

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

Follow Me

PART

5

TITLE

I Will Make You Choose

SCRIPTURE

Luke 9:51-62



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Well, it's great to see you, Providence family, and it's always a joy to sing with you. I hope that you have had a great week. If you're new here with us, a guest, welcome. We're thrilled that you are here. As a guest, if you know Christ as your Savior and Lord, I hope that you have been and will be encouraged as you're here. If you're just exploring of who Jesus is and what Jesus did and what does it really mean to follow Christ, we pray that this time will be helpful to you and that you will be encouraged. One time a year, we block off a whole weekend to think about God's enormous heart for the people around the world. It happens to be next weekend. Missions Festival is always a special weekend. There's a lot going on. It will feel that way next Sunday when you come, but we what really hope and what I'm praying this week that will take place in our lives next weekend and even this week as we get ready for it is that you and I would be confronted with the reality of God's enormous heart of compassion for people all around the world.

You see, you look at the faces of the nations, you see something like this, and you see all kinds of different people. Our heart, naturally, is inclined to associate each of these people with a place, a religion, a race, a something. We put them into categories. Yet, if you boil it all down, what it is, it's a person like you. These people, they wake up just like you wake up, and they want hope, and they want peace, and they want rest. They want love in their heart. They want to love someone and be loved just like us. All of these people, they want their kids to be safe and to have a future. You know, every single one of these people and every person around the world, they recognize something's happening all around the world. That is that people are dying. No one's living forever. They all recognize, just like we do, that there's something missing within us. There's this guilt.

We know that we're not perfect as people. We wonder what it's going to be like when we die. What does that actually look like and feel like? What the Bible says is that God loved us, not just us, but he loved all the people of the world in such an unbelievable way. Literally, you couldn't invent how he loved us, that he would willingly come to rescue us so that we could be forgiven of our sin. What we're going to do is look at his enormous heart for the people around the world. We're going to look back at some things God has done in our lives this year. Then, we're going to ask God this question. That is, "How can I personally participate in the mission to help other people around the world who do not have a Bible in their language and have no preacher, they have no access to hear the message of forgiveness, how can I participate in what God is doing to get his name and his Son's name to the ends of the earth?" Let me pray for us. Okay?

Father in heaven, we pray that you would do that miracle. We pray for the people around the world. We know they're just like us. We know, God, they're broken. We know that they're sinful. We know that they're insecure just like us. You rescued us through Jesus Christ and gave us the amazing call and commission to take what you've done and to share it with other people. I pray even this week that you would begin to incline our hearts, Lord, to know how it is that you would have us participate. I pray, Father, that you would now, as we open up your word, as we look at Luke chapter nine, that you would even help us to see how this text prepares our heart for what you're going to call us to do.

Would you speak through weakness in myself, would you glorify Jesus Christ, and would you help us to gain more clarity of what it actually means to be a follower of Jesus Christ? We pray this in his name. Amen.

Luke chapter nine, if you want to head there. If you don't have a Bible, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you. If you don't have one at home, take that home as a gift. We would love for you to have your own copy of the Bible so that you can read it. What we find here in Luke chapter nine starting in verse 51 is a pretty stunning story, this stunning exchange between Jesus and three would-be followers. The reason that it's stunning is because, at first glance, Jesus seems intent on repelling instead of inviting each of these individuals to be near him. This is what he says, starting in verse 51, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' He turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' And Jesus said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Yet another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'" How unique Jesus is.

When you actually get a portrait in scripture of who Jesus actually is, what Jesus actually said, he confronts so many of our Western assumptions of what it means to be a Christian. It's stunning what he does here. You see, every single leader of a movement, whether it's religious, whether it's political, whether it's commercial, every single leader of a movement tends to want to attract people, to inspire people to want to come, to make it easy for them to sign, to enter, to join. Then, you get to Jesus. He stands up and he says, "No home. No funeral. No farewell." Then, it's recorded for us to figure out what are we supposed to do with this. You see, everyone is on their heels. It appears, does it not, from the absence of any other information that we're given that these three men probably decided not to follow Jesus. There's no celebration at the end where Luke says, "Guess what. They all said yes. Great news. Let's go have lunch." No, there's nothing like that.

