

## The Kingdom: Living Within: Part 4

God is so big and so amazing. He removes from us every reason for worry, anxiety, and fear. He promises to provide for our practical needs; in fact, He will always provide for us everything we need both physically and spiritually to do all He has asked us to do. We live fully equipped in Him. He also satisfies and stabilizes our emotional construct. He even gives us a completely new identity in Him—an identity that comes with amazing and awesome responsibility. We learned that we are the agents by which the Lord's will in heaven is done on earth. What we bind on earth will be as has been already perfectly and continually bound in Heaven by God. And the same goes for loosening. It is an amazing responsibility.

God has actually been talking to us a lot about our new identity. But I want you to understand that unless we first embrace the idea that we are actually aliens and strangers in this world, as God refers to us in **1 Peter 1:17, 2:11** and **Hebrews 11:13**, we will never learn to own up to this spiritual identity. As long as we seek validation, worth, significance and identity from anything this world has to offer, we will remain living as “residents” of the kingdom of the world and not as true citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, tonight we are going to talk through a passage that is about radically disconnecting from this world practically and emotionally. It is extreme. I have to warn you, this passage is not popular and it will make you extremely uncomfortable (or at least it should); thus, it is often overlooked or quickly read and most people tend to miss the true depth of the passage. But, keep in mind, we will be studying the words of Jesus; they are not my words. I am just here to explain them and help

you apply them to your life. This passage deals with three different scenarios where people come to Jesus and make some broad declaration about their desire to be in relationship with Him. In each instance, Jesus' reply was not just intense but it was also divisive and was meant to separate between those who were looking for the Kingdom of God for real and those who were coming to Him for some other reason. These three scenarios come from **Luke 9**.

### **Luke 9:57-62**

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus 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." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Let's start with this first encounter. Not only is Jesus' reply provocative, this whole first interchange draws out three key attributes about the Kingdom. When it comes to the Kingdom of God, who chooses who? Jesus and His disciples were traveling along the road and this man says to Him: "I will follow You." This is rendered in the *future active indicative*. In other words, this man was making a

definite proclamation: I **WILL** follow you, and that is a statement of fact. You will see, I will. The idea however is not that this man is declaring his desire to become a travel companion, but to become an actual disciple of the Rabbi. This same idea, and Greek word, is expressed in **Mark 8:34, 9:38, and 10:21**. This man is zealously declaring his earnest desire to be a disciple and go wherever Jesus goes.

Now in the world of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, this is what would happen in the realm of discipleship. A young man seeking to be tutored in the ways of God would search for the right Rabbi whom He desired to emulate. He would begin to follow Him, along with a whole host of want-to-be disciples, all the while hoping that over time the Rabbi would notice how good of a student he is and would in turn choose him to be a disciple. Keep in mind, a Rabbi was considered to be the elite of society, the mucky-muck; therefore, a Rabbi was well “above” going out and searching for their own students. Rather, the best of the best would come to the Rabbi. That is how things would normally go down. But Jesus, as usual, turned the traditions of man and religion upside down. If you remember, when Jesus began His ministry, no one chose to follow Him. Rather, He came up to Peter and Andrew, while they were working, and said, “Follow Me.” He likewise called James and John and they immediately left their work, their father, their home, and followed Him (**Matthew 4:18-22**). Jesus chose His disciples, it was not the other way around; and Jesus reminded them of that fact in **John 6:70; and 15:16**.

Those who belong to the Kingdom of God are chosen, handpicked, by the Rabbi. **Ephesians 1:4** confirms this when it says He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless before Him. So from the get-go, this man had it all wrong. If he would have been a true student seeking God, he

would have studied the Rabbi and known that Jesus did not follow the status quo and did not do things the way other Rabbi's did things. Jesus calls out to many ("Come all who are weak and heavy laden"); but few could be described as His chosen, for Jesus hand-picked his own disciples. Accordingly, this man's bold proclamation is therefore an indication that he really did not know the Rabbi. Therefore, his hard and fast commitment was misplaced.

