

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: May 18, 2008

Are You Ready To Get Serious About Following Jesus?

“As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, ‘I will follow You wherever You go.’⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, ‘The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’⁵⁹ And He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’⁶⁰ But He said to him, ‘Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.’⁶¹ Another also said, ‘I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.’⁶² But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Luke 9:57-62

Luke 9 is all about discipleship. In the beginning of the chapter, Jesus sent His chosen twelve on a mission trip, a hands-on assignment where they were sent out in pairs to go preach the gospel of the Kingdom, to heal, and to cast out demons in demonstration of the Kingdom’s power. When they return, and Jesus finally got some time alone with them, He asked them who they thought He was. When Peter confessed Him to be the Christ, Jesus began to not only tell them that He was going to Jerusalem to die, but *He challenged them to count the cost of following Him.* **They must be willing to deny themselves and daily take up their cross in order to follow Him.** After this came the transfiguration, where Peter, James and John not only saw His appearance change, so that He glowed, but Moses and Elijah also appeared, talking of what would take place in Jerusalem. A voice emanating from a glowing cloud which enveloped them said, “This is My Son, My Chosen One, *listen to Him!*” After exhorting them not to hinder people who were doing ministry in His name, even though they were not a part of their particular group, and also rebuking their fleshly desire to punish those who rejected Him, **the chapter ends with three separate individuals who interact with the Lord on the issue of following Him.** All three of these instances involved people who *said* they were interested in following Jesus more completely. **In each case, however, those who *professed* their readiness for a deeper commitment to Him *had excuses* or “conditions” which blocked their involvement.** They *expressed* their commitment and undying devotion, but, when push came to shove, something *else* was more important than Jesus. Times have changed, but people still struggle with the same obstacles to total commitment.

The first of these men, a scribe by trade and already a disciple of sorts (The word “another” in vs. 21 indicates that he was one of *many* that were “following Jesus” to some extent.), had been in the crowd, witnessing the incredible miracles Jesus was performing. [The fact that he was a scribe probably indicates that he valued spiritual things, or at least had a high respect for religion and the teachings of the Law. He had devoted his life to be one who copies the words of scripture, carefully checking and cross-checking to be certain there were no errors. To do this kind of work, a man had to be precise, exacting, one content to sit at his desk for long hours studying over scrolls. They were respected and sought out by people having a dispute as to what the Law said. Certainly, a scribe, rendered as “lawyer” in some translations, would be expected to know. Ezra the priest, who lived almost 500 years earlier, was the ideal example for these men, a man who was “a scribe skilled (quick, prompt, ready) in the Law of Moses”, and one of whom it could be said, “the hand of Yahweh his God was upon him” (Ezr. 7:6).] This scribe had seen *amazing* things that day, things he had only read and dreamed about before. Evidently he overheard Jesus’ orders to make ready to depart, and he quickly drew near to declare his willingness to accompany the Master. “Teacher, I will follow with You wherever you might depart!” **This man was overwhelmed, he was excited and deeply moved emotionally.** He was not about to let Jesus out of his sight. **He wanted the excitement of this day to continue on and on, and was willing to leave everything to follow Jesus, right then!**

On the surface, that sounds exactly like the kind of response Jesus is looking for, doesn’t it? Doesn’t He want people to just drop everything and follow Him? Isn’t that what happened with Peter, John, James and Andrew (Matt. 4:18-22)? **In a word, “No”.** On the surface, it might appear that way, if we just look at the verses in Matthew 4, but in actuality the response of those disciples was the culmination of *numerous encounters* with Jesus. There was a year or more of occasional, but deepening, involvements with Jesus before He ever offered the call to follow Him (the events of Jn. 1:35-4:45 all took place before Matt. 4:12). Like any relationship, there generally is a natural process of growth in learning to trust God, a process that deepens over time and experience. God wants our commitment to be solid, based upon a substantial, strong, well-founded trust relationship with Him. **Jesus wasn’t into emotional manipulation. He wanted commitment that was real and lasting.** The scribe in this first encounter was an *enthusiast*, one who was *too excitable*, one who too easily made an emotional commitment that was beyond his ability to sustain. **To him, Jesus spoke a word of challenge and caution.** Basically, He was setting him back, saying, “**You better count the cost of what you are saying. You don’t fully understand what you are claiming that you are willing to do.** Let Me give you one piece of what it means to follow Me. The foxes have dens, the birds of the air have roosting places, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” In other words, what Jesus was saying was, “You are used to your daily

routine, going to the office, where you are surrounded by your scrolls and everything is safe and predictable. Are you really able to follow Me 'wherever' I might go? Let me tell you, it is no cake walk. There is no regularity, no stability, no quiet, safe place you can count on. You will have to leave all that behind and trust God to provide what you need. You will have to be willing to no longer be a recognized, respected, established person. You will have to be willing to simply be a no-named, unrecognized wanderer, a follower of Jesus. Are you ready for *that*?"