He throws it out there and, all of a sudden, he moves to the next and he moves to the next. Then, they're done. We don't know exactly where they stood before the Lord, but you have to ask this question. How do words like this, how do statements like this that may seem to be harsh and repelling, how do they align with what we know from his lips? That he has a mission to come to this earth to seek and to save the lost. How does this align with what we know about Jesus, that he has a heart of compassion and love and mercy, that he loves the sinner, he's a friend of the sinner and he wants us to draw near to him? So many of these other commandments, the invitation, "Follow me," is an invitation, "Come, be with me." Then, he says this.

One thing that may help us to remember that love must be as truthful as it is soft. You see, you and I, naturally, things feel more loving when it's soft as opposed to harsh. On the other side of the softness spectrum, there's a truthfulness spectrum. You may be driving down the road, and I know that the bridge is out just ahead. I may warn you in a way that may not be soft to stop. You may conclude I'm not loving you. Yet, I just saved your life. We have to balance these two. There's a truth spectrum, and there's also a compassion and softness spectrum. I think it's important to help understand what he does with these three men to see the setting. You see, the setting is the first paragraph that we read starting in verse 51.

This is what it says. It says when he knew that it was time, it says that he set his face to Jerusalem. He made a commitment. This is where I'm going. I'm not following someone to Jerusalem. I'm leading these pack of people to Jerusalem. He's the only one that knew what awaited him when he got there. In Luke chapter nine, before verse 51, in two different references, he says, "We're going to Jerusalem where I'm going to be crucified." He knew it was there. One word that helps us understand sort of the environment of this story is the word focus. He is focused of where he's going. He knows where he's going, and he knows why he's going there. A second word would be rejection. It says that he sent a few of his disciples ahead to make preparations in a village of Samaria. It says that they rejected him.

Now, it's interesting that in God's sovereign plan, it says because his face was set toward Jerusalem, and so there were other things at play than simply a human decision to invite him in that night for dinner or for lodging, but we do know that there was rejection. We do know there was hurt because two of the disciples, they got so angry, they come to Jesus and say, "You want me to pray to your dad, Father? Hey, I'll just ask for fire. We'll just consume these people." Jesus then corrects them. That's the third word, is correction. You know, it's never fun to correct anybody. It's hard to correct people. That's one of the reasons why preaching is so exhausting. Every single Sunday, I tell people what they don't want to hear. No one likes to correct. Yet, that's what he does. He has to pause and say, "Guys, you don't understand. This is not how we treat people. We don't call for fire out of heaven upon people."

Three words, focus, rejection, and correction, surround what's taking place, and yet inside this intensity, Jesus has the emotional bandwidth and the desire to clarify for three men and for us what it truly means to be a follower of Christ. What do we learn? The first thing is this. Following Jesus is about crossing into a kingdom. It's about crossing into a kingdom. Did you notice that as we read through these stories, on two of the three men, they want to talk about the walk, the following, the journey, and everything about following? He redirects their attention to the kingdom. He keeps talking about a kingdom, the kingdom of God. They want to talk about the journey, and he wants to talk about the kingdom. What's happening here? Well, every kingdom has a border. There's a boundary line. You're in the kingdom. You're not in the kingdom. What Jesus is saying is this. Following Jesus is about crossing a border into his kingdom.

Sometimes we think it's about moral improvement, it's about ethics and doctrines and disciplines. Maybe that's what they thought. We're ready to do all the things that you want to do. He comes to them, and he says, "Look, before there's anything you're supposed to think or do, you have to cross a border. You have to make a fundamental change within your own heart. Something has to happen to you." You see, let's just say that you wanted to cross into the kingdom of Canada. I know we don't call it a kingdom, but just because he talks about kingdom, that's what we're going to call it. The kingdom of Canada, they have a border. We have a border. That's the nearest country to us. From right where we're at right now, it's about 650 miles to the nearest border in Canada.

Let's just say that you wanted to walk the whole way there. You exert all kinds of physical energy in order to make all kinds of progress. Yet, if you land and stop at this place of the border just shy of crossing, then all of the progress was for nothing. You are just as much in Canada there as you are right now. This is what he's saying about the kingdom of God. We naturally think, "I'm going to make so much progress. I'm going to exert all kinds of moral strength in order to see moral improvement, in order to get all the way up to that kingdom." Jesus says, "And yet you can't get over the border." You see, each of these individuals, they're considering the walk, and Jesus was conscious of the border. He keeps bringing up the kingdom. We have to ask the question, "Well, how do you enter?"

Well, there was an old rich man that we talked about last week just briefly in John chapter three. He had spent his entire life exerting moral energy for moral improvement in order to cross the border on his own. He couldn't get there. He comes to Jesus at night, knowing his friends would not approve. He says, "Look, don't tell anybody. How do I get across the border?" It's a paraphrase, but, "How do I do this? I can't quite turn the key. It just won't go." Jesus says to him, "Truly, truly I say to you unless you're born again, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." In verse four of chapter three, he says, "But wait a minute. I'm an old man. How am I supposed to be born again? A man can't get back into his mother's womb and be born a second time." Jesus says, "You're right."

In John chapter three verse five, he clarifies. He says this. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." This is true of you. If you are not twice born, once of water, once of Spirit, you will not go to heaven. That's what Jesus just said. Now, what's water and Spirit? Water is a physical birth. Our mothers, their water broke when it was time to have a baby. He's talking about the fact that every single person has had one birth, but not everyone has had a second. The second comes by the Spirit of God. This is how he says it happens. Romans chapter 10 verse nine says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

This is how you get across the border. You ready? The first thing you do is you acknowledge, you admit that you're a sinner. You admit that you can not, you do not have the moral energy, you don't have the perfection to cross the border because you can't. You can't be holy. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We can't save ourselves. Then he says that we're supposed to believe, believe in Jesus Christ. That's not just a believe that he's some historical character that actually did come and did live and did do things on the earth. No, what it means that we believe in Jesus is that we believe, first, who he is, that he is the Son of God, and he came from heaven to earth, and not only that he's the Son of God, but he lived a righteous life when he was on the earth so he wasn't disqualified from being a pure sacrifice. He lived a life that none of us have. Then, he died on a cross for our sin to pay for our sin.

He was buried in a grave. Then, he rose from the dead. People saw him alive. He gave an invitation to them and for them to go tell other people. That is if they would believe in the accomplishments, the work of Jesus, they would be forgiven of their sin. The third thing he says that we are to do is to confess him as Lord. Now, when you admit that you're a sinner, you believe in Jesus Christ, you confess him as Lord, the Holy Spirit comes into your heart and carries you across the border. That's what it means to be born of Spirit. It's something that he does. Listen, no matter what you've done in your life, good or evil, no matter how bad your week or no matter how much moral energy you are investing in order to try to get there on your own, Jesus says, "It's not simply about doctrines and disciplines and duties. You have to cross a border that you do not have the ability to cross without me." That's what he's saying.

Every single one of us who have already trusted Christ, he says that the Holy Spirit is there. We're living in the kingdom. Aren't you encouraged? For most of us, we go, "Wait a minute. Is this the kingdom? This doesn't feel like everything's fixed. My body keeps falling apart. I watch the news, and I see the world's falling apart. I see families falling apart. I see my own heart falling apart sometimes. Is this the kingdom?" What the Bible says is this. Once we trust Christ, we come into the kingdom. Yet, it's partial. It's only spiritual. It's something that's happened to us, and yet more is coming. It's sort of like an acorn that's dropped and planted down within our heart. It's small, sometimes even unnoticeable. Then, all of a sudden, it begins to grow. Suddenly, this tree begins to grow within us, and it starts to take over in our life.