Clearly, this man was seeking something for himself, something to validate and affirm his own place in this world. He was not actually seeking to follow Jesus in the way of a true disciple. Likely, he just wanted the prestige, honor, and prosperity that came with following a Rabbi. Let me explain; a true disciple's goal was to become just like their Rabbi. They followed their Rabbi, lived with their Rabbi, studied them, and if they completed their training grew up to be an exact replica of their master. This mindset is captured in **Matthew 10:24-25**, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master." Thus, when this man declared, "I **WILL** follow you," he was making a lifestyle commitment to become just like Jesus, if Jesus would only choose Him in return. And therein lies the rub, which explains Jesus's somewhat cryptic answer: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Think about it, this is quite a strange retort to someone who just declared their loyalty and commitment to you. And keep in mind, Jesus was not talking about His accommodations for the night. At this time, Jesus had a significant following as well as His chosen disciples; and, as with every Rabbi, it was His responsibility to care

for the practical needs of His disciples. Thus, this was a statement to get at the heart of this disciple want-to-be.

"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." In essence, Jesus was saying that He does not belong to this world. This was a statement regarding His identity as an alien and stranger on this earth. You must understand, Jesus never intended to stay. He was on a very specific mission and never even intended, at least in this visit, to establish a physical throne in this earthly realm. He did not come to win the praise of people; rather, He came knowing He would garnish the hatred and ire of most. Jesus was merely passing through this kingdom of the world. Thus, He made the point that if you really want to follow, if you really want to be His disciple, then you will have to make the exact same radical choice to declare that this place is not your home and you have nowhere to lay your head. There will be no prestige or honor from man; you will not have a building in the school of discipleship named after you; and you will not have the young masses of students clamoring after you. This journey will not afford you any earthly fame, reputation, or guarantee you riches because the true disciples of Jesus **DO NOT BELONG** to this world.

I want you to understand that, even today, if you want to truly be a disciple of Jesus (and not just a disciple in name only), you must choose to identify yourself in this manner. The goal of a disciple is the same today as it was in Jesus' day: to be like the master in every way possible—to follow Him completely. For example, Jesus said in **John 12:26**, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." You must follow Jesus in order to serve Him—the two go hand-in-hand. You cannot

legitimately say you serve Him if, like Him, you are not practically and emotionally so radically detached from this world. Are you ready to declare to everyone in your life, family and friends, that you have nowhere to call your home—that you don't belong? Do you live this way? Do you make your choices as one who does not belong to this world? This puts an interesting spin on the passages we studied last week where the Lord said to seek first in time, priority, and order of importance the Kingdom of God.

Then, just to make sure this young man knew how radical and extreme Jesus' disconnection from this world really was, He said, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Cutting through the imagery, which I will explain, Jesus is saying that even the familiar demonic spirits of wickedness have a home in this world, but He doesn't and His true followers don't. Therefore, if you are seeking any fame, fortune, recognition, validation, and acceptance from this world, you are in effect ingratiating yourself to, and aligning yourself with, the demonic spirits that have found their home in the kingdom of this world. If that is the house you want to live in, go ahead.

Have you ever read this passage and thought why foxes and why birds? If He was really talking about personal accommodations, that would be a weird analogy. Why not lions, bears, elephants, or tigers? Throughout Biblical and Jewish literature, certain animals are used as a euphemism for demonic spirits. For example, in ***Leviticus 11:13-19*** there is a list of birds that are considered unclean. The Jews understood this in its literal sense, in terms of certain dietary restrictions; they were not to eat these unclean birds. But they also understood this list to be a picture into the spiritual realms and as a likening to demonic spirits. The same goes for the

passages in *Leviticus 16:10; Isaiah 13:21; 34:11-15; and Zephaniah 2:14* where birds and other animals are thought of as representations of demonic spirits.

To the Jews, the spiritual world and the natural world overlapped and they believed that the form of beast that we have in our world overlaps with the form of beast in the spiritual world; just as we see with the four Cherubim in *Revelation 4:6-7*. This is nothing new. From the ancient ruins of Egypt to all the kingdoms of Mesopotamia, the so called “gods” of antiquity were always depicted as mythic animals: part man/part beast. Even in the New Testament, in *Revelation 18:2, Mark 4:3-4, 14-15, Matthew 13:4, and 19* the imagery of birds is used to refer to what we would call the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places (*Ephesians 6:12*). And in *Song of Solomon 2:15* and *Luke 13:32*, the fox is also imaged as a demonic presence—a troublesome meddler.

