



Many of you know this about me already, but I am a huge San Francisco 49er fan. I grew up watching Joe Montana complete 50-yard touchdown passes to Jerry Rice. I can't tell you how many times I watched Steve Young scramble into the end zone on TV. In high school, I even went to the Mormon temple in Oakland to hear Steve Young speak! That is what fans do. A fan is defined as an enthusiastic admirer. You can be a fan of a politician, a sports figure or a celebrity. This was true even in Jesus' day. He had fans, people who admired him and followed him throughout Palestine.

When you read the Gospels, which contain the life of Jesus, what's striking is that Jesus wasn't interested in fans. He wasn't interested in large crowds. He didn't seem to care about fame or fortune. In fact, he often seemed to discourage people from following him by describing the cost of becoming his disciple. Listen to what he said in Luke 9:23, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* Twenty times in the New Testament Jesus issued a compelling and challenging invitation: "Follow Me." Following Jesus meant to submit to him; it included sacrifice and self denial. He even told a rich man to sell everything he had and then come follow him. To anyone in the marketplace, this doesn't look like a very good marketing strategy. But, Jesus was not interested in fans. He didn't want enthusiastic admirers. He wanted completely committed followers; followers, not fans. Fans of Jesus get close enough to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires sacrifice. Fans want to follow Jesus to heaven, but don't want to pick up their cross.

At the tail end of Luke 9, we read about three people who were fans of Jesus and how Jesus challenged them to become followers. What Jesus tells them may not only surprise you, but might even tick you off. Both the Gospel of Matthew and Luke cover this interaction. Jesus was with his disciples and others and was quickly on the way to Jerusalem.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus

replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:57–62).

What strikes me is the way in which Jesus handles these guys. Most of us with a cause are busy trying to recruit as many folks as we can. This is true for almost every movement, cause and organization. Most pastors are busy trying to get as many people for their church as they possibly can. This is all very natural. It's what we expect to see. Jesus is radically different in his approach. He seems to spend a great deal of his time trying to discourage people from following after him, or at least that's what it looks like. Here is the first lesson we learn from this passage—the follower of Jesus has no earthly security.

The Follower of Jesus Has No Earthly Security

It's quite a bold statement the first fan makes, isn't it, *"I will follow you wherever you go."*? The guy has no idea where Jesus is headed or what would be involved in the journey. Jesus replies that to follow him "wherever he's going" will not be an easy road. He's not one of these high-flying Rabbis who jets from village to village, staying in the best hotels, and collecting nice offerings from the crowds that come to hear them. When Jesus left heaven to come to earth and live and die for us, he left behind all that he had. He exchanged wealth for poverty, the comfort of heaven for a rude cattle shed. He exchanged rulership for servanthood.

He says, *"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* What irony. The King of glory, heir apparent to the throne of the universe, doesn't even have a place to call home. He has no earthly security. He was lent accommodation by those who loved him. He borrowed a coin to tell a story. He borrowed a donkey to ride into Jerusalem and fulfill prophecy. He was even buried in a borrowed tomb! Thankfully he didn't need it for too long! Jesus had no earthly security.

Matthew tells us that fan #1 was a teacher of the law, a scribe. Scribes were generally hostile to Jesus. I believe this Scribe genuinely wanted to follow Jesus. He saw the crowds, the miracles, the enthusiasm and wanted a piece of the pie. He wanted to get close to the action, but he didn't understand the full cost of following Jesus. He was a fan, not a follower.

Jesus' response was not a cold one. He could see the man's heart. The scribe had an idol of security. He wanted to get in on the IPO

early and ride it to the top! Like a contractor placing a bid on a project, anyone who wants to be a follower of Jesus must count the cost. There will be struggle and warfare. It won't be easy. You may not even have a place to call home.

