

Luke 9:51-62

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[0 : 00] Well we're diving right into the middle section of Luke's Gospel this morning and if we're unfamiliar with Luke there's a bit of a change of direction in his whole gospel there's a new energy and there's a new focus because Luke chapter 9 verse 51 marks the start of a journey for the Lord Jesus if you look there when the days drew near for him to be taken up Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And this journey to Jerusalem is a kind of constant theme really from this point really until the end of the Gospel of Luke and along the way people will come and listen to Jesus' road trip soundtrack as he travels along he'll hear them teach and preach and they'll either join him on the journey or they'll let him pass them by.

Luke punctuates his narrative for the next 10 chapters with little journey markers like verse 57 if you look there as they were going along the road.

And then chapter 10 verse 38 there's another one. Now as they went on their way. You see this is now all about this momentum forwards going with Jesus on this journey.

I've noticed in our passage there are words like go and going and follow and following repeated again and again. Jesus is moving forwards on his mission on this journey and he calls people to join with him and to move with him and to go with him and to press on to journey and to follow.

[1 : 40] There is this forward momentum in Luke. And he wants movement from us. He wants progress as we follow him. But in our section today Jesus meets three characters three would be followers who are resisting this momentum.

There's a pull in another direction from them. And in response Jesus makes a bold claim. He claims that there is nothing as important as him.

And there is nothing as good as him. In life there is no one who takes higher priority and nothing that deserves higher praise.

So we need to go in the direction of Jesus. And not to resist that momentum as he calls us to follow him. We're going to think about those two things.

Nothing is as important and nothing is as good as Jesus Christ. We're looking at verses 57 to 62. So the second paragraph. Particularly.

[2 : 49] Lots of things are important in life aren't they? But nothing is as important as Jesus Christ to us of all. And we see don't we three potential followers in this little chunk here.

And two of these potential followers want to come with Jesus. But they have prior duties. They have prior engagements. Important things that they need to do.

And they want to settle before they follow Jesus. Look at the guy in verse 59. Jesus says follow me. But he says Lord let me first go and bury my father.

And then there's the guy in verse 61 isn't there. I will follow you Lord but let me first say farewell to everyone at my house. In my home.

You see with both of those men or people. The momentum is forward isn't it? But there is this sense of hesitancy. And of delay and of holding back.

[3 : 50] You are important Lord but let me first go and do this. Yes Lord you are important. Forward is the right thing.

But I have to take a step backwards. I am following but I need to look back just for this one thing. They are people who hold back aren't they?

Because they don't see the importance of following Jesus. And they have got other things that they feel are more important. Now actually both of them have got pretty important things to do haven't they?

They have got important reasons to hold back maybe. And it sounds a bit like Jesus is being a bit impatient. And the guy who needs to bury his father.

Jesus says to him let the dead bury their own dead. The one who wants to say goodbye to people at his home. He says no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

[4 : 52] Jesus is very clear isn't he? I am more important than your father's burial. I am more important than your family connections and your affections. And if you don't agree with that then you are not fit for the kingdom of God.

It's brutal. They are pretty important requests. They are pretty good excuses it feels like. The first one seems totally legit doesn't it? Even in Jewish law.

To go and bury his father. You can read in Deuteronomy about important responsibilities that families had. To care for the elderly. And to bury them in the right way.

And remember that Jesus himself has commanded that caring for elderly parents is an important duty. If you were here a few Sunday mornings ago when Paul preached from Matthew 15.

Do you remember there were people who were getting through loopholes. Man made loopholes in God's law. To keep money back from elderly care.

[5 : 58] They were using it on religious observance weren't they? And they were saying to their parents listen it's okay. Because what would have been given to you has been given to God.

And Jesus slams them for that. He says no you're breaking the fifth commandment. To honour your father and your mother. And so if you follow Jesus. This is something that he is going to direct you to do isn't it?

To care for the elderly. And to look after your parents. And to treat them with dignity. And so is Jesus contradicting himself suddenly? Why does Jesus seem to respond to this request of burying his father so insensitively?