Again, Jesus made the point that even the demonic spirits call this world their home. They have made their abode both in the ground and in the air; which makes sense since this world is the temporary kingdom of their supreme demonic lord, Lucifer. But Jesus and His true disciples **DO NOT BELONG** to this worldly kingdom. They are aliens and strangers; and, like Jesus, are merely passing through. They don't try to find, and they don't want to find, their praise, approval, identity, and comfort in the kingdom of the demonic; they want their praise, approval, identity, and comfort to come only from the Lord God Almighty. This young man was not ready to make that sort of commitment; he was not ready to be a true disciple; he was not ready to leave it all behind and follow. This incident dovetails perfectly into the next scenario.

“And He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’ But He said to him, ‘Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.’” Here is a perfect example of Jesus’s upside-down and inside-out way of doing things in His own school of Rabbinical training. The Rabbi comes to the student and calls Him to follow (which, again, was something never heard of). Yet, instead of asking, Jesus actually commands this man to follow (it is an *imperative*). This man’s reply is interesting; it is filled with contradiction? Although he calls Jesus “Lord,” he does not actually mean it. Instead of just obeying what his Lord commands (which He would do if he truly trusted that Jesus was His Lord), he starts negotiating. But even then, he does it in a very religious way. When he said “permit me,” it is also an *imperative*; thus, he says, “Lord command me to go and bury my father.” In so doing, he acts as if he is honoring Jesus’ position and authority and even acts as if Jesus is his master and he was just waiting for the word so he could be sent. But the fact that he is negotiating betrays the true condition of his heart and the true nature of their relationship. He is not a true disciple.

Now just so you understand, when this man says, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father,” his dad is not horizontal, at room temperature, smelling up the room; rather, it is a euphemism for saying, I am not yet ready. Let me go home and take care of my responsibilities and once my parents die and all my obligations are settled, then I will come and follow you. You see this man was carrying a responsibility to his earthly family that God did not require of him. The Lord wanted him, just like Peter, Andrew, James and John, to pack up and leave it all behind and



come follow. Remember, James and John left their dad mending the nets and Peter even left his wife all to come and follow the Rabbi.

Being a disciple of Jesus is radical. The prior statement of Jesus having no place to lay His head is so extreme that it even envelopes our familiar relationships. We all have obligations, duties, and responsibilities that family, custom, society, and even common sense give us; but Jesus does not operate from within this realm of earthly duty. Our responsibilities may be self-imposed and rooted in our personal goodness, ensuring that we are doing “right” by way of our family. They may be imposed by others and rooted in guilt and an overinflated sense of responsibility (usually because they are not responsible and they demand you to be responsible for them). But it does not matter where it comes from, all that matters is what Jesus requires of us; and He wants us to let the dead bury their own dead (which is a euphemism for their spiritual condition).

Jesus lived this way. Do you remember when Jesus was just a twelve year old boy and He and His family came to Jerusalem for the holidays. When the celebration was over, his mother and father left Jerusalem assuming Jesus was with his relatives and the entourage of travelers heading back home. But when they could not find Him, they understandably freaked out and searched for Him all over. They finally went back to Jerusalem and after three days they found Him in the Temple talking to the religious leaders. He gave them quite the fright. Being a Jewish mother, Mary of course started with the guilt: “Son, why have you treated us this way. Behold, your Father and I have been anxiously looking for you.” He responded to them, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?” (**Luke 2:41-52**). There was no apology. There was

no recognition of parental authority. There was not even an acknowledgement that it was simply rude. But Jesus did nothing out of a misplaced sense of responsibility to His earthly family. He made His decisions based on what His Father in Heaven wanted of Him.

Then there is the time when Jesus started His ministry and His mother and brothers literally thought He had lost His mind and tried to get Him to stop all His shenanigans and come home (**Mark 3:21**). When they arrived and it was reported that His mother and brothers were looking for Him, Jesus said: “Who are My mother and My brothers?’ Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother’” (**Mark 3:33-35**).

What drives your sense of responsibility? Do you only do what your Father in Heaven tells you to do, or do you take on the customary responsibilities of your family because it is the right thing to do, because it is expected of you, or because there is no one else to do it if you don’t? The life of a true disciple of Jesus is radical and extreme. Jesus says, let the dead bury their own dead. Therefore, our responsibilities, as those who are committed to do like their Rabbi, are to our true mothers, brothers, and sisters—those who do the will of the Father. They are the ones spiritually alive to us; the rest are spiritually dead; and you don’t normally have much responsibility to the dead. I know this is not something anyone likes to hear, but again, I am just explaining what Jesus has said.

