

# Devoted

by Glenn Meldrum

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*The early church's devotion was a complete and absolute surrender to Christ, which led to a lifestyle of obedience, fellowship, and prayer.*

**Duration:** 56:31

**Scripture:** Luke 9:57, Luke 9:59-62, Acts 2:41-42, Acts 2:47

**Topics:** "Devotion"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a series of events where Jesus encounters three individuals who express their desire to follow him. However, the speaker emphasizes that the concept of 'following' Jesus should not be understood in the same way as our modern society does. He explains that true devotion to Jesus requires a deep understanding of who he is and what he has done, including his death, resurrection, and ascension. The speaker also uses the analogy of a young boy learning to plow a field to illustrate the importance of staying focused and committed to following Jesus without distractions.

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## Transcript

Turn with me to Acts chapter 2, in the 41st verse. It says, those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

And in the final verse of that chapter, it says, And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. I want to look at the idea of devotion this evening. One thing we need to understand is that the early church devoted themselves for a reason.

The events that we just saw in that video, they saw in real life. They saw the real events. Now some of the apostles fled, it was the women who may have saw so much of that took place there.

But they knew those events, they were not mythical events. They weren't make-believe events, those were real events that they saw. Real events that they knew of.

They knew that he died on a cross. They knew that, without any shadow of a doubt, they knew that he had died. And the reality is that everybody who was crucified, there was never anybody who ever got off the cross alive.

And so there was no maybe of him being dead. He was absolutely dead, he was thoroughly, completely dead. There was no maybes of it.

They knew those events. And they knew the reality of his resurrection. It wasn't a maybe, it was an absolute.

They knew it, they knew he was dead, and they knew three days later he rose again from the dead. It was proved, it was demonstrated. And even so much so, he revealed himself to the apostles and some disciples, and we're not even told all the accounts that was given of him revealing himself.

But then we know at the very end when he ascended to heaven that over 500 people saw him ascend to the Father. They knew the reality of it. And we have to understand something, is they devoted themselves, because they were so thoroughly convinced of who Jesus was.

So thoroughly convinced of the events that took place. So thoroughly convinced of his death, of his resurrection, and of his ascension to the right hand of the Father. And so I want to look at the idea of devotion, because we have to really ask ourselves, are we devoted? We may think ourselves devoted by American standards, but are we devoted by biblical standards? Are we devoted according to what the Word of God says, to what he's calling us, to what the book of Acts says? We say we want to see the book of Acts.

We say we want to see the signs and wonders. We say we want to see the power and the people saved. We say we want to see the 3,000 that was saved, like the first verse I read there.

3,000 were added to the church that day, and then the Lord added daily to their numbers such as should be saved. We want to see the miracles, but do we want to live the life that it took to produce that? Do we want the book of Acts, but do we want the lives that produce the book of Acts? And that becomes the real crux of the matter, is do we want the lives that will produce it? Because until we're willing to live the apostolic lives, we'll not see the apostolic power. The apostolic power will be withheld from us until the apostolic lifestyles are following us.

And that's such an important thing. Today in our American culture, in our Christianized American culture that we have, that we end up thinking that we can give a half-hearted devotion, or we think devotion a little thing that we go to a Bible bookstore, and we get this little devotion, we read it for five minutes, and we've done our duty for the day. That we've taken care of our Christian duty, we pray a little prayer on the way to school or the way to work or something, and we've done our devotion, and it's over.

But we have to understand devotion from a biblical standpoint is totally different. The idea of devotion is not a little book you go buy, it is a lifestyle. It is that you give yourself completely, absolutely, unequivocally, everything that you own, everything you desire, everything of your life, every hurt, every pain, every want, every ambition, that you yield it entirely, absolutely, completely, without reservation, that you devote yourself completely to it.

What did they devote themselves to? They said they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. What was the apostles' teaching? Putting it very simple, the apostles' teaching was Christ's teaching. What the apostles taught is what they were taught from the Messiah, from the Savior.

And so they devoted themselves to it. They didn't go to the Gospels and say, is this convenient? Will I live it out? Is it going to prosper me? Is it going to bless me? Is it going to be comfortable? Do I like what it

says? They came to it and said, this is what Jesus said, what he said was true, who he was was absolute fact, there was no maybes, we saw it with our own eyes, we saw him raised again from the dead, we saw him ascend to the Father, we know it to be true, we will abandon ourselves to his word. The giving of themselves over to it.

Then it says they devoted themselves to fellowship. And the idea of fellowship, I'm not going to dwell on each of these things, they're very interesting, if you take the time to really understand it, the fellowship wasn't the idea that they came to church once or twice a week, it was the idea that they gave themselves over to each other, to the building up of each other, to the encouraging of each other, they met with each other on a constant basis, going from house to house and so on, encouraging, helping each other, because in a persecuted situation, they needed the encouragement, but you know what? In America, we think because we're not a persecuted people, we don't need a fellowship like that. But in a land of such prosperity, we need it as much as they do, because without it, we will become a worldly, self-centered, self-absorbed people.

And because we don't understand the importance of that issue, we live independent lives apart from that place of abandonment to Christ. And then they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread, and I believe what the idea of the breaking of bread is that they devoted themselves to the cross, because the breaking of bread speaks of communion, and it wasn't that they made some religious function that they had to do it X amount of times a month or whatever, they devoted themselves to what the communion was all about, what the breaking of bread was all about, and what it was about, about a Savior that came to this world, and was born in a manger, and walked this planet, and when his ministry began, he made the blind see the lame walk, and preached the good news, and he was crucified for us, and rose again from the dead, and ascended to the Father. They focused upon the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

It was the focal point. It wasn't prosperity, it wasn't ease, it wasn't comfort, it wasn't blessings, it wasn't all their desires and their ambitions, because all of our desires and ambitions will pass away. Heaven and earth will pass away.

