

Man's Response to God's Calling

by Stephen Kaung

Following Jesus means to prioritize His business and seek His righteousness above all else, and to live the way He lives, self-sacrificing and God-pleasing.

Duration: 58:49

Scripture: Matthew 8:18-22, Luke 9:57-62, Revelation 14:4

Topics: "Calling Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the importance of truly understanding what it means to follow the Lord. He questions whether believers are truly living by the life of Christ or still living by their own desires. The speaker emphasizes that following the Lord requires a willingness to sacrifice and not having a place to lay one's head, as illustrated by the statement that the foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. The sermon also highlights the call to come to Jesus and the necessity of following Him, as there is no true forgiveness or salvation without being constrained by His love to follow Him.

Transcript

Will you please turn to Gospel according to Matthew. Matthew chapter 8. We'll read from verse 18 through verse 22. Matthew chapter 8, verse 18.

And Jesus, seeing great crowds around him, commanded to depart to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, Teacher, I will follow thee whithersoever thou mayst go. And Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven roosting places.

But the Son of Man has not where he may lay his head. But another of his disciples said to him, Lord, suffer me first to go away and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 9. We begin with verse 57 to 62. Luke, chapter 9, 57. And it came to pass, as they went in the way, One said to him, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, Lord.

And Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven roosting places. But the Son of Man has not where he may lay his head. And he said to another, follow me.

But he said, Lord, allow me to go first and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Suffer the dead to bury their own dead, but do thou go and announce the kingdom of God. And another also said, I will follow thee, Lord, but first allow me to bid adieu to those at my house.

But Jesus said to him, No one, having laid his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. And finally, Revelation, chapter 14. Revelation, chapter 14.

Just a middle sentence in verse four. These are they who follow the Lamb wheresoever it goes. Let's have a word of prayer.

Dear Lord, we want to thank thee for giving thyself so totally to us. We do thank thee for thy amazing grace and tremendous love that thou has bestowed upon us. And we, as a grateful people, we do want to follow thee.

Lord, teach us how. Show us the way that we may really follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes. We commit this time into thy hand.

We look to thy spirit to quicken thy word to our hearts that we may hear and obey. We give thee all the glory. In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.

We would like to consider together on this matter of man's response to God's calling. Man's response to God's calling. We know that the first calling of God that comes to us is when our Lord Jesus said, Come to me, all ye who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.

In other words, the first call that ever comes to mankind is the call to come. The Lord said, Come, come to me. You who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.

Now, thank God we have responded to that call. We have come and we find truly in Christ Jesus there is the forgiveness of our sins. There is the peace from above.

There is a new life being given to us and grace upon grace. But brothers and sisters, immediately after that first call, there is another call. And that another call actually is not another completely.

Rather, it is part or it is to complete the first call. And that is our Lord Jesus' call. Those who come to Him, follow Him.

He calls us to follow Him. Now, brothers and sisters, we must remember so far as God's purpose is concerned, so far as the purpose of God's salvation is concerned, it is more than just a coming to the Lord and God saved. It is that we who come will follow Him.

We will be His disciples. We will put ourselves under His control and allow Him to train us, allow Him to transform us and to conform us to His own image. Now, that is God's purpose of calling His people.

So far as God's purpose of calling is concerned, this call to follow the Lord is not optional. It is mandatory. In other words, He wants everyone who comes to the Lord Jesus to follow the Lord Jesus.

There is no such thing as you can come to the Lord and not follow Him. There is no such thing as you can come and receive, receive forgiveness from Him and not constrained by His love to follow Him in order to be like Him. That is looking from God's side.

But of course, from the human side, we find when He calls, there are many various responses. So this morning, we would like to consider together how do we respond to the call of our Lord to come and to follow Him. We find in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 8, a record of some people who come to the Lord and how our Lord reacts and how happens to those who say they will follow the Lord.