Besides, Jesus demonstrated this same attitude with His own family. For example, in **John 7:1-9** we find Jesus talking to His brothers. They had been provoking Him telling Him to go to Jerusalem and show off His “God-stuff” so the

world could see His greatness. We know they were provoking Him because we are specifically told that even His brothers did not believe in Him. Jesus replied that they could go to Jerusalem any time they wanted, for the world did not hate them. It was a back-handed way of saying that they were like the rest of those going to Jerusalem, spiritually dead (**Luke 13:34-35**). The rote religious traditions did not mean anything to them and were of no spiritual impact, so what did it matter if they went. The dead can celebrate with the dead.

When Jesus told this man, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead,” it was more than a suggestion, it was a command to be obeyed (it is rendered in the *imperative*). Jesus is communicating that a true disciple understands they are an alien and stranger in this place and they have been brought into a new family, a family of those spiritually alive. Therefore, He wanted this man to choose to restructure not just his practical priorities, obligations, and responsibilities but his emotional ones as well. It is how a true disciple is to live. The dead will take care of their own; but a disciple of Jesus is to go and continue to go (“go” is rendered in the *aorist active participle*) proclaim or declare the Kingdom of God. And being rendered in the *present active imperative*, to “proclaim” the Kingdom of God is a command to be obeyed every moment of our now. How radical is this? This is extreme! This is what it means to be a disciple.

By the way, the Greek text does not include “everywhere” that was added by the translators who probably had a “missions” bias. If they were trying to pick up the feel of the *present* tense, they should have said, every moment of your now declare the Kingdom of God. That has a different implication than “go and proclaim

everywhere the Kingdom of God.” The Greek deals with a way of life; whereas, the translation attempts to insert a duty or obligation to go out and preach.

“Another also said, ‘I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” Now things even gets more extreme. This young man had the same issues of attachment buried in his soul as the others. Again, he plays with this idea that Jesus is his Rabbi and calls him “Lord,” and like the other even asks the “Lord” to command him to say good-by to those at home, presumably friends and family. But Jesus once again cuts to the quick and reveals the corruption in this man’s heart. “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” And with that statement the story is over, dialogue finished. This is the exclamation mark of this passage.

If you are the kind of person who encounters the “Lord” but is still so attached to this world that you cannot just leave it all behind, you are not fit for the Kingdom of God. This statement, along with a few other passages, is the nightmare that haunts so many in the world of Christianity; and, if it doesn’t, it should. The imagery of the plow is also quite salient. A plow turns over the earth, digs everything up, rocks, weeds, old growth, sticks, and prepares the soil for planting. This images for us the idea that if we follow Christ we will be used to dig up, turn over, and remove all the obstruction and waste in people’s lives in order that the Word of God might be planted in good soil. This is what others do in our lives. There is no sense of “Come to Jesus” and be saved in the modern sense of the word. It should be understood that if you truly come to Jesus, He will save you from yourself by tearing everything apart until the soil is ready to produce and be fruitful. Do you get the

picture? We know what that is like. We affectionately refer to it as the fire and the knife. The cutting away of all our attachments to this world and the burning away of everything in our lives that is not God. That is what it means to be saved.

Imagine, all this person wanted to do was to say good-bye to his friends and family; that should be a reasonable request. After all, if he just disappears and follows Jesus they will be worried and upset not knowing where he is (just like what happened with Jesus' parents when they were freaked out looking for Him). How could it ever be ok to cause his family and friends such unnecessary distress? Yet, Jesus knew his heart. This man's heart was filled with desire for all that was dead and dying. His wanting to say good-bye was in disdain or lack of appreciation for what is truly new and alive. And this desire in his heart made this person unfit for the Kingdom of God. It is this same intent to look with desire on all her worldly relationships that turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt when the Lord was delivering Lot's family from Sodom (**Genesis 19:26**). You cannot put your hand to the plow and continually look back (it is rendered as a *participle*) if you ever hope to properly prepare the field of someone's heart. You will be reckless and probably cause more damage than is needed.

Jesus' point was that if this man truly had the heart of a disciple, then his parents and friends would already know where to find him—doing the will of his true Father in heaven. In fact, they would not be surprised at all to find that he dropped everything and followed the Lord; they would be used to it. After all, isn't that what it means to seek first in time, priority, and order or importance the Kingdom of God? Thus, the mere fact that his parents and friends would be caught off guard is a warning in-and-of itself and an indicator of the true condition of his heart.

This guy said he wanted to follow Jesus, but what he wanted more was for everyone to be ok with him wanting God in this way. He did not want people thinking he was crazy, joining a cult, or going all radical on them. He valued their opinion of him more than he valued the Father's opinion. Thus, he was not fit for the Kingdom for God; and being rendered in the *indicative* we know it is a statement of fact—He was not fit! We all know people like that. They may know the truth, but are so reluctant to actually bet their lives on the truth because they value what people think of them far more than they value what the Father thinks of them. As a result, they are enslaved to others and their entire life they will make their choices based on that criteria: what others think of them.

Consider this following passage. We have studied it before so I won't spend a lot of time on it; but again, it drives home the radical and extreme nature of being a true disciple of Christ and not just a religious want-to-be that says, "Lord, Lord," but does not actually know Jesus as the Lord God Almighty.

**Luke 14:26-33**

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle,

will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

The point is that nothing, simply nothing, is to have a greater priority in your life than following the Rabbi; not your' family, not your wife, not your children, not your siblings, not your reputation, not your occupation, not your possessions, and not even your very life. Jesus is the Lord and He is the one makes us worthy of being His disciple. If we are unwilling to approach Him in this manner, He literally says in the Greek, "I will not now let you be my disciple," and that is a statement of fact (it is rendered in the *present passive indicative*).

That is so RADICAL and EXTREME! Jesus is telling everyone who makes the bold proclamation, "I **WILL** follow you," to count the cost for real. Jesus has no place in this world to lay His head; He does not belong to this world, and neither does His disciples. This is a world for demons, not for the children of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Remember, the goal of a true disciple is to be like their master. If this is how Jesus lived, then it is to be how we live. As hard, cold, and unloving as it may seem, we are to leave the spiritual dead to care for their own. Our job is to be about our Father's business doing only His will and His will alone. That is what demarcates a true believer from those who merely say they believe.

Now I want to quickly touch on the idea that this way of life seems unloving. I wholeheartedly disagree. I believe that playing religion, pretending, not going all

the way, is unloving because it is vapid, vacuous, a mere visage that is as much victim as it is vicious. It is a veneer, a vestige of vanity vowed to violently and volitionally vanquish the valiant of faith. Yet, however vivified and voracious, it simply is not real. Thus, it is unloving to ask them to follow something of such venal virulence vanguarding as valid. It's a total violation and the only verdict is a violent vendetta against our religious *flesh*, held as a votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous. Excuse the verbosity of my verbiage, but if you really love those who are now dead and dying, give them a reason to believe. Let them see that it is real in your life. Be a true disciple and let them see that it is possible to live free from the chains and control of this world. If they see Jesus in you, it will give them hope for their own lives—a hope that just might one day lead to true faith.

And here is the thing, in the realm of Christianity, people know these truths. They have read these scriptures; but they tend to avoid and ignore them because of their radical implications. Like these men, they say they want to follow, they declare they **WILL** follow, but when it comes down to it they don't really want to follow if it means such a total seemingly reckless abandon of all they have known and loved. They are too attached to this world and to those in this world. They care far too much about what the majority says about them and how they are going to get on in the kingdom of this world. As a result, they are unfit for the Kingdom of God; it is sad but it is the truth.

Now, I want you who have chosen to live this RADICAL and EXTREME existence, and who fully identify yourself as an alien and stranger in this world, to know that the Lord promises that He will not only care for your practical needs, settle your



emotional construct, lead you in your new identity, but He also promises to give you of abundance everything you walked away from.

***Luke 18:28-30***

Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You." And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Yes, Jesus will bind you to all those who do the will of His Father; and they will be your mother, father, brothers, sisters, wives, parents, and children, and so on. Jesus literally redefines the family—all relationships really. This is so hard, this is so uncomfortable, this is so not popular; and it seems so unloving, unnatural, and mean. But the Kingdom of God has no place in the kingdom of this world, and the implications are staggering. That is why so many are fine "following" Jesus, but so few are really actually ready to be His disciple. Jesus is calling us, commanding us really, to follow Him. He wants us to leave behind our attachments to this world that is dominated by the demonic. He wants us to leave behind this world that is lorded over by Lucifer, the king of this world. Likewise, I encourage you to obey this command. Leave it all behind and choose to seek first the Kingdom of God confident that all the things you leave behind will be added unto you in abundance.

Let's pray.