the actions of those around him.

In verses 52 and 53, Jesus has messengers go into a Samaritan village to prepare the way for him. It's a bit like the Kembara-Kenali-Boneo road trip that our previous Yang Dipertuan Agong went on last year.

[9 : 01] As our Agong went through the various places in Sarawak on his way to his final destination, Lundu, there would be people already prepared along the way to receive him as king.

And Jesus' disciples here are preparing for something similar. If Jesus is the Messiah, if Jesus is God's chosen king, then surely the villagers must respond accordingly.

But in verse 53, we discover differently. The people there did not welcome him. And that does not make James and John happy at all.

Verse 54. They ask Jesus, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them? Now, to us, that sounds pretty over the top.

Are James and John just fanatical men with a bad temper? Well, no, actually. James and John are men who know their Bibles.

[10 : 13] Many years ago, there was an Israelite king called Ahaziah. You can find his story in 2 Kings 1. Like many of his predecessors, he fell into idol worship and rejected God.

Can you take off the... He looked for help from other gods instead. And in the very same place where Jesus and his disciples are now standing, Samaria, he had a confrontation with God's prophet, Elijah.

He had sent soldiers to kill Elijah because he didn't like the word from God Elijah had spoken against him. But as Elijah faced off with these soldiers, what did Elijah say?

2 Kings 1.10 And now you can put it on the screen. If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

And that is exactly what happened. God said, Elijah's on my team. Don't mess with him. And so when these Samaritans in the very same place reject Jesus, the capital P prophet, James and John think of what Elijah did and they ask Jesus, shall we also call in the airstrike?

[11 : 43] After all, by rejecting Jesus, Samaria is once again rejecting the one true God. Hey, so Jesus, show them that you don't mess about.

It is time for judgment. But look now at Jesus' actions. Does he sanction this?

No. That must have been a surprise. He rebukes his disciples. And that must have been a surprise to James and John and everyone else who was there.

After all, James and John's request had scriptural precedent. But you see, Jesus is now beginning to show us not just that he's king, but what kind of king he is.

He's a king whose priority right now isn't to bring judgment. It is to bring people into his kingdom. You see, let's backtrack a little bit and come back to verse 51.

[12 : 51] And that very first action I drew your attention to. Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Now, let me read to you the ESV translation of that verse, which is a more literal translation.

You can put it on the screen. Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. That's what it literally says. Now, why might that be significant?

Well, when Luke uses the phrase set his face, he's not just being fancy with his words. That phrase actually comes from Isaiah 50 verse 7, where a person known only as the servant is describing his experience.

And what is this servant facing? Well, let me read Isaiah 50 verse 6 to 7 to find out. It should be the next slide. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard.

I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, have I set my face like flint and I know I will not be put to shame.

- [14 : 08] This servant is facing suffering. It is in the midst of suffering that he sets his face, confident that God will vindicate him.

And Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is deliberately echoing the words of the servant in verse 51 of Luke.

Yes, Jesus is going to be crowned king. But to be crowned king, he must first undergo the experience of this suffering servant. He will first have to be betrayed and beaten, mocked and spat at.

He will first have to be rejected and crucified. To go up to heaven, he must first go down to Jerusalem. His glory must be true Calvary.

In other words, his kingship will be cross-shaped. And yet, Jesus was determined to go. Why?

- [15 : 18] Because he knew this was the only way for people to be safe. This was the only way the problem of our sinfulness could ever be dealt with.

Not by him bringing down judgment on us, but by taking the very judgment we deserve. And we see this determination foreshadowed even in this very section.

you can take the slide off now. Earlier, we just heard about how Jesus sent messengers into the Samaritan village to get things ready for him.

Now, what you might not realize is how unusual that is. You see, there is a lot of bad blood between Jews and Samaritans. Centuries centuries of them.

This is a bit like an Israelite soldier walking through a neighborhood in Gaza where they all support Hamas today. And to get to Jerusalem, Jesus could have gone around Samaria rather than straight through it, which is what just about every other Jew did.

- [16 : 31] But look at his actions. He went into Samaria even though he knew it was likely he would be rejected. Why?

Because he wants to bring them into his kingdom too. He wants them to know that salvation is for them too. He is going to the cross for them too.

And he's willing to pay the cost for their sake. And right now that offer still stands.

That's why in verse 55 Jesus turns and rebukes James and John. He is not rebuking their zeal. But he is saying to them it is not yet the time for judgment.

The day of judgment is coming, yes. Jesus will teach that clearly in some of the later chapters in Luke. But today is not that day.