And also you'll find this is recorded in Luke, chapter 9. Almost the same thing. But brothers and sisters, if you read very carefully, you'll find that these two happen at two different occasions. Because in Matthew, we find that after our Lord Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, He came down from the mountain.

People were amazed at the authority He had in His Word. And then the Lord healed people, cast out demons, do wonders. And because of that, great crowds followed Him.

Great crowds were around Him. And it was at that occasion you'll find Matthew, chapter 8. But when you look at Luke, chapter 9, you'll find that it happened towards the end of our Lord's ministry. Because in Luke, chapter 9, our Lord was going to Jerusalem.

And He went to Jerusalem in order to go to the cross. And it is on that way that such things happen. Even though outwardly they seem to be similar, but actually you'll find these happen at two different occasions.

Now brothers and sisters, we know when something seems to repeat in the Word of God, not once, but twice, God is trying to say something to us. It shows that this is not just something happened only once. It shows that this happens all the time.

In other words, it happened at the time of our Lord Jesus more than once. And I believe that probably it happened from the beginning of our Lord's ministry to the end of our Lord's ministry. And I also believe that these being recorded in the Word of God is to show us that such things happen all the time.

It happened even now, even among us. So that's the reason why we want to consider carefully what happened at these two different occasions. According to Matthew, after our Lord Jesus spoke those marvelous words in Matthew 5 to 7, and then after he did healings, wonders, in Matthew chapter 8, a scribe came to him.

Now brothers and sisters, who is a scribe? What is a scribe? Probably today we do not have any idea. But we know scribes in those days are noted for their knowledge of the Bible. They are the people who copy the Word of God.

And they were so careful in every letter of the Word. They not only copy the Word as exactly as they should be, but they study the Word. So they are noted for their knowledge of the Word of God.

But a scribe came to the Lord. Why? A scribe came to the Lord and said, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. What is behind his mind? Evidently, he was deeply touched by the teaching of our Lord Jesus.

Because our Lord Jesus taught with authority. Different from the scribes and the Pharisees. So he was touched.

He considered our Lord Jesus as a teacher sent from heaven. And he wants to follow the Lord in order to learn more of the teaching. You remember in John chapter 3, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler, he came to the Lord at night and he said, Teacher, we noticed that you are different.

You are a teacher from above because no one can do such signs as you do. In other words, Nicodemus came to the Lord trying to learn more teaching from the Lord. They think that by learning more of the teaching, they will be perfect.

They can enter into the kingdom of God. So that is the motive. The motive behind the scribe, he wants to follow the Lord.

But in following, what he really wants is just following God's teaching. The teaching of our Lord Jesus. A better teaching.

A higher teaching. A heavenly teaching instead of on the human level. So when this scribe came to the Lord and said, I will follow you.

You know what the Lord said to him? The Lord said, The foxes have holes. The birds of the heaven have roosting places. But the Son of Man does not have a place to lay his head.

What a strange statement. A scribe coming to the Lord saying I want to follow you wherever you go. You should welcome him.

You should feel honored. But instead our Lord Jesus said, You do not know what follow me really means. You mean to follow me as a teacher? That you may be taught more of teachings, more of doctrines, more of theology, higher theology? You're totally mistaken.

To follow me means to follow my life. To live the way that I live and see. The foxes have holes.

The animals, they have their holes. They have something that they can consider as their own. Their possession.

They can rest. And the birds of the heaven have roosting places. They also have a place of their own.

But the Son of Man does not have a place of his own. This is my life. This is the way I live.

He who is equal with God and that is not something to be grasped at. He emptied himself. Of course not of his deity, but all the glory and honor surround deity.

He emptied himself in order to take up the form of a man. And being the flesh of a man, he was obedient. To the Father.

Even unto death and then the death of the cross. In other words, his life is self-sacrificing. He gave up everything in order to enrich us, to save us, to give us life.

He walks the way of the cross, losing his soul life in order to gain it eternally. This is following the Lord. So dear brothers and sisters, I think we need to be very clear what to follow the Lord really means.