All the things that we want and desire and pursue will all be done away with and will not matter in the scheme of eternity. What will matter is what we have done for him, and they focused upon the cross. We have become actually a people focused upon ourselves, focused upon our own desires, our own hurts, our own pains, our own struggles.

They became a people devoted to the cross and all that it meant. Then they devoted themselves to prayer. You know what it means that they devoted themselves to prayer? It means they gave themselves over to it.

It doesn't mean that it was a little thing that they put in a little portion of their life. It means that it's what defined their life, that it defined their Christianity, it defined everything. When they got together in fellowship, you know what the fellowship was? It wasn't talking about football.

Now I'm not going to say it's wrong to sit down and talk a little bit about it, but you know the main thing that they talked about was Jesus and what he did, and what was taking place in their lives and in the miracles that were taking place and loss that was being saved. And you know that what was the center of it all? It was this place of prayer because it's just not, they didn't want to just talk about Jesus, they wanted to commune with Jesus. They wanted him in the midst of them, not just discussing theology and the Bible, which is wonderful and good, but they wanted to be in communion with him.

They wanted him in their midst. And they devoted themselves to that. And what I want to do is I want to look at devotion from the standpoint of Christ.

The reason why I want to look at Jesus and his idea of devotion, because the early church got their idea of devotion from Jesus. So if we want to understand how the early church understood devotion, we need to understand what Jesus had to say about devotion. And really Jesus spoke so much on devotion, it's outrageous if we just would understand what he was really saying.

And he doesn't say that word, he implies the whole concept of devotion again and again and again. But we're going to look at one section of scripture. And if you would turn with me to Luke chapter 9 the 57th verse.

What's taking place is Jesus had his face set to go to Jerusalem and because his face was set to go to Jerusalem as he was passing through Samaria, the Samaritans and the Jews had great prejudice and animosity against each other. Because he had his face set to go to Jerusalem, the Samaritans rejected him. They wouldn't even give him a place to stay so he had to pass through the Samaritan villages to go to a Jewish village to spend the night there.

And so Jesus is walking with his apostles and disciples and with many other people I don't believe that in this setting. I believe many times as Jesus went from village to village, it wasn't just a couple of people. I believe there was throngs following them.

People that were just thrill seekers but also those who were want to be disciples and some that were disciples and the apostles and so on. There was a whole company of this. So the setting that is presented to us here is this idea.

Jesus is walking along. His apostles are there. Some disciples are there.

Some want to be disciples are there. And they're walking along. And Jesus, what I believe he did all the time, he made the most of every opportunity and he's walking along.

He's teaching. And I just believe as he's going to Jerusalem, he's teaching. And this is the situation we're going to look at here.

Jesus is going to speak to three men. And these three men are going to respond to Jesus. And Jesus is going to respond to them with a parable.

A little parable, a little proverb in essence. And each of these little parables, we could refer to them as open-ended parables. And what I mean by that is they are parables that the answer is never given to.

So we don't know the response. We don't know what these three men did in response to what Jesus had to say. And so Jesus does that in many of his parables.

He has them open-ended. So you don't know what the answer is. You want to know why he did that? So that we could put our own lives into it.

So that we could give our personal responses. So that's what we have to do with each of these men as we look at this thing. What would we do if Jesus said this to us? Now let's read the section of Scripture in the 57th verse.

It says, as they were walking along the road, a man said to Jesus, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus replied, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests. But the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

He said to another man, follow me. But the man replied, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. Jesus said to him, let the dead bury their own dead.

But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God. So another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family. Jesus replied, no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

Now I'm going to touch on something and it's going to come out especially in the second and third parables. I'm going to be touching on some new scholarly work that has been taking place. I think that's very interesting.

And what it is, is one of the scholars lived for 25 years in the Middle East in villages, you know, among the village people, among the peasants. And then he was raised in the Middle East as well. So he has, you know, 50 years or whatever it would be in the living in the Middle East before he even wrote this.

And his scholarly work is trying to go back into the lives of peasants. And what it was, because Jesus spoke to peasants. He was speaking to the common poor people of the day.

And so there were situations that were being dealt with that many times we don't understand, especially from a Western mindset. And so I think there's some interesting thought that comes out as we begin to look at what Jesus has to say here. And so let's begin with the first parable.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. This man volunteers to follow Jesus. And that's a good resolution, isn't it? It's a wonderful resolution to go and say, yeah, I'll follow Jesus.

That's a that's a good thing. You know, we want people to say that. But you know, there's a problem with Jesus.

And what it is, is he knows your heart. You know, you can say something to him and he knows the reality of it. You'll see this many times when Jesus deals with people that he is not dealing with the issue that they're mentioning.

He deals with their heart. The rich young ruler is an example of it. This rich young ruler comes to Jesus and he tells Jesus that he kept the commandments all the commandments.

That was an absolute lie. Jesus could have taken a few minutes and showed him he broke every one of the 10 commandments, but he didn't do that. He knew the real idol of that man's heart and he went after the idol of his heart and it was his wealth.

And so when he confronted the man with his wealth, he walked away and he wouldn't follow Jesus. So that's what Jesus does. He goes after the heart issues.

And so we can give these excuses why we're not doing this or why we're not doing that or whatever. But he wants to go after those little idols, those things that are really controlling our lives, those things that are dominating us. And that's what he does with this man.