By living in the kingdom, what he means is this. The power of the new kingdom actually comes into our heart and allows us in small ways to begin with and ever-increasing power as we continue to walk with him to live a new kind of life, to be kind to people, to love him, to love one another, to worship him, to serve people. You know what's interesting? This kingdom promises something about our future. What it promises is that all the fairytales that we've ever invented are not magical enough. It says that there is a truer and better Camelot that is coming, where there is no death, and there's no sin, and there's no divorce, and there's no harming one another, and there's no starvation, and there's no poverty. We can't invent what the Bible actually affirms is true. Listen, when we cross the border by trusting its King, we are guaranteed to enjoy not only the King but also his kingdom forever now in spiritual form, one day in spiritual and physical form. This is the kingdom and this is what he offers. My question to you is this. Have you crossed the border?

Not do you have moral improvement? Not are you trying to do better than you did yesterday? Not are you trying to live a Christian life? Have you crossed the border?

What's interesting, once you start talking about the kingdom, people start having misunderstandings about what it is. This is where we get to these three men. We learn two other things. See, the first guy is different from the second and third guy. The second and third guy are actually one category. The first guy is in a category of his own. What Jesus wants to do is he wants to clarify what the kingdom is all about, to strike down these misunderstandings so that you know exactly what it is to follow him. The first thing is that Jesus and following him is all about crossing into his kingdom. The second point is this. Following Jesus is agreeing to temporarily take on difficulty. It's agreeing to temporarily take on difficulty.

You see, the first man, unlike the last two, he has no conditions whatsoever. He comes to Jesus, and he says, "I will follow you wherever you go." This is an idealistic. The reality, and I know we have a whole bunch of them here, is that people, when they're 20, we tend to be attracted to idealism. Idealism is this thought that all of Ecclesiastes talks about, in particular, chapter one and chapter two. It's if I do it right, things will work. If we have the right law, people will stop hurting people. I'm going to invest myself in the justice system, and we'll fix what all the past generations couldn't fix. If we send all this food over to third-world countries, the starving people will actually get to eat it. Idealism, it's a wonderful thing, to be honest with you. This man is an idealist.

You see, all of us have seen rallies, rallies like this one here where a lot of people, they all kind of come, and they gather, and they rally because there's a cause, there's a cause of importance. It is important. It is good to show support. If you take out all of the politics and everything else, what's happening here is this. Real people are on the earth saying, "This place is broken, and I want to help fix it," but what Ecclesiastes one says is that every single new generation, they get on the treadmill, and they run like crazy thinking, "All those past generations, they had no idea what they were doing. We have the answers. We can do it." Suddenly, what happens is you wait 20 years, and they find out that they've only contributed to the fallenness of the world, but they have kids. Now their kids get on the treadmill, and say, "You know what? My parents didn't know what they were doing, but we do. We can fix this thing."

Literally, generation by generation by generation, the word of God says we begin as idealists and we become realists. This man is an idealist. He's excited, not about Christ. He's excited about excitement. He's loving the heroic. Jesus' teaching on the kingdom has always attracted idealists. Wait a minute. You're talking there's a Camelot, like a real Camelot, a change, a new world order, justice for everyone? Where do I sign? Jesus, I'll follow you anywhere. He's so excited until Jesus talks to him. He goes, "All right. Look, you want to follow me, right?" "Yeah." "Well, foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." What's he saying? He's saying you fail to recognize and grasp the present day difficulties that come when you're a part of the kingdom because when you're a part of my kingdom, you inherit all of my enemies. Everyone who has animosity towards Jesus Christ, they now may show their animosity towards you.

It may become very difficult before you experience Camelot.