We know we who have come to the Lord must follow him. Because if we do not follow him, we will not be transformed and be like him. This is the only way.

But oftentimes we do not know what following him really means. It means denying yourself. It means losing your soul life.

It means for the Lord's sake and for the Gospel's sake, you are willing to lose your soul life in order to gain it eternally. It means self-sacrificing. It means giving up your right.

It means giving up your possession. You possess nothing. Everything is laid on the altar.

It is the way of the cross. That is the way of the Lord. And brothers and sisters, we have no record what happened afterwards.

Whether described, went away sadly. Just like the rich Ying ruler. Because he felt that's not what he wanted.

And there's something beyond him. He didn't want to do that. Or probably by the grace of God, his eyes were opened.

He received revelation from above. He really saw what following the Lord means. And by the grace of God, he followed.

We don't know. But then, when you turn to Luke, you find it is not exactly the same thing. Why? Because you find in Luke this man who came to the Lord and said, Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.

Lord, you see that? The first one was a scribe. He's a teacher. In other words, he didn't have the life of the Lord in him.

Without the Lord's life and try to follow the Lord, that's impossible. No one can imitate the Lord. No one can follow him outwardly.

Only those who have this life are able to follow him inwardly. But there you find in Luke, this man called our Lord Jesus Lord. Now you know what it means.

If it's not by the Holy Spirit, you cannot call Jesus Lord. And this man really believed in the Lord Jesus and he called the Lord Jesus Lord. I want to follow you wherever you go.

But he also doesn't really know what following the Lord means. You know our Lord Jesus never tried to hide anything. Now if we as human beings, if somebody wants to follow us, we will tell him all the good things that he will receive.

And we try to keep away from him all the things that he has to give up. Not immediately. Gradually.

After he is hooked, then you can gradually show him what he must lose. That's the way of man. But with our Lord Jesus, he's different.

At the very outset, when people come to him and say, Lord, I want to follow you. The Lord said, do you understand what following me means? I will tell you. You know, in the word of God again and again, the Lord Jesus said, now if you love your father and mother and brother and sister and children and even your own life more than me, it's not worthy.

Cannot be my disciple. If you do not forsake all and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. If you want to be my disciple, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.

Because he who gains his life will lose it. But he who loses his soul life for my sake, shall gain it eternally. Brothers and sisters, the Lord is not after crowds, popularity.

The Lord is after reality. So here you'll find the Lord try to say to this man who has come to the Lord, who has received his life, but the Lord said, now are you willing to give up your own soul life and live by my life? Give up your own way of living and live the way that I live. Brothers and sisters, think about that.

We have a way of life. We live that life for years. Some longer, some shorter.

But we live for ourselves. We are self-centered, self-loved, self-possessed, self. But when we come to the Lord, the Lord said, now I have given you my life.

From now on, how are you going to live? Are you going to live still with self at the center? Everything is for self. Or are you going to live by my life, which is self-sacrificing, God-pleasing, doing the will of God, willing to lay down your own self. Self is natural to the natural man.

Self-possession is an instinct in natural man. This is mine. Even with children, when they are playing with toys, you find the children, this is mine.

We want to have a resting place. And we do have. And we treasure that.

We will not let that go. This is our life. But brothers and sisters, now we have a new life, a heavenly life, a divine life, a life that has been demonstrated in the life of our Lord Jesus.

Are we going to live by that life? And if we do, you will find it's a different manner of life. Not my, me, mine, but thou. Not my will, but thy will be done.

Not what I love, but what thou loves. Not what I want, but what thou wantest. That is the life our Lord Jesus lived upon this earth.

And he said, follow me. This is following me. Brothers and sisters, have we considered this seriously before the Lord? We find in Luke chapter 14, the Lord Jesus said, if you want to follow me, count your cost first.

Sit down. Count your cost. See if you are willing to give up all.