And so this man says, I'll follow you wherever you go. Jesus replied that foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head. You see, Jesus was understanding something about this man that it was a selfish pursuit of him.

He was going after Jesus for what Jesus had to give, not for who Jesus was. Now let's look at this picture a little bit more from a Jewish mindset of 2000 years ago before the resurrection. They may have believed that he was Messiah, but what would that have meant to their minds of that situation? They would have thought that Jesus being Messiah as being a son of David would come to the throne of Israel and he would become the power of Israel as the king and he'd have amassed this great army and overthrow Rome and the tyranny of Rome and Israel would become the praise of the world and Jerusalem, the city of God, where all the world would come to worship.

And so you know what that would mean is if you, if Jesus became the king and you were one of his insiders that you'd be some of the people in the high places of power. You wouldn't have to go through an election like we just went through. You'd be appointed in essence and so man, this guy was going to say, Jesus, I'll follow you wherever you go, man.

Yeah, you're going to Jerusalem and you're going to be king. I mean, you're going to get rid of all these Romans and you know, I'd like to be right there. I'd like to be one of your cabinet.

You know, in essence, that's what he was saying. I'll follow you if you give me what I want. I'll follow you if life is easy, if you bless me, if you prosper me, if you if you give me the expectations of my heart.

But you know what Jesus was doing? He was attacking that very thing. He was laying siege to that very thing because he was saying, foxes have holes and birds have nests. He says, but I don't have anywhere to lay my head.

And what he was trying to say is, will you follow me if I have nothing to give you? Will you follow me as if you're going to be in need and poverty if you're not going to have the expectations of your heart? If you're not going to have all these these desires fulfilled within you, will you still follow me? Will you follow me if the if all the ambitions that you have designed in your life never come to pass? Will you still follow me? Will you still serve me though you don't know you have these desires and they don't come to pass? Will you still serve me? This one Arab commentator, what's interesting about Arab commentators is they don't approach the word of God from a Western mindset that we have and sometimes really taints the word. And so he makes a statement in relation to this, this Arab commentator. He says this man that Jesus is speaking to, he does not understand that to follow Jesus means Gethsemane, Golgotha and the tomb.

He thought that to follow Jesus meant a throne. He didn't understand that it wasn't a throne, that if you follow Jesus you have to go to the garden with him and you have to weep with him over a perishing world. That if you follow Jesus that you got to go to the cross and you got to die.

That if we want the resurrection that we've got to first follow him through the garden and to the cross. And that's not what the man wanted. He wanted a nice Christianity.

He wanted a happy Christianity. He wanted a Christianity that gave him everything he desired, everything he dreamed of. Not a Christianity where he got a living savior that would take him right through the garden and take him to the cross.

And so he was willing to follow a popular leader. Would he follow a rejected one? Would he follow a rejected one? Because you know what happened is if you followed a rejected leader, you know what that would mean? That means you'd be a rejected follower as well. I mean, there's no other way around it.

You would be rejected along with him. Now we know Peter ran away from it because he didn't want to be rejected. And he denied the Lord three times because he didn't want to be rejected.

But we know after that, after the resurrection, after he found forgiveness and eventually, you know, in years later, he laid his life down. He did finally give up his life. He finally came to the point where he would be willing to do it, where he loved Jesus more than his own life, more than his own self-preservation, more than his own happiness and desires and ambitions.

But Jesus had to do a lot of work on the man to bring him to a point to be willing to give that all up. And so let me ask a question. Are you like that man? Are you like the man that you'll follow, Jesus, so long as it's good, so long as it's convenient, so long as you get what you want? You know, young people, will you follow him just so long as everything is going fine and there's a guy in the youth group that you like and he pays a little attention to you? Will you still follow Jesus or is it that you're really following Jesus at all? Is it contingent upon what you get or is it upon who Jesus is? You see, the early church devoted themselves to Christ because they knew who he was.

They saw a crucified, resurrected Lord. They were so thoroughly convinced of it. They devoted themselves to it.

And you want to know one reason why I believe that the American church is not devoted to Christ? Because we don't believe he is who he really says he is. We question it. We'll go and we'll say amen to a point.

But do I believe him to the point that I would give up my rights, my life, my ambitions, my desires, my wants, my possessions, would I give it all up? Do I really believe him to be that? Am I yet convinced of his resurrection and of his death? Am I convinced of it, that I will devote myself everything that I have, everything I desire, will I devote myself to him because I know he is who he said he is? K.P. Yohanan was a man who started a ministry in India. He himself is Indian. Never wore shoes until he was 17 years old.

I'm not going to go through his life. He gave a story though of some missionaries. And these were five young pioneer missionaries.

And they were called to go to a northern state in India. I know I'll pronounce it wrong. I'm pronouncing it as a westerner.

It's Raghestan. And they had no money for the train fare, let alone for food or rent. And everyone begged them to stay at home.

But this was their answer. If we have no money to go by train, then we will walk the 1500 miles to get there. If one of us becomes sick and dies on the way, we will bury him on the roadside.

And the rest of us will continue on. If only one of us survives the journey and reaches Raghestan and places one gospel tract on that hot desert sand of that state before he dies, we will have fulfilled our mission and we will have obeyed our Lord. What a concept.

What an alien concept in America. It's not about the aspect, I will follow Jesus if I have all the stuff I want. It's the idea I will follow him because he is who he says he is.

He did what he said he will do and he is worth the abandonment of my life whether I get what I desire or not. Whether I prosper or not. Whether life is easy or not.

Whether all my dreams are fulfilled or not. I will follow him because of who he is, not because of what I get. But you know in our country we have developed a whole doctrine of prosperity that centers upon the aspect that we'll follow Jesus for what we can get from him.