What did he do? He looks at him in the face. He goes, "Look at me. No, no. Look at me. Look at me right now. Look at me." He says, "I am the face of the kingdom. I am the marketing plan of the kingdom. You just saw me get run out of a village. Everything this world considers success, I don't have. I don't have a home. A bird has a home. I don't have a home. I'm the Son of Man." It's a reference to the Messiah from the seventh chapter of Daniel, that he would represent us. Just as he's the Son of God who represents God, he's the Son of Man who represents us, and he mediates both. He says, "I don't have these things." John 15:20 says, "If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you." He says, "What I promise on this earth is peace and character and God's presence in your life and eternal life. I'm going to go right now to Jerusalem, and I'm going to give my life in self-denial and pain in order to secure these blessings for you. Now, are you ready to follow?" There's no answer.

See, Providence, what we have to remember about the kingdom, Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. It's a matter of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." See, there's a lot of people who are infected with something called prosperity theology. What that basically means is this. We recognize that God is our Father. It just so happens that God is really rich. He owns everything. We just assume, "I should be rich. I'm one of his kids. If I have enough faith, I'm rich. I will be rich. I'll have things." The thing about prosperity theology is this. It's not entirely inaccurate. It's entirely mistimed. Camelot is coming. There will be a day when there's peace forever, and there's plenty for everyone. There will be a day, but on this earth, the kingdom's advanced through self-denial. Jesus looks at him, and he says, "Do you see this? This is what you're following. Do you want this? I don't have a home. You still want to come?" We know from what we see here is that following Jesus is agreeing to temporarily take on difficulty.

The third point, which is about the last two guys, is following Jesus is removing our conditions for obedience. Admittedly, his last two statements, in particular, the first of the last is pretty harsh. It sounds like the guy is saying, "Hey, let me go bury my dad," and he says, "No, you can't go bury him. You just got to come with me." The second guy says, "Let me just go have a farewell," and he says, "No, follow me." What's happening here? It's really important you understand this. Jewish law actually required for a man to honor his father, if his father was actually dying, that he was supposed to be at his deathbed. The fact that he's walking around from village to village with Jesus, talking about following him, and not at the deathbed, shows something, maybe his dad's really not dying or maybe what he's actually saying is this, "Jesus, I really want to make a commitment to you, but I better wait until my father dies." Maybe his father wouldn't approve. Maybe he would disown him. He's saying, "When following won't alienate me, then I'll follow you." A third guy essentially says the same thing. He says, "You know what? I'd love to follow you but not quite yet. First, let me go do this, and then I'll follow you."

Jesus looks at both of them and he says, “Look, guys, you don’t understand the urgency of crossing this border. You don’t understand the absolute present day blessings of the kingdom and the blessings of having me as your King. If you did, you wouldn’t stand at the border and say, ‘If I can do this first.’ You would simply cross.” You see, whenever we have conditions, it’s like standing on the border and refusing to enter in until our demands are met, in which case, who is the king? Who’s the queen? You see, following Jesus is abdicating the throne of our heart and saying, “You’re now the King. I’m crossing into your kingdom, and you are my King.” It’s to yield our heart and life to his loving reign. To a person, we don’t do that perfectly. We all sin, fall short of his glory, no one more so than me as I’m aware of. Yet, he loves us. One thing I want you to see before we move to just a few applications is this. He never says this to broken people. He is not repelling sinners. He’s not repelling people who come and say, “I’m at the end of my rope. I’ve got nothing left.” What he’s doing is he’s challenging and correcting people who are still uncertain if they need him. He says, “This is what it means to follow me.”

A few applications. First is this. Let’s consider the worthiness of Jesus. You see, the only possible way to follow Jesus, to receive these difficulties, to relinquish the throne of our own heart, is to see in Jesus a superior person than what we would give up. Jesus is teaching, and he’s testing. He’s teaching that the road to follow him is hard. Yet, he’s testing to see if he’s valuable enough to us for us to endure the road. This is why I appeal to you so often about opening your Bible and looking for not what you’re supposed to do but who you’re supposed to admire because he is the prize of the redeemed. Do you see in Jesus something of such supreme worth that you say he is worth whatever I would give up? Until you see his worth, it will be virtually impossible to give up other things.

The second thing is this. Let’s not look back to our idols. Jesus was not creating new laws. He’s not saying no beds for Christians, no funerals, no farewells. That’s not what he’s saying. He’s revealing functional saviors. Jeremiah chapter two says it this way. He says, “My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” This is what he’s saying. In this next picture, you’re going to see a bucket. Let’s just say on the back wall, an actual waterfall. There’s an actual self-replenishing spring of water always refreshed, people. What Jeremiah says, what God says through him, is this. He goes, “My people are simply just like every one of you right now. You’re facing the wrong direction.” Every single one of us have turned our back on what is ultimately refreshing. We’ve chosen instead substitutes.

If you think about your past, what you’ll find is a whole graveyard of buckets that were insufficient to satisfy your heart. This is what he’s talking about here. You see, whatever provides the lion’s share of our security becomes our functional savior. To one man, he says, “Let the dead bury their dead.” What does he mean by this? This is Jesus’ shocking way to say even though dads are the embodiment of strength to us while we’re on the earth, dads can not help us get across the border.

Only Jesus can get us across the border. Then, he says to the next guy, “No one who looks back is fit for the kingdom.” What does that mean? It means you can not plow a straight line looking backwards. Jesus is saying, “I can not make a whole new life out of the timber and materials of your old idols.” You can’t look back to them anymore. Let them go. That gets us to the last.

It’s really important for us to trust and follow Jesus. I know right now that many of you, just like myself this week, you may feel defeated. Maybe you can remember a long list of things that you said, “God, first, let me do this,” whatever it is. You know you’re supposed to do something. You say, “God, first, let me do this.” This confronts all of this. Maybe you spent the whole week looking back to your old ways, your old idols. Maybe you gave into temptation, and you feel guilty. I totally understand. As a man, I promise you I try to resist temptation every day of my life, and I fall short every single day, every day. The only hope that I have and you have is Jesus Christ. If you’ve trusted in Jesus Christ, you’ve crossed that border, I want to urge you to keep looking to Jesus. If you never have, we want to give you an opportunity to do that right now.

I want to ask you to bow your head. I want you to pray with me. If you’ve already trusted Christ, I want to ask you right now that you would search your heart and ask God to search your heart and reveal anything that stands in between you and obedience to your King, whatever it is, and tell him. If you’ve never trusted Christ, but you admit that you’re a sinner, you believe in Jesus Christ, and you want to confess him as Lord, you can say a prayer to him. You need to say it to him, not to me or anyone else. It can go something like this, “Father in heaven, I need you. I admit that I’m a sinner and I can not save myself. I believe in Jesus. I believe that you’ve sent Jesus from heaven. I believe that you sent him to do a special task. That was to rescue me. Not only do I believe he’s the Son of God, but I believe that he died for my sin. I believe he was buried. I believe he rose. I confess him as the Living Lord over my whole life. I give you the reigns. Would you change me? Would you forgive me?”

Father, I pray for those that just prayed that prayer, that you would comfort them, that you would give them peace, that you would give them courage to tell somebody what they did, that you would help us to celebrate as a family of faith every single person that just trusted you. I pray, God, that as a church family that we would be so active in looking at our life and looking at the times we look back and repenting and, Lord, looking at those times when we put something in the way of obedience. Would you take that away? Now, God, I pray for Addie as she’s about to be baptized in front of all of us. Thank you, God, for saving her. I pray that as she now wants to publicly identify, to tell every single one of us what you’ve already done in her life, to be a follower of Jesus Christ. I pray, God, that you would help us as a body to celebrate, and I pray that you would give her peace in her heart now. We love you. We are so grateful for what you have made available. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.



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