- [17 : 38] And you know this won't be the first time Jesus will be rejected. As we travel with him over the coming months, we will see that he will be rejected again and again and again.

That's the path Jesus takes. But does he say, enough? Fire, come down now. Well, that's what we would say, wouldn't we?

Jesus, look at all those people dishonouring your name in the public square. Look at all those people laughing at your word. Fire, come down on them now. But notice what Jesus has his disciples do instead in verse 56.

Then he and his disciples went to another village. And given the area they were in, it's quite possible this was another Samaritan village.

You see, Jesus keeps paying the cost. He keeps going where there will be rejection all the way to the cross. Why? Because the offer to be on team Jesus is not just for those whom we think are deserving, who have the right kind of background, who already are seeking God.

[18 : 57] No, Jesus' kingdom is so big that it's for those who are rejecting God right now, who are already prejudiced against Christians, who think that his ways are laughable.

And as long as Jesus has not yet returned, today remains a day of salvation. Today is still a day for enemies to be loved and transformed into friends.

Today is still the day that we can count the cost for people to come into his kingdom. And if you're not a Christian today, today is still a day you can check out if Jesus is who he really says he is.

And I find it interesting that in the rest of Luke's gospel, from here on in, every time Samaritans are mentioned, it will be in a positive light.

We'll meet one in two weeks. And that suggests that as long as it is still the day of salvation, there is hope even for those who don't initially welcome him.

[20 : 10] They can still be warned for the kingdom. And so Jesus shows us who he is by his actions. he is king, but his kingship is a cross shaped one.

It is cross shaped in its destination. Jesus is determined to go and die for our sin in our place. And it is cross shaped in its orientation.

Jesus is willing to constantly take the path of hardship and rejection and count the cost so that people will be in his kingdom.

Because today is still the day of salvation. And if that's true, then can you begin to make more sense of the words of Jesus?

For if Jesus is a cross shaped king, then anyone who follows him will have a cross shaped path too. If Jesus is a cross shaped king, then anyone who follows him will have a cross shaped path too.

[21 : 30] Anyone who follows him will also count the cost to ensure as many people as possible experience the kingdom of God. That's the terms and conditions.

That's why verses 57 to 62 look the way they do. Because the path Christians take is shaped by the path Christ took.

And now Jesus will show us what that practically looks like in the form of three snippets of conversation he has with three different people. So let's have a look and let's begin with the first person.

We meet him in verse 57. as they were walking along the road a man said to him I will follow you wherever you go.

Wow. How amazing is that? I mean that's what you want to hear every Christian say wouldn't you? How heartwarming if you hear that in the testimony of a new believer.

[22 : 37] I will follow you wherever you go. But Jesus' reply is equally striking. Verse 58.

Foxes have dens and birds have nests but the son of man has no place to lay his head. Jesus isn't being severe here but simply wanting to lay out before this man how challenging life is going to be.

Do you want to follow me wherever I go? Then understand this. I might go to places where even the animals are better off than me.

I might go to places where there is no material security and you have to be okay with that. After all isn't that Jesus' entire life?

This is the son of man. according to Daniel 7 that means God's throne room is his home. But he gave that up. He chose instead to be born and placed in an animal feeding bowl no less.

[23 : 48] He chose to live the life of an itinerant preacher and he chose to head to Jerusalem to die an unjust and cruel death. So if that is Jesus' path, would it not make sense that that is the path of everyone who follows him as well?

To follow Jesus is to say Jesus is first even over material security. That's the point here. It means that when others are trying to climb up the property ladder or the pecking order at work, you are heading in the opposite direction.

You are downwardly mobile. Now, of course, Jesus isn't asking us to sell our homes right now or vacate them.

Clearly, Jesus sometimes did have a roof over his head as he stayed with people. The early Christians had houses where the church met. But Jesus is asking us, if giving up material security is what it takes to put him first and to help others to come to know him, will you do it?

Are we ready to adopt a lower standard of living than what we enjoy now, if that's what it takes? It's hard, isn't it?

[25 : 18] Because from young, our entire culture is asking us to climb, climb, climb. Get a good degree if you want a better life. Change jobs if that gives you a better paycheck.

Earn a bit more so that you can afford something a little nicer. Look to upgrade where you can. And now here is Jesus saying, think the opposite. Don't get a master's if that distracts you from serving Jesus.

Stay in that lower paying job if you have a better chance of being a good witness there. Give away your bonus if it makes an impact for eternity.

And of course, we naturally resist. I know my heart certainly finds all sorts of excuses. But if we say Jesus is our Lord, then why should our mindset be so different from his?

If foxes have dens and birds have nests, but Jesus has nowhere to lay his head, why do we think that when we follow him, we are still entitled to all kinds of stuff Jesus didn't see himself as entitled to?

[26 : 36] Is it because we haven't yet grasped that today is still the day of salvation? And so the kingdom matters more than our material security?

I think of my friends, Lorenzo and Liliana, not their real names, who currently serve in an unnamed African country which is a little dangerous for Christians.

I told their story a few years ago, but it's no harm repeating it again. There were previously medical missionaries in Bolivia and then they came back to Sydney as their kids finished their schooling and they could have stayed in Sydney.

I mean, they've already served God overseas, haven't they? They had good jobs, it was comfortable, they could still serve in church. But with the kids grown up, they started asking themselves, what can we do to keep putting Jesus first?

What can we do in light of the fact that today is the day of salvation to put his kingdom first? And for them, even though they were in their 50s already, it meant uprooting themselves from Sydney, learning another new language yet again, and going where Jesus called them to, and adopting a simple lifestyle once again.

[28 : 01] Now, of course, we won't all have to uproot ourselves to go to Africa, that's not the point, one. But Jesus does ask us, what creaturely comforts are we willing to give up for his sake?

Where do we draw the line? Do we say, I'm willing to follow Jesus, but not if it means taking a lower salary or giving up nicer holidays?

And if that's what we say, then we need to ask ourselves, am I really following Jesus? Because being on team Jesus means Jesus is first over material security.

Which brings us to the second person, verse 59. This time Jesus takes the initiative. Follow me, he says to this other man.

But, he replied, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. Now, surely that's entirely reasonable? Let the man grieve a little.

[29 : 13] Let him do what is right by his family. I mean, burial would have been the expected social norm. And does not even the Ten Commandments ask us to honour our father and mother? Doesn't Jesus himself in Mark 7 rebuke the Pharisees for their own neglect of their parents?

So, how can Jesus say verse 60, let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God?

Well, here's Jesus' point. Yes, family is important, but it is not more important than Jesus. Jesus is first, even over social, cultural obligations.

He always takes priority, and so we shouldn't offer excuses. You see, there is a possibility that this man's father isn't actually dead yet, although he might be ill.

After all, if your father is already dead, it is unlikely that you will be out and about travelling as this man clearly was. And if so, then what this guy is really doing is engaging in delaying tactics.

[30 : 31] Yes, Jesus, I'll follow you, but first wait till my father dies, and then I'm free of all familial responsibility. That might be weeks from now, that might be years from now, but wait first.

That's the key word in verse 59, isn't it? First, let me. And that's a challenge for us today, because how many of us make excuses of the very same nature?

Yes, Jesus, I'll follow you, but first, let me get more savings in the bank first. Yes, Jesus, I'll follow you, but first, let me concentrate on my work.

Wait till I'm almost retired, okay? Yes, Jesus, I'll follow you, but first, let my young kids have all the attention. I will follow you eventually, don't worry Jesus, but first, you have to take a bit of a backseat.

But Jesus makes it clear, you don't put him on hold. There is nothing in this world you put him on hold for. And certainly, you don't put on hold the proclamation of the gospel.

[31 : 43] Well, that's what Jesus caused the man at the end of verse 60 to do, isn't it? Because how do you know when is someone's last day on earth?

Once someone has died, the only thing left is the day of judgment. Remember from the last time we were in Luke's gospel, how Jesus was willing to even put on hold healing people so that he could go and proclaim the gospel?

So it's no wonder these are the terms and conditions. You see, my friends, Jesus says there is no but first or maybe later when it comes to him.

Following Jesus is not a part-time job you do when you have time. It's not something we do when we feel like it. It is not something we can drop the moment it inconveniences us.

It is not something we can delay until later. And if that is what we think, then we have completely misunderstood what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus has given his everything and so Jesus has a claim on our everything.

[33 : 01] Our time, our money, our families. Following Jesus means Jesus is first over material security and yes, over social, cultural obligations.

And then finally, there is the third guy. Look at verse 61. Still another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.

Now, once again, this sounds like a reasonable request, does it not? And in the Old Testament, is that not what the prophet Elisha did? Elisha was anointed as Elijah's successor, but he requested to go home and say goodbye.

And Elijah said, okay. But what does Jesus say? Verse 62, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

And we're thinking, wow, why is Jesus harsher than Elijah? But actually, he isn't.

[34 : 18] Because if you take a close look at 1 Kings chapter 19, which is where this episode happens, what do you find? Well, what happens when Elijah goes home?

He slaughters his oxen. He burns his plowing equipment. He cooks a farewell meal. In other words, he is saying with his actions, there is no turning back.

My old life is completely dead to me now, which is exactly what Jesus is saying here. When we follow Jesus, we have to say, Jesus is first over my former existence.

Jesus is first over my former existence. We don't look back anymore. we don't pine for our old way of life.

We don't do what Israel did after they left Egypt or Lot's wife did after she left Sodom. Because what happens if you do put your hand to the plow, but you look back?

[35 : 26] You won't keep the plow straight. You will go all over the place and you will have a farming disaster. now we have to be single minded for the kingdom.

Now, it can be tempting to look back, can't it? I've been in full-time ministry for nearly 16 years now, and occasionally I'm tempted to imagine what if I had chosen differently to imagine scenarios in a way that would cultivate dissatisfaction in my heart.

You know, what if I had chosen a higher-paying job? Then today I can afford to take my kids on overseas holidays. I can look back. But Jesus says, don't do that.

Let Jesus be first over your former existence, and you won't regret it. So that's the terms and conditions laid out in large font.

But now it's over to us. Did you notice how Luke never tells us how each of these three men respond? Because that's not the point.

[36 : 43] The point is not to figure out how each of these three men will respond. The point is to figure out how each and every one of us today will respond.

You see, this isn't special Christianity applicable to only those really committed Christians. No, not me. No, what Jesus is describing here is ordinary Christianity, meant to be true of everyone who claims to be a Christian.

And so how will you respond? If you want to call yourself a Christian, are you willing to accept these terms and conditions? Christians?

And so as we end, let me leave you with two final questions to reflect on. Firstly, do you truly know your team leader and what he's all about?

You see, here's the good news. The truth is we all often already do sacrifice for something. We might sacrifice eating certain foods if we are training for a marathon.

[37 : 51] we might sacrifice time and energy for the sake of our kids' education. Many of us do that, I know. We already sacrifice if we are convinced it's worth sacrificing for.

And the good news is when we sacrifice for Jesus, we are sacrificing for the very person who is the most worth it in the entire universe.

We are sacrificing for someone who chose first to sacrifice for us. He set his face to do that.

He didn't say, oh, first let me go and do something else. He didn't say, oh, maybe later if ever. No, he was committed to you from the very beginning.

We are sacrificing for someone who knows what it's like firsthand to count the cost. And we are sacrificing for someone who by his sacrifice will bring in a kingdom where the lame are healed, the blind will see, and everyone will leap for joy.

[39 : 01] And if we grasp that this is truly our team leader, then we can follow. We will be willing to sign up for the terms and conditions. A few years ago, a teacher won \$10,000 after she closely read the terms and conditions that came with a travel insurance policy she had bought.

The insurance company had inserted a hidden clause promising to reward the very first person who actually saw this clause and emailed them to claim the price.

Well, Jesus doesn't hide the reward in the fine print. He states it clearly. If you lose your life for him, you will gain it. follow me, he says.

It's worth it. And then secondly, what do you need to begin changing in your life so that it's Jesus first above everything else?

As a parent of young kids right now, I know how easy it is to arrange my life around them so that their nap times determine my schedule or their dietary ones determine what I eat.

[40 : 16] But Jesus wants to know, do you arrange your life around him the same way? If not, what needs to change? Let me encourage all of us today to begin an audit of our lives.

In fact, I'm going to give you a few seconds now to do exactly that which I hope you will continue to do throughout the week. But don't walk away today without taking seriously what the Lord Jesus might be saying to you.

Because one day, you and I will have to stand before God and he will audit our lives. Will he find then that Jesus is first?

Well, let's have a moment of silence. You go talk to God and then I will lead us all in prayer. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, soften our hearts this morning.

[41 : 42] help us not to harden our hearts towards you towards the words these challenging words that you have to say to us today Father we pray that we will take them to heart we pray that you will help us by the help of your Holy Spirit to examine our lives and to help you to notice where we have not put you first and to therefore by the help of your Holy Spirit to put you first in those areas Lord we need your help so much give us all the help that we need help us to support one another in this endeavour and help us to remember Lord that we do this for the sake of your glorious kingdom we do this because we know it's worth it we do it because we know that if we lose our lives we'll gain it in the end so please help us to listen to you this morning we pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ Amen