Because we deserve to prosper. Rather than the aspect that he deserves my abandonment. I don't deserve his prosperity.

Now let's look at the second parable. Jesus said to another man, follow me. Now just think of this situation here.

Jesus walking along and this young man comes up to him and says, I'll follow you Jesus wherever you go. And Jesus responds to him. And soon as he's done responding to him, here's this other young man that maybe came up with him.

And he turns to him and says, you follow me. I think these events are taking place one right after another. It's kind of this situation that probably takes place just in a couple of minutes time.

And probably some really intense stuff. And I would imagine because Jesus had the Holy Spirit without limitation that the presence of God was there in such a tangible way that conviction was flowing through the whole place and everything else and rattling these guys' cage. And so Jesus turns to this man and says, follow me.

Now that sounds reasonable, doesn't it? So this man, Jesus, pursues. The first one says I'll follow you. The second one, Jesus, pursues.

The third one says I'll follow you. But you know, the problem is we've got to understand follow from the standpoint of what Jesus is saying, not from our American society. What do we think of when we say follow me? Well, follow me, okay? Follow me to Starbucks.

Follow me so far, so long as it's convenient. And if it's not good, I'll just turn around and go back home. Follow you so far.

It's always contingent. It's like today, the way marriages work. For better, for worse, for richer, or poorer, as long as I think it's okay.

Those are all lies anymore. They shouldn't say that anymore. It's all lies.

They're coming, they're lying. They know that they have no intention for better, for worse, because it's not in their hearts. It's for convenience.

It's for happiness' sake. And if we have that whole concept in relationship to each other, how do we think we're not going to have that same concept with Christ? And so this man is hearing this from Jesus, and Jesus is saying, follow me. But the man knew what follow me was.

Let's look at a couple of illustrations of what follow me is. In the beginning of the Gospels, Jesus goes to a couple of men that are fishing, and he says to them what? Follow me. What does it say? It says they left everything and followed him.

And then it gives another story of a couple men that were with their father fishing. And Jesus goes to those men and says, follow me. It says they left their father and their nets.

So they left their family and they left their livelihood. And they left it all and followed Jesus. You see, following what Jesus was saying when he said, follow me.

You know what that would mean to them, to their minds, to that day and age? Jesus would be saying to them, stop everything you're doing. Stop the way you're living. Stop the way you're acting.

Stop what you're pursuing. Stop everything. And start something brand new, what I'm telling you.

Christianity is radical to the bone. It's absolutely totally, completely radical. And somehow we're forsaking that in America.

We're making following Jesus contingent upon convenience. But that has no part of the kingdom of God. Jesus said follow.

Now you know what that means? That means I have to take everything I have, everything I own, everything I am, every desire I have, every hurt, every struggle, pain, everything in my life. And I have to take it to the foot of the cross and I have to put it at the foot of the cross. And I have to leave it there.

And I have to be willing to let him keep everything and anything he wants. Whether it's my job, whether it's my money, whether it's my any, everything. I have to lay it all at his feet, give it all up freely to him and let him give back to me what he chooses to give back to me.

Another way we could think of it is that I have to take everything that I hold on every loved one, every possession, everything and put it in the palm of my hand and hold it forever in my life while I'm on this planet, hold it in the palm of my hand and let God reach into it and take anything out he choose to take out and put anything in that he choose to put in. And I must refuse never to grab hold of what he puts into it and grab hold of it and then make it my own and say, I will not let it go because you know how many times that God has given us something or maybe not even God gave us something. We grabbed hold of something we wanted and we grabbed hold of it and then it became an idol to us.

And if God tried to take it away, we'd cop attitudes and bitterness and anger at him and say, why'd you do this? Why'd you take this from me? Because we clung to the thing. We turned it into an idol. And so we have to take everything we have, everything at all, absolutely everything and put it before him and let him take anything out that he desires and put anything in that he wants.

To follow him means I must make myself totally, completely vulnerable to him. Totally vulnerable. But you want to know what? The only way I'll truly make myself vulnerable to him is that I believe that he is who he said he is.

That he did what he said he did and that he is faithful to do what he promised to do. Now, the response of this young man is interesting. He says, first let me go and bury my father.

Now, you know what's so interesting? You can go to commentary after commentary after commentary and you'll find them all wrong. You wonder why they're all wrong? Because they interpret that little phrase from a Western mindset. They do not interpret it from a Middle Eastern mindset.

There's one man that wrote on this very thought. He makes a statement. He says, the phrase to bury one's father is a Middle Eastern traditional idiom that refers specifically to the duty of a son to remain at home and care for his parents until they are laid to rest respectfully.

You know what that means? That means that a son, it is the duty, it is the responsibility, it is the cultural responsibility of a son to take care of his father until his father dies. This wasn't about a father that was ready to die. You don't know if this man would have lived a year or 50 years.

You have no idea. This young man has no idea. But it was the culture.

There were no concept of convalescent homes. You didn't take your parents and put them in a convalescent home. You took care of your parents no matter what it cost you.

You cared for them. You loved them. You nurtured them.

Even if they were in senility and so on, you took care of them. That was the culture. You do not abandon your parents.

There was, in our culture, we revere youth and we reject seniors. But you go to other cultures, it's the total opposite. I mean, they think when you're old that you have come to the place where you have knowledge, you have wisdom.

And they revere those who are older because of the wisdom and the experience that they have. And the whole idea in the Middle East would be that they would pass that wisdom down from one generation to the next generation. It was a thing of great honor to take the wisdom of your father and take it in your own life.