Well this is a unique moment isn't it? This is a moment where a comparison is being made. And a question of priority is being asked. Yes elderly care is a duty.

But it falls under the greater priority of following Jesus. In fact following Jesus gives importance. And meaning to the command to care for the elderly.

[7 : 12] But the man is asking for permission to fulfil what he saw as a more important thing. Before coming to the Lord Jesus isn't he? He is prioritising this duty over the duty to follow Jesus.

And it is funny how Jesus answers isn't it? If you look in verse 16. Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Sounds like something out of a zombie movie. Leave the dead to bury their own dead. I think what he is saying there. He is talking there about the spiritually dead. Burying the physically dead.

He is saying. Hang on a minute. The task. The job. The priority. The thing that you need to do. The task of burying your father.

Can be left to. And done perfectly well. By others. Who have not received the privilege. Of knowing me and my message.

[8 : 20] And non-believers. He calls them the spiritually dead. And what you should do now. He says to the man. Now that you've met me.

Is do something. That only now. Now you have the gift and ability to be able to do. Which is to go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

In other words. There are times. When it's not wrong. To let the spiritually dead. As Jesus calls them. Of non-believers.

Or the world. Outside the church. Do what they can do for themselves. So as to have more time to do for them. What they cannot do for themselves.

Now you have me. You have a greater responsibility. And a greater priority. Jesus says. Now let me try and illustrate this a little bit. I think we've got a few doctors in this morning.

[9 : 17] We've got a few nurses. Haven't we? I think we've even got a heart surgeon. David Lefroy is in. Our resident heart surgeon. Now I am not certain about this. I haven't spoken to David about this.

But I reckon there's a pretty good chance. That David has never received a patient. In his surgery. And he's ready in his scrubs. And all of that. And just before.

Performing vital heart surgery. Says to his patients. Do you mind if I polish your shoes for you? Would you like me to sing you a little song?

Would you like me to give you a little puppet show? Or read you a bedtime story? Those things are not wrong things to do are they? They're great things to do. But if that was me under the scalpel. Just before the anesthetic took hold on me. I'd want to say David. Look. Don't waste your time. That is not what you are here for. Get on and do the job. That only you can do.

[10:17] Be a surgeon. Somebody once said that a surgeon doesn't waste time polishing his patient's shoes. And with the unique gifts that he or she has.

There comes a new set of priorities. Doesn't there? As a patient comes in. One after the other. On the NHS I'm sure. The priority is to get them operated on.

Isn't it? And not to mess around with things that other people could be doing for them. And so the man who delays here with some kind of sense of duty for the greater good of burying his father.

Doesn't understand the gift that he's been given. As he meets Jesus. He's been negligent of the more important thing now. Because he's been given a greater duty and a greater priority.

And if he doesn't fulfil that duty. He's even being false and negligent to his father isn't he? Who he's so worried about. Because he's ignored his father's most important need.

[11:27] Which is to hear the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus says now you know me. I am more important. And there is nothing as important as me. And so your priorities have shifted around me and my message.

That's why all we seek to do as a church. If you're a visitor today and you're kind of wondering what are we about. What is this church about? All we do is under the greater priority of proclaiming the kingdom of God.

That is what makes us tick. That is what we're about. All that we do is about that. To bring glory to God and to tell people about him. To make disciples of all nations.

Baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And to teach them to observe all that Jesus has taught. That is Jesus' great commission to his church isn't it?

We recognise that the gift of the gospel. Of having met with the Lord Jesus. The message of God's kingdom through the Lord Jesus.

[12:34] Is the only thing that the world does not have. That we have. And we've got to shift our priorities around that gift.

The message of the kingdom of God. And of course we get involved don't we in things that the world does around us. We feed homeless people.

We care for the elderly. But we feed homeless people under that one ultimate priority. And we care for the elderly and for the unborn.

Because of that one ultimate priority. And when that ultimate priority is challenged by some other priority. Whether it is a social convention. Or popularity.

Or a political agenda. We need to realise that we're doing the world a disservice. And we're starting to neglect the one job.

