

**As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;<sup>53</sup> but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”<sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and rebuked them,<sup>56</sup> and they went to another village.**

**<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”**

**<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”**

**<sup>59</sup> He said to another man, “Follow me.”**

**But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”**

**<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”**

**<sup>61</sup> Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.”**

**<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (NIV84)**

Theme: Dedicate Yourself Completely to the Lord

1. To Follow Christ is not always Easy
2. He wants all of you

Intro: Everybody wants the best of both worlds—to take the best aspects of one thing and combine it with the best aspects of another thing. People like the idea of living in the safe environment of a small town, but want it to be just outside a large metropolitan area where there is a lot to do. People are constantly on the search for food that tastes great, but is also good for you. We often want to make our lives better, without doing much work, which is why many try all sort of “get rich quick” schemes, or they try learn a new language in a matter weeks simply by listening to some audio while you sleep.

It would be nice to have the best of both worlds, but it’s often far from reality. Sadly, there are many who want it “both ways” when it comes to their faith. They want to be a Christian and go to heaven, but they

also want to live like the rest of the world and are unwilling follow Christ. They want to have their feet on both sides of the fence—one on the side of God and the other on the side of the world.

Today we see that the Lord demands that we dedicate ourselves completely to him in all things and at all times.

Our text for today takes place not long after Jesus’ transfiguration on a mountain in Galilee. His time on earth was coming to an end, and Jesus knew that his death would take place in Jerusalem. So he started out on his methodical trip south to Jerusalem. The straightest and easiest way to Jerusalem from Galilee was to pass through Samaria. Jesus had been in Samaria on numerous occasion and had gained a following there. So he sent some of his followers ahead of him into a village to find them a place to spend the night.

But Samaritans and Jews did not associate with each other. The Jews saw the Samaritans as half-Jews who didn’t worship the true God. Samaritans did not like Jews because of their hostility and claiming that one had to worship in the temple in Jerusalem in order to worship the true God. There were many Jews who passed through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem in order to worship, especially for the three pilgrimage festivals. One could imagine that they weren’t always the best caretakers of the land as they passed through and that this caused even more hostility between the two groups. Because he was heading to Jerusalem everyone in the village refused to house him and his followers. So they went on to another village.

As they were on their way someone came up to Jesus and said, **Lord, I will follow you wherever you will go.** So Jesus pointed out to him that he literally didn’t have a place to sleep that night—as of that point in time, no one had taken him into his home—at least foxes and birds have a place to lay down their heads, but Jesus did not.

Jesus is pointing out to this man that following him won’t always be easy. It won’t always be pleasant. He is not telling the man that he can’t follow him, but he is warning him about the cost of following him. It reminds us of what Jesus said in last weeks’ gospel about following him, it means to deny ourselves and carry our crosses. While not having a place to spend the night isn’t pleasant, it wouldn’t be the worst thing followers of Christ would have to endure. They were put in prison, beaten, flogged, murdered, and much more simply

because they followed Christ. In our second lesson for today Paul goes through a short list of things he had to endure because of Christ. Years later he would be put to death for his faith.

We want things to be easy—we want everything in our lives to be nice and convenient. But that is not going to be the case when it comes to being a Christian. As we talked about last week, we will face persecution in one way or another. People will put obstacles in your way that make it all the more difficult for you to follow God's Word. Maybe that comes at the hands the government who may forbid us from teaching certain things or prohibiting us from putting God's Word into practice. Maybe it will come from a family member, who makes sly comments, questions, or openly mocks you to your face because of your faith. Or perhaps persecution will come at the hands of employers, friends, or someone on the other side of the world. The point is, being a Christian will not always be easy. It won't always be enjoyable. Of course, it won't be like that all the time. In fact, here in our country, God has blessed his Church with relative peace and security. But that could change in an instant. So the question is: are you okay with that? It won't always be easy. It won't always be pleasant. Are you willing to suffer, in numerous ways, for the sake of Christ?

The way of the Lord is not easy. Jesus knew that first hand. He knew full well what he was going to Jerusalem to do—he told his disciples about it again and again, twice in this chapter alone. He was going to be betrayed by his own countrymen and then put to death. We know the physical pain that Christ endured; but that paled in comparison to the emotional pain that he went through as he was forsaken by the Father for taking all of our sins upon himself and suffering the eternal damnation that we deserved.

Think of Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane right before he was betrayed. Drops of sweat like blood dripped from his forehead because he was praying so earnestly and fervently that the cup of suffering that he was about to endure would be taken from him. It wasn't going to be easy or pleasant—both physically and emotionally. But it was the Lord's will, so he did as the Lord wanted so that he could save us.