So that you could take it and pass it on to your children. It was the idea within families that it was a noble thing. This is still going on in the Middle East.

We have to understand what I'm saying here is still happening. You can go into Middle Eastern villages that haven't changed for 2,000 years. Because they think it a noble thing to stay the same.

They think it a noble thing for the son to do what the father did, to do what the grandfather did, to do what the great grandfather did, and so on for generations. They think to veer from that occupation would be a disgrace to your father and to all your parents before you. That it was a noble thing to continue the family line, to continue the family tradition, the family business.

And so, Jesus is going to respond to the man in a way that is so radical. We don't understand how radical this is. This man actually is putting off Jesus to a convenient time.

He's going to Jesus, I'll follow you later. I really like to. I think all this excitement is wonderful and maybe I'll show up once in a while for some exciting time, but I don't know whether I really want to commit myself to you.

Besides, I've got some cultural pressures upon me. Some cultural things that are moving me in a particular direction. I don't want to go against the flow of the culture.

Now there's another dimension of this that I want to touch on that I think is so important. You see in the Middle East, it's a patriarchal society. You know what that means? That means that the father rules the family.

How does that work in the Middle East? You have the father that rules the family. He rules the children. But he rules the children that are young and the children that are old.

He rules the children that have now their own wives and have their own children. He rules the grandchildren. He rules all under him as long as he's alive.

He is the voice, the ultimate authority of that entire clan. And when he dies, the eldest of his sons would take that position and then he would pass on. It was a noble thing to be under that.

And so your father had absolute rule over you. You didn't do anything without permission of your father. It was an absolute.

It was a patriarchal society. That is what everything was. You didn't do anything apart from the blessing of your father.

Look at that with the patriarchs in the scripture. You know the importance of the blessing of the father. The child never wanted the cursing of a father.

So they would walk in their place of obedience to him that they might have the blessing because they believe so importantly of that blessing upon their life. Because if they had a curse, it would literally curse their life. If they had a blessing, it would bless their life.

The problem is he had a greater commitment to his father and to his culture than to Christ. Now you know what's so radical about this? Jesus is standing against the entire culture and he is saying I will have greater authority over your life than your culture. I'll have greater authority over your life than your parents, than your spouse, than anybody in this world.

And you know how radical that would be? I can just imagine when Jesus responded to that, what happened is all the apostles and disciples, their mouths gaped open. They all looked at him in absolute astonishment because of that culture. It was right to obey your father.

And Jesus is saying, no, I am the ultimate authority. I am the supreme source of authority. You will obey me.

We have to see how this works in our day and age because our culture is pushing upon us to be a particular people, to dress a particular way, to act a particular way, to think a particular way, trying to force us in particular ideas and to be a particular type of people, to believe particular things. We have a culture screaming at us to accept ungodliness and make it a normal thing. And we are called of God, no matter if it means the giving up of our lives for it, to stand for what he says is true, not for what a culture stands for says is true.

But how often is it that as a church we are compromising because it's difficult at times to stand against the culture. Stand against the culture of a workplace, of the school. Young people, you got pressures at school.

Are you standing against the culture of a school that is trying to push you away from Christ, trying to drive you away from Christ? Are you standing in opposition, in defiance to a world that's trying to take you from Christ? Because there's a world that is hostile to you because it's a hater of your souls. Do you have the courage to stand and say no, I will not bow my knee to the gods of this world or are you giving in because you don't want to be strange? You don't want to seem weird. You don't want to seem out of place.

Jesus made a statement in Luke 14. He said if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Jesus was saying something here so radical again.

He says if you don't love me supremely, it doesn't say that you'll be a bad disciple or a poor disciple. He says you can't be his disciple then. That the only way you can be his disciple is you must love him supremely.

That you must love him more than a spouse, more than children, more than parents, more than a friend or whatever. You must love him supremely and if we love him supremely that means he has supreme authority over our lives. That we relinquish the right of authority of ourselves or the right of authority of others over us as we go to him and we allow him to be the supreme source of authority.

Now that's disturbing though. Do we have the courage to stand against a culture that's trying to push us in other directions or loved ones that are trying to have us be less than what we're supposed to be, what Christ has called us to be? I want to make a point here that I think is important though. That Jesus wasn't trying to undermine the family.

Jesus loves the family. Let me just establish this for a moment. Jesus created the family.

It is his idea. It is his creation. But you know when sin came into the world, sin became the corrupter of the family.

What he designed it to become beautiful and pure and holy, we have created to be that which has twisted it and demented it and perverted it. His love is so great for us that he will destroy a family to save one. Do you hear what I'm saying? He wants a whole family saved.

But there are some families that they're not going to be saved. That he'll save a husband or a wife or a child and destroy the whole family if that's what it takes to save that one. He'd rather have that one saved than all of them to go to hell.

He wants the whole family saved. Ultimately that's what his desire is. But we have to understand that his love of us as individuals means that he will work in our lives as individuals even if it means the breakdown of a marriage, the breakdown of a family.

What does he do? He goes to this man and he brings upon him something more important than family. Now this is a disturbing thought. Something more important than culture.

What did he say? He says, let the dead bury the dead. You go and proclaim the kingdom of God. He was bringing something into their life more important than the selfish pursuits of things of this world.

You know you can go out there and make money and you need to make money to put food on the table and so on. And it's right to do it and it's right to make the right amount of money and to be able to take care

of the home. But you know where's the place then that finally it's no more about putting food on the table and having a nice house that can take care of the family.

That now it's just pride and greed and insecurities and fears and you've got to have more and more and bigger and better and all the other stuff that drive us and push us and compel us. That we become things that weren't meant to be because these desires in us haven't been conquered by God. He's calling us to this place that we love him supremely.