[13:29] And the one gift. That we can offer. That the world cannot. And we might neglect it in favour of jobs. That actually the world that non-believers can do.

And often better than we can. We're not all called to become full-time mission reason evangelists. Don't get me wrong. That's not what I'm saying. But in all of our lives.

Whatever we do. It is with Jesus as the goal isn't it. And Jesus is showing this man. That in Christian discipleship. And in following him. The parameters and limits of our goals.

Become much more focused. Don't they? Jesus says. Some things have greater priority. And there is a fencing offer. The priorities for us to pursue.

In what we do. And why we do those things. Whether it's changing a nappy. Or running a home. Or running a business. Or studying. Or doing your homework. Anything we do.

[14:30] Is all done for the glory of God. And the proclamation of his kingdom. Otherwise we're being false. And we're being false to people's greatest needs.

And suddenly the surgeons are polishing shoes. The man wants to follow in a way. But he doesn't see the priority. And if he really wanted to follow.

And tell the gospel. He wouldn't wait until his audience had died. Before he did that. Would he? What his father needs. Is to hear Jesus' message.

Give him that thirst. And live your life around him. With that goal. Because Jesus is more important. It's similar with the third guy. In verse 61 isn't it?

The one who wants to first say goodbye. To his family. Now we might spend a bit more time looking at him tonight. Because I think there's a link with this third guy. And Elisha.

[15:28] In 1 Kings 19. Who we'll look at tonight. But just to say that he is a man with a double mind. Isn't he? He said he'll follow Jesus. But he keeps looking back at a previous life.

At the things that he wants to be involved with. Before he met Jesus. To say goodbye to his household. And in this culture. What he's probably asking for.

Actually. Is a succession of farewell dinner parties. This isn't just a quick toodaloo. This is a kind of a bigger thing. Where often. The leaving.

Would have been delayed. And put off. And so he's against the momentum. And the priority. And if you have to choose.

When push comes to shove. Even the most important. And sacred. Social conventions. And demands. And duties. Are not as important as Jesus.

[16:23] And actually. Jesus. Is the one who gives them importance. As we do them. And all we do. Is focus under him. And is for him. But secondly.

The reason for that. Is not just. Barefaced arrogance. From Jesus. He's not. Just got a big ego here. Nothing. Is as important as Jesus.

And his message. Because. Secondly. Nothing. Is as good as Jesus. Nothing. Is as good as Jesus. Just look at the first guy.

We haven't seen him. Have we? In verse 57. He comes to Jesus. And he says. I will follow you. Wherever you go. Jesus responds.

Foxes have holes. And birds have nests. But the son of man. Has nowhere to lay his head. It's a great sales technique. Isn't it? Come and follow me. And be homeless. Come and follow me.

[17:20] And you'll be worse off. Than birds. And animals. So. What are you waiting for? Come and follow me. And how can Jesus. Still expect. This guy.

To be interested. And what kind of people. Are going to join him. In this world. When he's saying. You'll be destitute. In this world. Well.

They are. The kind of people. Who are looking for something. Greater than this world. Aren't they? And Jesus is claiming. With this guy here. That he is worth having.

Even if you. Can't have anything else. Even if you. Lose everything else. Even if. With him. You've got no place.

To lay your head. In this world. Luke gives us. Some clues. To show us. That there is something. Stunning about Jesus. And where he is. Taking his people.

[18:17] We know. In Luke. That Jesus is in Galilee. In the north. And he's heading. On this journey. To Jerusalem. In the south. Isn't he? But Luke's. Original readers.

Would know. That Jerusalem. Is loaded. With historical. And theological. And metaphorical. And emotional. Significance. It's like.

If we say. Downing Street. Or Buckingham Palace. And Jerusalem. Is a place. That means. Something more. Than just. A physical place.

And this. Isn't just. A literal. Journey. This isn't. Just. Jesus. Calling people. On a nice trip. Down south. For some. Warmer weather. As they go.

On a literal. Road. To the literal. Place. Jerusalem. They are going. On a. Theological. And spiritual. Road. To a place.

[19:14] With spiritual. Significance. And so. He claims. A greater. Priority. Because his. Followers. Are going. With him.

