

THREE MEN AND THE CALL

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While walking along the road to Jerusalem with His followers (Luke 9:57-62), Yeshua spoke with three men of the kind of commitment needed in order to follow Him:

‘And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” And Yeshua 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.”¹

And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Allow me first to go and bury my father.” But He said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.”

And another also said, “I will follow You Lord but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” But Yeshua said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

It seems from this episode that Yeshua is very hard-hearted in not allowing a son to bury his own father, or another to just return home and say ‘Goodbye’ to his family. But Yeshua wasn’t being callous. He was presenting the nature of the Kingdom’s Call upon our life as taking precedence over every-thing in this life. His words are designed to impress themselves upon us, to sift us, and to establish us in the Way that we should go. Leon Morris states,

‘As Jesus journeyed some people announced their readiness to follow him. They were clearly well intentioned but they had not realized the nature of the demands the kingdom makes.’²

The first man (‘I will follow You wherever You go’) seems to give the Lord ‘his all,’ but Yeshua speaks of the cost of what it meant to follow His Lord. There might not be nights where he would be able to sleep in a bed, something that most take for granted. Would he be ready for that? Was he willing to consider this? Or would that end his commitment to the Messiah?

Alexander Bruce states the man was a scribe and quite possibly already a follower or disciple of Yeshua (v. 21, ‘and another of the disciples of Him’). But the Lord ‘purposely paints the prospect in sombre colours’ for him. ‘The whole speech is studiously enigmatical, and calculated to chill the scribe’s enthusiasm.’

‘The scribe has his spiritual home in’ Rabbinic ‘traditions, and would not be at ease in the company of One who had broken with them. Jesus had no place where He could lay his head in the religion of His time’.³

¹ Charles F. Pfeiffer, Old Testament; Everett F. Harrison, New Testament, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 1045. ‘The rejection at Samaria’ (Lk. 9:51-53) ‘gave point to this utterance. The Lord of the earth had less that he could call his own than the beasts and the birds.’

² Leon Morris, M.Sc., M.Th., Ph.D., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Luke* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. 196.

³ Alexander Balmain Bruce, D.D., Author; W. Robertson Nicoll, Editor, M. A., LL. D., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. one: *The Synoptic Gospels* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 142. In Mt.

The second man wanted to bury his father but Yeshua called him to proclaim the Kingdom instead. Two views are seen here in relation to the man's father. First, the father may very well have still been alive. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states that the man didn't 'mean that his father had died, but that he was obligated to care for him until he died.'⁴ This puts God and His Kingdom second to something else, and even though family relations are extremely important to us and to God, they must not take precedence over the call of the Kingdom. The man was wanting to put his call 'on hold' indefinitely.

The other view is that the father had just died. We Jews consider burial as taking precedence over many important things. Morris writes,

'The duty of burial took precedence over the study of the' Torah (Law), 'the Temple service, the killing of the Passover sacrifice, the observance of circumcision and the reading of the Megillah (Megillah 3b). But the demands of the kingdom are more urgent still...the man who has seen the vision must not deny or delay his heavenly calling.'⁵

Either way, whether the father was alive or dead, Yeshua was calling the man to realize that the Kingdom of God was to be his primary responsibility and that, even over the burying of his father.

Yeshua's words speak of extreme holiness and radical consecration unto God that we only find in two places in the Law. In the Torah the only people who couldn't bury anyone, including their parents, was the Nazarite⁶ and the High Priest (Lev. 21:10-11).⁷ With the Nazarite not able to leave his Vow, even for the death of his mother or father, he entered a sphere of holiness comparable to the High Priest of Israel. Although all Israel was holy,⁸ the High Priest was the holiest or most 'set apart' and consecrated individual in all the world, to Yahveh. The Nazarite Vow opened up an avenue for the common Israeli to walk in the kind of holiness, dedication and purity that only the High Priest walked in. It was seen as a very powerful vow and especially esteemed in Israel. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery says:

'The Nazarite vow symbolized extreme devotion to God. A solemn oath was sworn to separate oneself *from* certain items, such as symbols of feasting (grape products) and ritual impurity (dead bodies), as well as *to* Yahveh's 'unique service'.⁹

Yeshua's call into the Kingdom requires the kind of holiness and dedication that only the High Priest and the Nazarite pictured. The crucified Messiah reveals in His answer to the man the nature of what it meant to truly follow Him. Marshall says that the meaning of His reply is simply,

'Let the (spiritually) dead bury the (physically) dead'. 'Those who do not follow Jesus are regarded as spiritually dead (cf. 15:24, 32; Jn. 5:25; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 2:1; 5:14). They

8:18-22 where a similar account is spoken of, the man is called a scribe (gramataes, Mt. 8:19).

⁴ Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1045.

⁵ Morris, *Luke*, p. 197. See Gen. 23:1-20 for the biblical importance of burying a wife and Gen. 50:1-14 for burying a father.