And he's giving us a call that is more important than the making of money or the building of houses or whatever else it is. Something more important and it's go and proclaim the kingdom of God. What will matter in eternity is not what you have accumulated in this world.

What will matter in eternity is what you did for the kingdom of God. What you have done in building his kingdom and winning a perishing world to him. That's what will matter.

It won't matter the clothes you wear, whether you're in fashion. You know whether you have a nice car, fancy car, whatever. None of that stuff is going to matter in the end.

What will matter is whether you have souls to lay at the feet of Jesus. That's what will matter. And so often we don't live in light of eternity.

We live in light in the temporal. And you know what's so interesting? And I want to disturb you with this. Jesus will never accept our cultural excuses of why we didn't follow him.

He will not accept your culture excuses. Young people, he will not accept your cultural excuses of it's so hard at school. It may be hard at school, but you want to know what? I believe that there's a God of grace that will give grace for any young person that wants to stand in school.

He will not accept our excuses. So that means we have to conquer our excuses. That means we have to crucify those excuses.

That means we have to be willing to have the courage to stand up and to love Christ more than ourselves, more than all that's around us, more than the culture. There's a pastor from India who had come to the U.S. and he made this interesting little statement in one of his sermons. He said they killed Stephen, but the disciples kept preaching.

James was killed, but they kept preaching. My wife doesn't have any real teeth, only plastic ones, because she was beaten for the gospel. They beat me and almost killed me.

They almost killed my sons, but we keep preaching. What a thought of devotion. What a thought of devotion.

Why did they devote themselves? Why did they devote themselves in such a way? Because they knew who this Jesus was, that he died upon a cross, that he was beaten, and that he rose again from the dead, and that he ascended to the Father. They knew who he was. They believed who he was, and they were willing to follow him because of who he revealed himself as.

Now what's the final parable? So now, think of the story. Here's this one man comes up to Jesus. I'll follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus responds to him. And then Jesus turns to one man and says, follow me. And then right after it, can you just imagine a man maybe on his other side that heard all the dialogue going on, all that's going on? And so in the excitement of the moment, he responds, and he tries to respond with greater passion than the other two.

He says, I'll follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family. Now that sounds pretty reasonable, doesn't it? And you know, here again, I think there's a lot of error with the commentators because they don't understand the culture. The problem comes down to be with a Greek word.

And you know what that Greek word is? The Greek word for that is used here is goodbye. Nowhere in the New Testament is that Greek word ever translated goodbye. Nowhere else.

Only in this place. You know what that word actually means? It means to take leave of. And because of commentators and because the translators did not understand the culture, they didn't know how to translate the word correctly.

But now understanding the culture, we understand the correct use of the word here. So there's this idea of taking leave. Well, what does taking leave mean? Well, let's look at the culture.

Let's take it in the place of a dinner. You're invited to somebody's house. This is Middle Eastern now.

This is an American. This is Middle Eastern. You're asked to a house to eat.

And it is a great honor to go to that house. And so you go to that house and you have your formalities that you go through and everything else that happens. And when you're done eating and you have all the things that went on of the evening, you never go to your host and say, well, thank you for the dinner.

It's been wonderful evening. We're going to go home now. You never do that.

That would be that would be an insult to your host. It would just and something you would never do. You'd never insult your host like that.

Now, in America, that's what we do. And that's not right or wrong. It's just the cultures are different in that.

And so, you know, I do it all the time. I'll be at somebody's house and I think it's time. It's getting late.

And I'll say, well, thank you. And and then I leave. But in the Middle East, you wouldn't do that.

You have to ask permission. May I take leave of you? And you can't leave until your host says yes. So as if you go and say, may I go? And he says, no, you sit right there and you sit there and you keep eating or you keep doing whatever you do until the host says you go, whether it's an hour or whether it's five hours, you stay there until the host says you are able to leave because the leave would be an insult to him.

Now, I want you to think of that in the situation of a father now going back to the patriarchal family. You don't do anything without taking leave of your father. You don't do anything without taking leave of your father.

Now, you see, this young man goes and he makes a bold statement. He says, I will follow you. But, you know, I want you to listen to me here.

As we can say some very bold things and have them be very cheap promises. No guts to back them up. No life, no desire to say something.

How many times we went and says, says, I'll do something. And we said it just flippantly off the top of our head and never had the intention of doing it. And we can do the same thing.

We can go to God and make a promise to him says, oh, yeah, I'll do this. I'll do I'll never do that again. And there we are, because we weren't willing to put the life behind it, the desire, the passion that it would take to and seek the grace to live it out.

And so Jesus knows when we have a bunch of bold words and she promises. Well, I want to ask you that. Is your promise to God, which is the most important promise you've ever made that when you bowed your knee and you said, Jesus, I'll serve you all the days of my life is that cheap promises or is that something that you're willing to to no matter what it costs you to fulfill that.

Even to your own hurt. Well, I see today a lot of cheap promises. I'll go so far.

I'll follow Jesus until the right guy comes along until the right girl comes along or if I get a job, well, you know, I can't come to church anymore on Sundays because they want me to work Sunday. So, you know, I don't have time right now. And so that's more important because I want to buy a car.

I mean, understand the dynamics. I'm saying that to young people, but it's just as much for all those that are older. We have those same things.

I'll work. I'll do it so long as it's convenient and comfortable and works in my life with the very idea where this young man went and says, let me go and first take leave of my father. He was saying, let me go back and get permission from my father.

