

Session 5

May 12, 2019

“LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR DEAD”

Luke 9:57-62

As a pastor, I have presided over countless funeral services. These meaningful memorials play a significant role in ministry. They give family members a sense of closure and provide an opportunity to honor their loved ones. In addition, pastors are given the opportunity to proclaim the gospel like no other time in a family's life. Having lost two close family members in the last four months has put me on the grieving side of things. In light of all that, how could our loving, compassionate Lord ever rebuke someone for wanting to attend his father's funeral? A careful interpretation of this passage will help us understand exactly what Jesus was implying.

Luke 9 is a lengthy chapter filled with activities. It includes Luke's account of everything from the commissioning of the disciples to the feeding of the 5,000 to Peter's confession, to the miracle on the Mount of Transfiguration. But all of those stories share one common characteristic: there are people around. Whether with just a few of the disciples (v. 28), or the entire group (v. 1), or the multitude (v. 11), Jesus was engaging in people's lives and consistently teaching them Kingdom truth. And with that teaching, Jesus emphasized the cost of discipleship. Rather than build up His numbers, Jesus spent the majority of His time running people off! The reason? He was not seeking *casual* followers; He was seeking *committed* disciples.

Following Christ means putting Christ ahead of earthly comforts (vv. 57-58). The popularity of Jesus had grown momentous. Something new and exciting was definitely happening. As He and His disciples moved from town to town, the crowds swept in behind Him. But who was really interested, and who was just along for the ride? The unidentified spectator in verse 57 called out to Jesus with an offer to follow Him *wherever He went*. That sounds like commitment! But few things in life offer more security than a place to call home. Jesus' analogy of the foxes and birds was a challenge to mankind's natural desire for earthly comforts. Even the animals had places to sleep at night, but the One who created them laid no claim to such comforts. Was this one who called out to Him really willing to forsake the security and comfort of home?

Following Christ means putting Christ ahead of earthly obligations (vv. 59-60). The second prospect mentioned (v. 59) was called out by Jesus. We have no details about what led to the invitation tendered by Christ, but the context would suggest a conversation or comment similar to the one above led up to it. This time the call to discipleship was rebuffed by personal-life circumstances. The request certainly sounds reasonable; even necessary. But details are few. Some suggest the father had died, and the son was participating in the traditional seven days of bereavement. But a better view is that the father was still alive, and the son was waiting for his passing, and all the obligations that sons were supposed to fulfill in the weeks that followed a father's death. Jesus' response seems harsh, but this man was really looking for an excuse *not* to follow Jesus. Under those circumstances, the comeback makes good sense. Those who are spiritually dead are more concerned with the routine obligations of physical life than the higher spiritual calling Christ requires of His followers.

Following Christ means putting Christ ahead of earthly relationships (vv. 61-62). In the final example, another delay is requested, this time to bid farewell to the family. The casual

commitment is evident by both the man's affections toward his family (see Luke 14:26ff) and his failure to name anyone specific. Jesus' response is pointed. The farmer who keeps looking back as he plows can't complete a straight row. Once he begins, he must focus on the end and move resolutely in that direction. So it is with following Christ.