No king can fight a battle if he reserves half of his strength to fight an enemy of full strength. No one can complete a tower if he will hold back his resources and only willing to give that much. Then he will only lay the foundation but cannot finish it.

The Lord said, count your cost. If you are not willing to forsake all and follow him, don't follow. You won't be able to finish.

Brothers and sisters, how many of us really understand what following the Lord means? How many of us have really sitting down and count the cost? How many of us have really seen by what life have we been living since we believe in the Lord Jesus? Are we really living by his life or we are still living by our own life? So the Lord tells the one who is his. The foxes have hovered. The birds of the heavens have roosted in place.

But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Are you willing to follow? So that is the first case and now comes the second case. You find there is a little bit difference in the record.

In Matthew it says one of his disciples came to the Lord and said, Lord, I will follow you but let me first go to bury my father and after I finish the business then I will follow you. And then in Luke you find it is said the Lord said follow me. And that man responded and said yes, I will follow you but I ask permission to go and bury my father first and then I will come.

So in other words here you find it is a person who really has come to the Lord a person who is really desiring to follow the Lord. He really has a heart to follow the Lord but he has a problem. His problem is he has a responsibility.

A human responsibility. A human duty. He has a father and he has to bury his father first and then he is free to follow the Lord.

Now evidently the father had not died yet but this man felt he had a responsibility to his father. It's legitimate it's the right thing to do. So he has to fulfill his human responsibility first and then he is free to follow the Lord and do his bits.

Now that is the situation. Now I wonder if we have the same situation. We as human beings we have responsibilities.

In this world these are legitimate these are our duties these are expected us to fulfill and what's wrong with that? Nothing wrong. And we have to fulfill our duty first and then we are free to follow the Lord and do his work. Isn't that reasonable? And isn't that not our condition? But brothers and sisters listen to what the Lord said.

Let the dead buried their own dead. Go and announce the kingdom of God. Lord you are unreasonable you are inhuman.

How can you say such thing? What do you mean by that? Let the dead buried their own dead. What's the implication? The first dead is the spiritually dead. To bury the second dead who is physically dead.

In other words the Lord said it is true this is a human duty. So far as the natural world is concerned the spiritually dead buried the physically dead. That's it.

But you do not see. First thing first. You think that human responsibility and duty must have the first place.

And after this is finished then God you are second. No. The Lord said God has made him the first place in all things.

Who is first? What is first in your life? Is legitimate human responsibility first? You have to finish these things before you can follow the Lord and serve him. Or is it the Lord first? His business first? Then if you make him first he will not fail you in fulfilling what is needed in your responsibility. So that is the issue.

Brothers and sisters what is the problem of our following the Lord? Do you sometimes being troubled you want to follow the Lord and do his bidding but then you find you have so much human responsibility to fulfill. You have to take care of these first before you are free to serve to do his work. Isn't that our problem? What is the solution? The solution is not in these things.

The solution is your heart. So far as following the Lord is concerned you have to put the Lord before everything. Remember our Lord said if you do not hate your father and mother brother and sister wife and children and even your own life you cannot be my disciple.

What does it mean? Does it mean that the Lord wants us to hate our father and mother? No. He wants us to love our father and mother respect our father and mother honor our father and mother take care of our father and mother. But why does he say such words? Because when you have father and mother brother and sister wife and husband children and parents and even your life when they are in opposition to Christ who would you choose? Is it Christ or is it your father and mother brother and sister husband and wife parents and children even your own life or is it Christ? That's the issue.

Who has the priority? Who is first? Brothers and sisters this has to be settled. The Lord said let the dead bury their own dead. You go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

It means that His business first. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. And then you find the third case.

Here is a man evidently one who has believed in the Lord and he really also wants to follow the Lord. He said Lord I will follow you but I ask your permission to let me go back say goodbye to all those in my house and then I will come. Reasonable.