Every single person in that crowd when they heard that man say that they would have known immediately that their father would never allow this. You wonder why? Let's go back to the culture here. You have a patriarchal society.

Jesus is speaking to an agricultural society in this situation. Sometimes he was speaking to farming out to a fishing communities. This is a farming community.

And so what he's doing is he is going to address this from a farming understanding from a concept that they would have. And so the idea of a father that he has these boys under him that's going to help take care of the farm. And if you want the farm prosperous, you need these boys to be there and to invest in and then to raise their children so that their children can help take care of the farm.

And if you have one of your sons go away, you lose not just the son, but you lose the children, the grandchildren that come up under that. I mean that the ramifications of this, the hurt that it could be to the family is tremendous. A father would never let his son to go run around with some wild prophet around the country, would never allow it.

And he knew that, let me ask permission, let me get permission for my father to follow you. And they all knew that the father would never give him permission. And so you know what Jesus says? He says, no man that puts his hand to the plow and looks back.

Let me just touch on that, no man who puts his hand to the plow. Well let me, I'm jumping ahead here. I want to touch on a point I think is important.

I want to deal with a moment, for a moment, our culture. Because this man was actually letting his father decide whether or not he would walk with Jesus. And his father and culture.

And I want to ask how this plays out today in your culture. How do you have to get permission of others to walk with Jesus? Why don't you think about that? How do you have to do that? Well you know, you can look at in school settings is do you have to have permission of your friends to walk with Jesus? And what if your friend doesn't give you permission? What are you going to do? Are you going to not walk with Jesus? You're going to cower in the corner? You're going to stop being what you should be? What if you have some friends that start telling you you should dress a particular way and you know that it's really sleazy and so you start dressing a particular way because that's the pressure and you don't want to go against the crowds so you're wanting to submit and kind of give in. You're letting them define whether or not you're going to be a Christian.

In essence you're going to them. It says will you grant me the right to be a Christian or not? And the world's not going to grant you the right to be a Christian. They're never going to grant you that right.

They're not going to allow it. You have to take that right. You have to say I will follow God no matter what you say, no matter what you think, no matter what your opinion is about.

I will follow Christ no matter what the price is. Whether you reject me, whether you hate me, whether you want nothing to do with me or whether you love me, that's irrelevant. I will follow him because he is true.

But you know we can do that as older people. I mean how many times have guys gone into the shop, they start having the shop talk, start letting the garbage come out of their mouths because now they're letting the guys in the shop define them, give them permission whether they'll be a Christian or not. Or you have it in the office where the gossip's flowing and here's this woman that's a Christian and getting in all the gossip.

In essence she has went and says will you allow me to be a Christian? No, we're going to talk about gossip. Okay, I give up. Yes, I'll just kind of flow with everything and we'll just want to rock the boat here.

You understand we can let culture, we can in essence give permission to the culture to define our Christianity. We're doing that all the time. More than we understand.

Allowing the culture to define our lives. And Jesus says you can't do that. He says no man that puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of heaven.

Now let's look at that. Here's an agricultural thought to an agricultural community. Let's just say that there's this boy that's coming to adult age and so dad's going to teach the junior how to plow.

And so he takes the boy and he teaches him how to hook up the oxen, you know how to put the plow on and everything else and gets it in the field and gets it all set up and teaches him all the things. And you know what's interesting about this? His father is teaching his son what his father taught him and what his father's father taught him and what's been passed down for ten generations. All the wisdom of all these generations trickling all down to this boy now.

And he's allowing this wealth now to come into him. How to do that which all of his fathers before him had done. And the boy would think this is a tremendous privilege.

And so here his father is pouring all this into him. How to plow and now it's finally time. And daddy says okay start.

And so whatever noise it is that he makes and the oxen take off and the kid's doing pretty good and going along and doing a good furrow down the field. But a kid has an attention span, a twelve year old has an attention span for what, five minutes? Maybe it was a little longer back then because they didn't have video games and all the others. So let's say ten minutes, okay? So he's doing good ten minutes.

But plowing gets old after ten minutes. I mean the thrill's gone. It's not like sitting in a tractor and you can turn on the air conditioning today and the stereo and so on.

Man, it's just sweating out there and it's hot and it's, you know, it's just rough stuff. And so after ten minutes he's starting to get bored and he hears a noise over there. He's going along and he looks over there.

When he does the oxen start going that way. And dad freaks out going whoa, whoa, whoa, stop, stop, stop, stop. Keep your head straight.

Don't look to the right or the left. Keep it straight. Oh, okay, dad, sorry.

And he goes on again and he gets it going and it's doing good. And after five minutes all of a sudden he hears a noise behind him. Turns back like this.

And then the oxen just go wham, wild. And dad's yelling up a storm and trying to get the boil straightened out. There's a reason for this.

Because you know what happens if you get your rows going like this? You don't get as many rows. And you know what happens if you get the depth of it going like this? You plant your seed and that which is deep will never come up and that which is shallow will be burnt up. That means you'll only get about a third of your crop.

And you know what that would mean to a family? That would mean death. That would mean starvation. That's a serious thing.

Now Jesus responds with this, this very vivid picture that all the people, all the culture, this agriculture culture would understand. And he speaks to them something and he says that no person, and I give you permission to take your pen and scratch out that one word that is nowhere in the Greek. Nowhere, anywhere, cannot be found.

It is a commentary that many translations put in it and it's erroneous. You know what that word is? It's service. The scriptures does not say that they will be not fit for service in the kingdom of God.

It says they will not be fit for the kingdom of God. And we put service in there because well you're just going to be, if you look back, you're just going to be a bad disciple. That's not what Jesus is saying.