On his way to another village in Samaria Jesus said to a man, **Follow me.** But the man made an excuse. He said, **first, let me go bury my**

**father.** But because they didn't follow any embalming practices like the Egyptians nor have the modern technology of today, it was customary to bury the dead the same day they died—and if they died during the night, they would bury them in the morning. The fact that this man wasn't preparing the funeral or in mourning, but was following Jesus around indicates that this man's father was still alive. This man wanted to follow Jesus, but only in his time frame. He was going to wait until his father died to do so. Then another man came up to Jesus, perhaps he heard the conversation that Jesus just had and he said that he was going to follow Jesus as soon as he went and said goodbye to his family.

Jesus's reply to this man can really serve both men; he said, **No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.** Plows back then were pretty basic and rudimentary. It had a wooden handle with a long metal hook in the middle. It required both hands and careful attention. So what is Jesus' point? It is that you can't have it both ways—you can't look back at the things of this world and follow him at the same time. That is what both of those men wanted to do. One wants to wait until his father died to follow Christ. The other wasn't fully committed to Christ either because he wasn't willing to leave his family in the rear view in order to follow Christ. They wanted to have a foot in the world and a foot following Christ—but you can't follow after someone if both feet aren't fully committed to walking after him.

What Jesus says in this story is in a highly specific situation, said to a man who wanted to follow him and do some gospel ministry. Yet it also makes the point of complete dedication to Christ. God doesn't command that we forgo any and all contact with family, or that we can't attend a funeral of someone we love. But he does command that he comes first in our lives—even above our families, as he says, **Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

In the same way he commands that we be completely dedicated to him in all things and at all times. You can't have the best of both worlds—being a Christian and being part of the wicked world at the same time. He doesn't want just some of his commands followed, but all of them; or all of the followed but only at some times. He doesn't want you to believe and agree with most of his Word, but all of it. He doesn't want

you to attend worship services sometimes, or half the time, or even most of the time—but all of the time. He wants you to read his Word every so often, but every day, just as he demands that you learn and study his Word all of your life—not just until you are confirmed. You can't have it both ways, or a foot on both sides of the fence—either you follow Christ completely or you don't. And yet, because of our sinful nature, we struggle with this day after day. Our new man strives to follow Christ, but our old man wants to follow the ways of the world—there is that constant battle. At times, we do well; but at times, not so well. We often act like an unbeliever and follow the wicked ways of the world: we miss a worship service, we don't read our Bible one day, or miss a Bible study. We hold back on our offerings, spending more on fast food each week than we give to the Lord. We refuse to point out the sins of our family members so we don't anger them, or we think that work, sports, or sleep is more important than God and his Word. Or we begin to value the thoughts and opinions of the world over what God says in his Word. We may drink too much, use foul language, or sleep with someone outside of marriage—just like unbelievers do.

There are times that we live like the rest of the world, or we act like a Christian on Sunday mornings, but an unbeliever the rest of the time. It seems as if we only obey God when it is convenient for us, or we only worship him when we've got nothing better to do. There are many times that we aren't completely dedicated and in-step with the Lord. We follow him for a while, then we look back at the sinful world and stray from the Lord, follow their wicked ways for a while. We want to be Christians and go to heaven, but we are often unwilling to follow Christ as we act just like an unbeliever. We want our cake and to eat it too! But the Lord says in 1 John, **"The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him."**

Yes, there are many times that we fail to be completely dedicated to Christ. But that is why he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Literally, he "set his face for Jerusalem." Again, Jesus knew what was going to happen there—he knew that he was going to suffer and die on the cross. But that didn't deter him. He went on his methodical trip to Jerusalem, going to his death. Along the way he taught and performed miracles, always having one goal in mind: our salvation. And he was completely dedicated to the task his whole life. Even from the time he

was an infant, he was concerned about God's commands, not once failing to keep them. He faced temptation after temptation, and never once did he fall. And when he was faced with the temptation to run away from his suffering and death, or to come down from the cross and save himself, he refused. He willingly let himself be arrested and murdered. He willingly took our sins upon himself and suffered the eternal damnation that we deserved.

Not once did he flinch. Not only did he stray from the right path. But he dedicated his whole life, his whole self to our salvation. And as a result our sins have been removed—as far as east is from west so far has our Lord removed our sins from us. The Lord looks at us and he no longer sees us as sinners, but he sees us as us completely dedicated to him in all things and at all times because Christ's perfect life is now ours. And the victory over death that Christ won by his resurrection from the dead is now ours. We have the sure hope of a perfect and eternal life with our Savior forever. Not because we have earned or deserved it, but because Jesus Christ has earned it for us completely and has given it to us freely as a gift of his grace.

Motivated by Christ's grace for us, we strive to obey his Word. We dedicate our whole lives to him and his Word. We fight the good fight everyday—keeping both of our feet on the right side of the fence, on the path that the Lord has led us on. We don't want the best of both worlds—we want to obey the Lord and to follow him. It won't always be easy and it won't always be pleasant. But we strive to be faithful knowing that our reward is in heaven.

And that reward isn't ours because of what we have done—because we often fail to do it. But that is ours because of Christ, who is eternal life. We don't need both ways, but the only way—Jesus Christ. Amen.