This was true for Jesus. He was born in a stable because there was no room in the inn. People in both Judea and Galilee rejected him (John 5:18, John 6:66). After healing a demon-possessed man, the people in the region of the Gerasenes begged him to leave (Matt. 8:34). Samaria refused him a place to sleep (Luke 9:53). Even in his hometown, he had no honor. The Bible says that even earth will not have him (Matt. 27:23) and heaven forsook him (Matt. 27:46). Jesus truly had no where to lay his head.

The follower of Jesus has no earthly security. Following Jesus is not easy or comfortable either. Jesus did not have a home in this world nor was he at home on this earth. Jesus experienced rejection as well. Those who follow him must be prepared for the same road; no earthly security. I am not saying that we have no security. Oh, there is security in following Jesus, but it's not any earthly security. It's not the security of possessions, or money, or homes, or things like that. We have the security of God's faithfulness, and a life beyond this one that nothing can take away. Though the Christian has nothing to his name in this life, he is more secure than the richest and most powerful of men of this world. This is what we learn next—the follower of Jesus has no earthly ties.

The Follower of Jesus Has No Earthly Ties

Jesus surprises us by approaching the next fan by asking him to follow him. Rabbis did not ask people to follow them in the First Century. Would-be followers sought out Rabbis and asked to serve as their disciples. Jesus not only took the initiative in calling others to be his disciple, but he didn't even ask them, he told them! With authority he called them to do it, "Hey, you guys fishing over there, come follow me and I will make you fishers of men!" There was no graduation plan or ivory tower to learn in; this was on-the-job training.

Here we have a conversation that has shocked many people. It shocked me when I first read it! All this guy wanted to do is bury his father. This seemed like a totally reasonable request, doesn't it? Jesus taught us to honor our parents. To bury a deceased parent was an important duty back then as it is today, especially for a Jew. It was considered more important than even studying the Law. Priests were not allowed to touch a dead body, but could do so in the case of a relative. Jewish people believed that burying one's father was a religious duty of utmost importance. It would be a scandal to leave it undone.

Jesus didn't honor the man's excuse. Why? There were several reasons. Jesus wants immediate obedience, not excuses. This man was asking for a "reservation to follow Jesus." During that time, burial in Judaism was a year-long process. The deceased

was first buried and then a year later the bones were dug up and put in a special box. This was a, "Hey, I will follow you in about a year." If this man wanted to be with Jesus, he had to leave right now and let others prepare for the funeral. If we believe that Jesus is sovereign Lord, then following him means doing whatever he commands, without any excuses, immediately. What could be more important than spending time with Jesus in his last days?

Jesus was also trying to spare the man from the drama of a funeral service. A funeral was somewhat of a ridiculous affair back then. People would weep and wail for hours upon hours and then wailing would often turn into laughter. The whole ordeal was hypocritical, long, and absurd. Instead, Jesus said, *"Let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."* Jesus reminds him that we are members of a greater family, a kingdom family. The man's father was not only physically dead, he was spiritually dead. Apparently, the man's father did not know God and Jesus as the way, truth and life. Instead of dwelling on that hurt, Jesus gave this man a kingdom assignment—go preach the good news! Jesus was saying, "Let someone else in your family bury him, you have kingdom work to do."

Jesus wants to be first, even over a person's family. That was startling news back then just like it is today. Rabbis did not require people to leave their families. Nor did other rabbis make shocking statements like this one found in Matt. 10:37, *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* The point Jesus makes here, and let no one mistake it, is that if you're going to follow Jesus Christ, then the claims of his Kingdom come before anything and anyone else. He's not calling for us to dishonor our parents, or shirk our responsibility to our family. But, if we are pressed into a choice between the two, Jesus comes first.

I saw this all the time when I led a high school ministry in Las Vegas. Many of our students did not have parents who loved Jesus and as a result they often had to make tough choices between their relationship with God and their family. Decisions like, "Should I join a small group and get discipled or continue with violin lessons? Should I go to summer camp and renew my faith or get a summer job?" I am sure some of you have lost family members to follow Christ. They don't get why you love Jesus and even discourage you from following him. This happens all the time when someone of another faith comes to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Sometimes their family disowns them.