You look back, you're not my disciple. Whole radical different thing. If you're not fit for service, then you're not fit for the kingdom.

And so Jesus being radical here as usual, and he's saying, you know, you put your hand to the plow, you can't look back. You've got to go to daddy and you want to follow me. You've got to say goodbye to dad.

You've got to say goodbye to mom. You've got to say goodbye. You've got to be willing to follow me no matter what the cost is.

No matter what the price is, whether you're persecuted, whether you're beaten, whether you're rejected from everybody, or whether they all love you. That's irrelevant. You've got to follow me no matter what the cost is.

Devotion from God's standpoint. Revival had swept through this one Chinese town during the communist takeover of China. It was just the beginning of the communist takeover.

It was a university, a small university town, and there were 200 university students that were converted in this revival. And the communists came in and tried to break the Christians in that town, and specifically the students. And when they couldn't break them and make them deny Christ and pledge their loyalty to the new government, they finally gathered the townspeople together in the town square and brought the students in.

And they were going to try and make a public show to bring the whole town and everybody cowering before the communist government. And so the communist leader began to call the students by name, giving them a chance to renounce Christ. One after another of those 200 names were called out.

Not one faltered. Though they knew enough of their persecutors by now to know that they would be made to suffer. Every one of them was beheaded that day in the marketplace.

Before each execution, the victim was given one last chance to recant. But even those at the end who had been forced to watch the terrible butchery of all the others did not flinch. Devotion! Devotion from God's standpoint, that I will not let the culture define my Christianity.

I will let God and His Word define my Christianity. I'll not let people define it. I'll let the Word of God define it.

That there is one authority given to us, and that is His Word. This place that we have devotion to Him. Now let me close on what does devoted mean.

It means that a disciple must leave all to follow Christ, totally abandoning himself to Jesus, abandoning himself to Jesus' teaching, to His Kingdom, and to His very mission. It means that we have to give ourselves totally over to, to be fully consecrated to, to be set apart for, to be absolutely loyal to, to have a commitment that is worth the laying down of our lives for, to pledge ourselves to, to pledge our heads, to pledge our lives, to pledge our possessions, to pledge even our blood. It means that Jesus must have absolute authority over us.

That our allegiance must be to Christ as our King. That He must be the King that rules over us. That everything in our life must be subordinated to Him.

And then in the end, it means that we must love Him supremely. Let me share with you one beautiful verse, and then I'll close with a little story. Ephesians 6, verse 24.

It says, grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. You know what that undying love? You know what that is? Devotion. Devotion.

To love Him so supremely that we will follow Him no matter what the cost is. In the land where there's, where it's dangerous to be a Christian, a national pastor had started a Bible school and he started it with 25 students. Although the students met periodically in out of the way places to maintain low visibility, their lives were very much at risk.

Yet they were filled with joy unspeakable. The pastor was having dinner one night when a visiting missionary was there and he invited the students to attend as well. The missionary asked the pastor a very simple question.

What kind of restrictions is the government placing on you? His answer is timeless. We can do anything we want as long as we are willing to die with devotion. Let's look at the Lord in prayer.

Father, we come before you now in the precious name of Jesus. Lord, you're calling us to devotion from your standpoint, not from a culture standpoint, not from the American church's standpoint, but from your standpoint as revealed in your word. You promised us, O God, that if we would devote ourselves to you, that we would see the fruit of that devotion such as the early church saw.

And so, Lord, we want to see the fruit of that devotion. But, Lord, that means we must live devoted lives no less radical than what the apostles were, than what the book of Acts is. So, Lord, we're asking that you do an upsetting in our lives.

We're asking that you disturb us, O God, that you'd show us where we are failing in that type of devotion. Dear God, there's not one in this room that has not failed in that aspect, and so it is something that we must all deal with. It's just a matter of whether or not we're willing to deal with the realities of our own compromise, of our American concept of Christianity.

Lord, bring us to a place of a biblical faith, of the radicalness of it. Give us the courage to stand in the face of a culture that is growing hostile more and more to the gospel. And, dear God, it's going to get worse and worse as years go by.

It's not going to get better. We are facing a hostile nation that is, by nature, God-haters. And if we do not have the courage to stand, we will not capture the hearts of this world.

If we live in compromise, God, the world will ignore us. God, we're asking that you bring us to a place to live the radicalness of the gospel, that the world may begin to see that we believe what we say we believe, and it's worth laying our lives down for. God, I'm asking for radicals.

I'm asking for young people that will be radicals, that they'll be devoted to you from your standpoint. God, you know what these young people are facing. You know the compromise that they're dealing with.

You know the pressures that they're facing. But, God, there's grace that you want to pour in their lives and make them to be the radicals that can stand in the face of it. Lord, that they can be Christian at home and at school and at church, that they're not living hypocritical lives and double standards, but, Lord, that they are the men and women of God that you purchased them to be with your blood, that they could be faithful in those situations.

God, the schools that they're in need them to be radicals. The communities need them to be radicals. But, God, you are also looking for the adults to be no less radical.

Actually, God, you're looking for the adults to be more radical than the youth. You want the adults to be more on fire because we need to be the living epistles that they should be following. And if we don't have the fire, God, we can't expect the young people to have it.

If we're cold and lukewarm, we might as well give up the hope of them ever having the fire, God, because they'll look at us and see nothing worth following. Dear God, I'm asking that you would make radical adults, that you would set a fire in our hearts, that we would be a people devoted unto you, that we might be living epistles to our children and to the youth and to the teens and that we would be the examples. So, God, we're asking that you bring us this place of devotion from your standpoint.

In the precious name of Jesus.

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