

And I begged your disciples to cast it out. But they could not. Jesus answered, O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and to bear with you?

Bring your son here. And while he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything that he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, Let these words sink into your ears.

[16:44] The son of man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it.

And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. And an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, Whoever receives this child in my name receives me.

And whoever receives him who sent me, for he who is least among you, all is the one who is great. John answered, