



Luke 9.51-62

Intro

- Key moment in Luke - cf military receiving orders to pack up & board transport to war zone - reality dawns, adrenalin flows, heart beats quicker...
- Alan Jones "when the flag drops, the bulls**t stops"
- At these moments questions are raised about our real values, our beliefs, our courage and our commitment.
- These kind of Qs are raised by Jesus here. Begins (51) when J sensed his time had come and "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Ends with J saying "No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." In between, tough Qs are raised for J's disciples and other people.
- These questions should challenge us too.

Context

- Jesus has been preparing for this turning point through Ch9
- Predictions of his rejection and suffering (22, 44)
- Radical commitment required of followers (23-25)
- BUT his words weren't understood by disciples. Were they just dull?
- How strange/unexpected his words after Peter's insight that J was Messiah
- No Jew expected Messiah to suffer. J's combination of 2 separate streams of OT prophecy was totally unexpected
- They probably just ignored J's statements with a nervous laugh - as if he were an eccentric inventor with a wild idea for a flying machine. As J prepared himself to strap on his wings and stride to the cliff edge, disciples concerned themselves, *as Christians often do*, with questions of membership and status amongst his followers!
- The Qs Jesus wanted to pose his followers and potential followers were aimed at 2 groups:- those who *refuse to follow* and those who *say they will follow*.

Those who refuse to follow

- Represented by Samaritan villagers. Refuse to receive J (let alone follow) because he is heading for Jerusalem
- Their hearts are locked into old tribal enmities and religious pride
- Jerusalem must not be valued above their own religious sites (cf John 4)
- Hand of friendship will not be accepted from one of the old enemy race
- NOTICE it is not just Samaritans who are locked into old ways:- there is a lesson for James and John as they suggest calling down fire from heaven to
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- destroy God's enemies (as Elijah did). Jesus rebukes them (55). This is not the way for his disciples...
- Jesus will not join in the old vendetta, he will not curse his enemies...
- Instead he will love them, responding to their hatred by continuing his journey all the way to the cross, on which he will die for their sins and ours.
- Those who refuse to follow are like the seed which fell on the path and was snatched away by the devil (8.12)

Those who say they will follow

Jesus gives three examples:

1. A *willing volunteer* who says he will follow J wherever he goes (57). The offer seems sincere but J perceives this man has no idea about the discomfort and hardship disciples have to endure (58).

- Following J is an adventure, but there is no 5 star accommodation.
- Committed in word but not in heart, this kind of follower will not be able to survive the time of trial (like the seed which fell on rock (8.13).
- Disciples who want to follow Jesus in comfort are of no use.

2. A second man called by Jesus agrees to follow after burying his Father (59) i.e. *in his own time*.

- It is unlikely that the Father has already died, or he'd already have been mourning and making arrangements.
- The man is probably saying *I can't make more of a commitment until my family responsibilities have eased and I have more free time*.
- Most of us have these kind of commitments - to grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren etc - they ebb and flow at different stages in our lives. It *is* important to honour these relationship commitments (Exodus 20.12)...
- BUT Jesus would challenge them where they are used as an excuse for avoiding wholehearted commitment to God (like the seed that fell amongst thorns, whose fruitfulness was choked by the worries and pleasures of the world 8.14) e.g. my decision to move here, against my parents' wishes!
- A true disciple will live in a way which serves God and proclaims the gospel, *whatever other responsibilities he or she has*.

3. Another potential disciple displays his lack of commitment, asking permission to go back and say goodbye to his family before he will follow.

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- He wants to follow *on his own terms* but Jesus wants followers who will keep their eyes fixed on him, not keep looking back to people or things they have left behind.
- (As Paul argues throughout Galatians - today's reading Gal 5.13-15).

Time for a reality check?

- Luke 9.51 a "reality check" for the disciples
- They'd begun to enjoy status of being his close companions. He'd shared his amazing powers with them & they were wondering which of them would be "top cat" & who they would allow to join the gang.
- Suddenly the strange things he'd said about suffering and dying became more pressing as he turned towards Jerusalem.
- He became less comfortable to be with and they were pulled in two directions - BACK to the familiar, comfortable, safe - FORWARD to a strange, rocky road with Jesus striding ahead, calling them to follow.

...for us too!

- We face similar choices and are also pulled in two directions:-
- Where are you on your journey?
- What pressures are pulling you away from real commitment to following Jesus?
- Are you refusing to follow, insisting on hanging onto the familiar, the comfortable?
- Or are you committed to following Jesus in your words but not your actions?
- Is your heart "good soil" for God's word and are you being as fruitful as he wants you?
- Wherever we are on the road, Jesus is ahead of us, calling us to follow him.