What's wrong with saying goodbye since you are going away? You remember in the Old Testament time even Elisha when Elijah came to Elisha and put his mantle upon him that is calling him and Elisha said let me kiss my father and mother and I will follow you. And nothing wrong with that. But here is strange the Lord's answer is so strange.

The Lord said no one who has laid his hand on the plow and looked back is fit for the kingdom of God. My Lord you are very hard but the Lord knows our heart. You know the problem is not the outward action.

Outward action can vary but it is the heart. Here is a man whose heart is divided. He loves the Lord but he also loves his family.

And these two things when they do not agree then what do you do? Remember Abraham when he was an earl of Chaldea the God of Glory appeared to him and said leave your native place your kindred and go to where I will lead you. Abraham saw the glory of the Lord he wanted to follow. He consorted with his father Terah.

He consorted with flesh and blood. And the flesh and blood said no what are you doing? This is your home. This is your people.

This is where you stay. Why do you go to somewhere not knowing where to go? That is foolish unreasonable. Don't do that.

And the result is Abraham still want to go. The father said alright I will take you. And you know the result.

He not only took Abraham and his wife but also Lot. And he took them half way and stayed in Heron. Never crossed the river.

Brothers and sisters remember Paul? After the Lord revealed to him on Damascus road he said I did not consort with flesh and blood. He went to Arabia and spent two three years restudying the Old Testament in the light of Christ. Brothers and sisters no one can put his hand on the plow that is to say if you have begun never you cannot look back.

If you look back you are lost. If you look back the plow will not plow straight. In other words the work of God will be destroyed damaged.

You are not fit for the kingdom of God. Once caught no escape. Never look back.

Brothers and sisters do not allow human affection. Do not allow human reasoning. Do not allow self love.

Do not allow anything to turn you around. But set your face towards Jerusalem as our Lord Jesus did. That's the way to follow the Lord.

And finally what is the more excellent response to following the Lord? You know in the scripture I find there is one case so beautiful it is a perfect way of response to God's calling. And that is the Apostle John. If you remember the story, he was actually a disciple of John the Baptist.

And one day he, an angel, was standing with their master, John the Baptist, and the Lord Jesus passed by. John the Baptist raised his voice and said behold the Lamb of God. Immediately his two disciples left him and followed Jesus.

In other words, the very announcement of the Lamb of God so arrested John. That's it. That's our hope.

That's the Messiah. That's the glory. So arrest him that he left everything and followed the Lord without being called.

He knows the Lamb of God means come and follow me. Brothers and sisters, do we need the Lord to call us again and again and we still hesitate? We are still arguing? Reasoning? All even before he called we answer. He followed the Lord in life.

And when you come to the end of the Gospel of John, in John chapter 21, you remember our Lord Jesus said to Peter, follow me. He called Peter before to follow him. But now he called Peter again, follow me.

What does it mean? He has just told Peter, when you are young, you go wherever you want to. But when you're old, you will be taken where you do not want to go. Follow me.

In other words, you have followed me in life, now follow me in death. And Peter followed. But there was John.

He was not called, but he followed. So Peter turned around and said, what about this man? The Lord said, that's not your business. If I want him to stay until I come, what is that to you? It doesn't mean that he will not die.

But it really means that he is the one who shows us so clearly what happened at the coming of the Lord. In other words, here is a man who follows the Lord before he was called. Both to life and to death.

Why? Because he saw the Lord. He loved the Lord. The Lord is everything to him.

Brothers and sisters, this is to me a perfect response to God's calling. So may the Lord help us. Dear brothers and sisters, the way of following the Lord is very short.

The end is at hand. This is the time that we have to be absolute towards the Lord. There is no time to play around anymore.

No time to cheat ourselves. It is time that we be earnest, real. They follow the Lamb where so ever it goes.

May the Lord help us. Dear Lord, by Thy grace, we want to be among those who follow the Lamb where so ever it goes. In Thy precious name, Amen.

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