⁶ Craig A. Evans, *New International Biblical Commentary: Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1990), p. 164-165.

⁷ Only the High Priest was so restricted. The Aaronic priests, the Sons of Aaron, weren't to defile themselves among the dead but they could do so in the case of their parents, their children, their brother and their virgin sister (Lev. 21:1-3).

⁸ Ex. 19:6; 22:31; Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:26; 22:31-33; Num. 15:40; Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 28:9, etc.

⁹ Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit and Tremper Longman the 3rd, General Editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 920. Italics are the author's.

have missed the life associated with the kingdom.’¹⁰

To ‘believe in Jesus’ is not something to be taken lightly. It’s very demanding and very costly and as Craig Evans says, ‘To follow Jesus requires radical commitment.’¹¹ Marshall adroitly adds, ‘the duty of following Jesus is placed above the most stringent of human duties.’¹²

The third man offered to follow the Lord but first wanted to return home and say goodbye. It doesn’t seem unreasonable. But Yeshua sees past the surface and into the heart and must have seen some reluctance on the part of the man ‘to take the decisive step.’ Yeshua ‘points out that the kingdom has no room for those who look back when they’re called to go forward.’¹³ This man said, ‘I will follow You Lord’ (Lk. 9:61) but was a type of man ‘who always wants to do something, in which he is himself specially interested first’ ‘before he addresses himself to the main duty to which he is called.’¹⁴

No one who puts their hand to the plow, and looks back (continually looks back), is fit for service in the Kingdom (v. 62). ‘A farmer who is plowing must always look forward if he is to plow a straight furrow.’¹⁵ One cannot keep their eyes on both their own self-interests and that of God’s Kingdom. Someone who tries to do that will never walk straight along the Road of Life.

The first man needed to consider the Kingdom Call: his life wouldn’t be his own if he followed Yeshua; he might not have the house, the car and the bank account. Was he willing to surrender himself to the unknown?

The second man had legitimate conflicting duties: he wanted to bury his father and he wanted to follow Yeshua. Which should he do first? Yeshua spoke of the Kingdom’s Call as taking precedence over the care for a father and his burial, a not insignificant reality. But the Kingdom can’t be put ‘on hold.’ It’s call is very pressing, very immediate. Putting it off is to disregard it. Who knows the day of their death?

The third man had a divided mind: he had self interests that would win out over God’s interests. But self must die in order to follow the Master. It’s not that Yeshua doesn’t want us to have a bed or a home, or that He doesn’t want us to take care of our parents, but nothing, absolutely nothing is to come between us and our Messiah. This concept of what it means ‘to believe’ is not for ‘super-believers, pastors and theologians.’ It’s just the starting point for all believers.

Marshall rightly says the three men expressed ‘their willingness to follow him’ but misunderstood ‘the degree of self-sacrifice involved.’¹⁶

‘Those who would follow him where he goes must be ready to share the homeless lot of the Son of Man, to place discipleship above the claims of family and duty...The commitment required is absolute.’¹⁷

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall, Author; I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, Editors, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 411.

¹¹ Evans, *Luke*, p. 162.

¹² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 411.

¹³ Morris, *Luke*, p. 197.

¹⁴ Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, p. 537.

¹⁵ Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1046.

¹⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 408.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Alexander Bruce relates that Yeshua was on the road to Jerusalem when this event took place.¹⁸ In other words, He was going to His crucifixion. He had counted the cost and was walking it out one moment at a time. Yeshua is calling all of us to the new Jerusalem above, but first we have to die with Him in the Jerusalem below.¹⁹ May we take action now within ourselves, casting down vain imaginations and everything that exalts itself above God and His call upon our life,²⁰ to vigorously and determinedly follow Yeshua all the days of this life that we have left. Let us not let anything come between us and Him. It's not without a cost but there is no other alternative except deception and eternal death.

We are called to be the Light of this world (Mt. 5:14-16) in whatever sphere of influence we find ourselves. There's an old Hasidic proverb, taken from Lev. 19:11, 13, 35-36 which states that we're not to deceive our neighbor, that goes one step further. The proverb says we're not even to deceive ourselves. May Yeshua open our eyes as to what it truly means to follow Him. Come, let us be about our Messiah's Business as He was His Father's (Lk. 2:49 KJV).

If you feel that you have fallen into one of the categories of those three men and that your commitment to Yeshua is less than absolute, all you need to do is ask our Father in Heaven to forgive you, and to give you the heart of His Son, in order to fully follow Messiah. He will. Your Father delights in molding you into the Image of His Son.²¹

'For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

¹⁸ Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, p. 536. See Luke 9:51.

¹⁹ Mt. 10:38; 16:24; Lk. 9:23, etc.

²⁰ 2nd Corinthians 10:5: 'Casting down imaginations and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Messiah.'

²¹ Rom. 8:29; 1st Cor. 15:49; 2nd Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10.