The follower of Jesus has no earthly ties. Jesus was teaching that the kingdom of God takes priority even over family. This doesn't mean that followers of Jesus can never care for their family obligations, but when they do, it must be "out of obedience to Jesus,

not **instead** of obedience to Jesus." I hear many people, especially in their 20's often saying, "I'll follow Jesus later on. I've got other more important things to attend to right now. My career, my education, my girlfriend, my boyfriend. I've got to provide a nest egg for my family first; wouldn't God want me to be responsible like that?!" If God is calling you to follow him, to commit your life to Christ, or to take up ministry for him, or whatever it may be, his call comes first! No excuses must be allowed to hinder you. The follower of Jesus has no earthly comfort and no earthly ties. The last lesson we learn is that the follower of Jesus has no earthly distractions.

The Follower of Jesus Has No Earthly Distractions

The third fan simply wanted to say goodbye to his family. Again, doesn't this seem like a reasonable request? Would you deny a soldier going to war one last chance to say goodbye to his loved ones? Jesus clearly spells out the cost of following him, "Sir, you've already declared you are ready to follow me, you've picked up the plow. If you put it down now because of your wish to see your family back home, you're not fit for the Kingdom of God!" What is Jesus saying? "Don't look back!"

When Peter, James and John followed Jesus, they literally dropped their fishing nets to go after him right when it looked like business was picking up. Jesus had just provided for them a huge catch of fish! Right after that catch, Jesus tells them to follow him. The Master had called and they didn't look back. Some have looked back when God called them forward. Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt! Judas Iscariot looked back and killed himself in shame and regret. Demas looked back and deserted Paul because he loved the world. They were not worthy of the Kingdom of God. If you're going to follow Jesus, there must no looking back.

Jesus sees what we cannot see. He saw this man's heart and his heart was divided. Jesus knew that this man would be easily persuaded by his family to stay home if he went back. His priorities were not firmly established. Can you imagine his mom emotionally begging him not to leave the home? "Son, they'll be plenty of other rabbis, don't leave momma."? I am not a farmer, but I know that if you are plowing a field and look back, the plow will not stay straight and quickly veers off course. The same is true when following Jesus—look ahead, not behind. The world is full of distractions and if you look back, you'll veer off course. The follower of Jesus has no earthly distractions.

Jesus' desire is that people will follow him, but He wants them to think through their decision first. He wants them to count the cost involved so that once we do follow him we'll never turn back. Even as Jesus spells out what is required to following him, in such clear, shocking terms, inside he is longing for them, for

us, to accept it. He's rooting for us, but the cost is the cost, it's non-negotiable and we must be prepared for it. What's interesting about this story is that we are not told how the three people responded. We don't know. Maybe that is intentional but it begs the question, how will we respond?

The call to follow Jesus takes priority over everything else in life—home, family, and any other concern all take a back seat to the kingdom of God. Jesus was radically obedient to the Father which led to his death on the cross. Because of his death, we have life abundantly. The call to follow Jesus is actually a call to truly live. It is an invitation into a relationship marked by self-denial, real intimacy, godly ambition, and true joy. When we truly begin to follow Jesus, everything changes. No one else and nothing else is worthy of our everything. In the book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes,

"Christ says, 'Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think are innocent as well as the ones you think are wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours.'"¹

Are you a fan of Jesus or a follower? If you are a fan, right now, would you commit your life to Jesus? It will be hard, there will be suffering, but it will be completely worth it. I will lead you in a prayer in a moment. If you are a follower of Jesus, how does your life stack up to these three fans? Have you longed for more earthly security recently? I sure have. I often dream about more money in my bank account, a nicer home, and a larger contribution to my retirement plan. I often complain about not having any family around to help us out. I am often distracted by things in my life. Many of those things are not bad, but am I, are we, truly putting the kingdom first? Are you serving that way? Are you living and growing with this perspective? If you've been more of a fan lately, confess that to God, repent, and follow him today.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

1 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* pp. 196-197

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