The second scenario involved a man who Jesus *did* call to follow Him. He also was one of the larger group of disciples, people who had identified with Jesus and were coming out to hear Him speak and witness the working of God through Him. Luke indicates that **Jesus called Him first, and then he responded with an objection**, that he must first fulfill his obligation to bury his father. [To the Jews, this was a very important, almost sacred responsibility of a son toward his father. The father undoubtedly had not died, or the man would not even have been in the crowd. He would have been at home dealing with the funeral and grieving over his father. In that time, a body was generally buried within 24 hours, so if the son was away when his father died, he may not be able to get back in time to participate in the funeral and burial responsibilities. Remember, this was also in the time before telecommunications or rapid transportation. If the father became ill, or died, word would have to be sent by the hand of a messenger, who would travel on foot to wherever the son was supposed to be. Upon receiving the message, the son would have to travel back by foot, as well. This entire process could take several days, whereupon the father would already have been buried before the son could return.] **The young man's sense of responsibility, propriety and honor toward his father may have been commendable, but, in comparison to the call to obey and serve Jesus, it clearly was to take a secondary position.** There were *other* ways to care for the needs of the father. There were *other* relatives, friends or hired servants who could be assigned the responsibility while the son was absent. **People might not understand, or agree, with the son's choice, ...and it may not be as desirable to him**, who would *like* to be with his father, **but duty to God comes before social convention or personal desire.** What was the value in waiting for an old man to die, when *hundreds* could be brought into the Kingdom of God as a result of the son's ministry? **How many may be forever lost because the son refused to leave the father's side? So, Jesus reiterates the call**, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead." This may sound harsh, but it states clearly what is the point. There were other people who could take care of the son's responsibility to his father, people who had no awareness of the spiritual things the son understood. In Luke's version, Jesus adds, "... but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the Kingdom of God."

The third scenario involved another disciple, who *offered* to follow Jesus, but asked His permission to go and say goodbye to those at home. **He also had a condition to his obedience, something that had to be done "first"**. Again, this does not seem to be an unreasonable request. The word translated as "say goodbye", however, can mean much more than simply to greet them before leaving. A different word is generally used for "greet". This word literally means to "arrange away from", and often refers to setting one's affairs in order, or to a more formal gathering of family and friends. This was not wrong in itself, but **the fact that the man placed this condition before his obedience**, and that it could involve some significant delay, **says something about his heart.** Jesus' response then is well to the point, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." This word picture requires some explanation. It refers to someone walking behind an ox, or a team of oxen, pulling a plowshare that cut into, or scratched, a furrow of soil. Ancient plows did not turn over the soil as more modern plowshares do. The goal of the plowman was to cut a straight furrow of soil close enough to the previous furrow as to break up the dried, packed earth. He was guiding the team, and had to give his attention to where they were going. If he was distracted, or looked back, the team could easily wander off to the side, and the furrow would be ruined. (In II Tim. 2:15 Paul refers to the same word picture for correctly interpreting the scriptures. Those who study to be accurate, effective teachers will be able to "plow a straight furrow" in that they will not be led astray by personal desires, or questionable teachings. They will stay firmly focused on what the Bible says, and faithfully teach *that*. This requires hard work and discipline.) In Jesus' response, the word translated as "fit" means "well-placed, suitable, or useful". It would be true that a plowman who was looking behind himself, instead of staying focused on his objective would not be suitable or useful for that job. Jesus' response to the man implies that he is not ready yet to be a worker in the Kingdom. He needs to either settle the matters at home, so he does not have need to look back at unresolved things, or he needs to choose to put them aside to follow Jesus now. **Jesus must be first in all things. Anything, or anyone, that takes priority over Him is an idol. Anything that competes with Him is a distraction.** There *will be* distractions in this world, but **we must learn to keep our eyes resolutely fixed on Jesus and what He has called us to be doing.**

One of the realities of sin is that when we diverge from God's path, we miss out on God's best. In an archery contest, if you miss the mark, you lose the prize. **All three of these people missed an opportunity to go with Jesus.** We never hear about any of them again, and they may well have become good, faithful followers of the King. **On that day, however, they were not prepared for the opportunity God had for them. What about you? Are you ready?**