Somewhere. That has. A greater. Significance. Than a place. In this. World. World. World. Somewhere. Up until now.

Pictures. And. Metaphors. And theology. In the scriptures. Have helped them. To understand. Somewhere. With someone.

Who is. Who is. Greater than. Anything. That this world. Has ever seen. Because. Actually. The. Physical. City. Of Jerusalem.

Is. Is. Not. The final. Destination. As. Jesus. Calls. People. To follow him. To Jerusalem. That. That place. Actually.

[20:07] Is not. Is not. Where he's. Leading them. The end. Is somewhere else. Look. Look again. At verse 51. And have a look. A bit more. Closely. This time. Jesus. Jesus. Sets his face.

Towards. Jerusalem. When. When the days. Drew near. For him. To be taken up. Jesus.

Journey. To Jerusalem. Actually. Jerusalem. Is. Is not. The end point. Is it. That. That's the kind of. Stopping point. To him. Being. Taken up.

Beyond the world. As we know it. Via. Jerusalem. To journey. With him. Will mean. Starting out. On a road. That doesn't. Just lead.

To a better. Place. In this world. But it leads. To a better. World. Altogether. Where his. Followers. Will. Will give up. On this world.

[21 : 01] As their. Ultimate home. And be led. To a new world. Where his. Followers. Will be. Travelers. With no. Place. To really. Settle down. In this world. As it is.

This side of heaven. It will feel a bit like. You're never really. At home here. Where even. Foxes. And birds. And animals. Will feel. More part of the furniture.

In this world. Than you do. Where this world. Will become. A purely. Transitional. Place. This world. And this. Life. With its.

Pain. And with its. Frustration. And with its. Death. Life. This life. As it is. Will. Simply become. A drop off. Point. A stop off.

Point. And we will. Desire. A person. Who. Leads us. To a place. That is. Even better. Than the best. That this world. Can give us. A Puritan.

[21 : 55] Pastor. Nathaniel Vincent. Was thrown out. Of his. Parish. Church. In 1662. Along with many. Other pastors. In the. Great. Objection. For his. Faith. And he was put. In prison.

Several times. For his. Faith. He suffered. Poor health. He was moved. From house. To house. And on the face of it. He had nowhere.

Permanent. To lay his head. He had a pretty dreadful life. Really. Humanly speaking. But he once. Compared. The desires. Of people. Who've never met. The Lord Jesus.

And the desires. Of people. Who now know him. And love him. He says. Someone who doesn't know Jesus. When he comes to die. Will choose.

Heaven. Over hell. And that's often. The reason given. Isn't it? To trust Jesus. So you don't go to hell. And that's right. And most people.

[22 : 51] Obviously. Prefer that. It's an easy choice. Isn't it? Choosing. Heaven. Over hell. But Vincent said. That there must be more than that. Someone who doesn't know Jesus.

prefers heaven. Over hell. But someone who does know Jesus. Even prefers heaven. Over earth. If Christ is ours.

Then all is ours. He says. He is better. Even than the best. That earth has to offer. And so this journey. That we take with Jesus.

It's not just about avoiding hell. But this journey. Leads us somewhere. Even better than earth. Better than the best. That we can get.

From this world. As it is. And just flick back with me. To Luke 9. 23. Jesus has already been calling people.

[23 : 46] To follow him. Before he sets out on his journey. And he says. In chapter 9. Verse 23. If anyone would come after me. Let him deny himself.

And take up his cross. Daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life. Would lose it. But whoever loses his life.

For my sake. Will save it. And the question. You've got to ask. Isn't it. With these doubters. And these delayers. And somebody. Who's just heard him say that.

Who would take up an offer like this. Who would follow Jesus like this. Who would take up their cross. Daily. And lose their life. For this Jesus. To go on this journey. Not just to give up this world. As it is. But to give up their own life. Life. What kind of a person. Would do that. Well it's the kind of person. Who is looking for something. Not just better than this world.

[24 : 45] For someone who finds Jesus. And realises it. Realises it. That he is giving us something. Even better than life itself. Where nothing is as good as him.

Not even life. That's what he goes on to say. Isn't it. In chapter 9. Whoever would. Save his life. Will lose it. But whoever loses his life.

For my sake. Whoever chooses me. Over life. Whoever sees me. As more important. And as better as life. Will save their life.

David Livingstone. Was a missionary to Africa. In the 1800s. And he. He spoke. After some of his missionary trips. To students. At Cambridge University. At Cambridge University. And he wanted to encourage them.

To go out on trips as well. And he kept using the phrase. It was about leaving the benefits. Of England behind. It was about trying to get them. To see the glory.

[25 : 45] Of serving the Lord Jesus. And leaving comfort behind. And he speaks about what it means. To sacrifice things. To serve Christ. Which is what. The Lord Jesus is asking these people to do.

Isn't it. It's a bit of a long section. But it's worth reading. In one of his biographies. He says. For my own part. I've never ceased to rejoice.

That God has appointed me. To such an office. People talk of the sacrifice. That I've made. In spending so much of my life. In Africa. It's a sacrifice.

Which brings its own blessed reward. In healthful activity. The consciousness of doing good. Peace of mind. And a bright hope. Of a glorious destiny.

So in such a view. He says. Away with the word. Away with such a thought. It is emphatically. No sacrifice.

[26 : 44] He says. Say rather. It's a privilege. When anxiety. And sickness. And suffering. Come. Or danger. Now and then. With a foregoing.

Of the common conveniences. And the charities. Of this life. May make me pause. And cause my spirit. To waver. And my soul. To sink. But it's only for a moment.

And all these. Are nothing. When compared. With the glory. That shall be revealed. In and for us. No. I never made a sacrifice. But was.

Livingston. Right. To say that. I never made a sacrifice. It was a hard life. For him. He suffered. He didn't delay. And he didn't hold back.

And he didn't look back. And he went forward. With Jesus. And he had no place. To lay his head.

He went with Jesus. The one who says. Whoever. Comes after me. Should take up his cross.

[27 : 42] And die to self. And have. No place in this world. Where animals are better off. Than you may be. And to let go of this world. And to even let go of life. Is that right?

No sacrifice? Of course. It's not wrong. To acknowledge. Suffering. As he does. But Jesus. Is telling us here. Isn't he.

That ultimately. If we think. That the Christian life. And following Jesus. Is a life of loss. Rather than gain. Then we.

We just don't get it. Do we? And we dishonor him. He's saying. Even if you. Have to lose your life. Even if you. Lose everything.

If you have me. You have everything. And you've saved your life. As we close this morning. We have to recognise.

[28 : 36] Don't we? What Jesus Christ. Is claiming here. He is saying. I am not somebody. That you can relativise. I can't be. One of the many.

Tunes. That you can play. On your journey of life. As and when you. Feel like it. Jesus demands. Exclusivity. And he. And his message.

Are. So good. They are too good. To neglect. And to not. Prioritise. He. And his message. Are the one. Thing. That we have.

That the rest of the world. Does not have. The one thing. That the world. Most needs. And so we go. With him. Can we? And all we do. Is for him.

And we follow. And we. Journey. In the momentum. Of his. Being taken up. To a greater glory. And once you've met. Jesus. And you've followed him.

[29 : 29] Your priorities. And your goals. Are twisted around. But if we're honest. Isn't it. This morning. Maybe we recognise. Ourselves. In these. Delayers. Here.

And if we're. Brutally honest. If we're honest. This morning. We do. Treat other things. As if they were. As good as Jesus. Don't we?

If not better than him. We look back. And we refuse. To prioritise him. And Jesus says. When we're like that.

We're not fit. For God's kingdom. But don't we long. To desire him. More than anything. Don't we long.

To start. Wanting him. More than anything. To value him. More than life itself. And since we do.

[30 : 25] Have him. People of God. We do have him. Don't we? As our Lord. And our saviour. We can long. And we can pray. That as we talk.

Of sacrifice. We will be able to say. Hand on heart. It is no sacrifice. Let's pray. Let's pray.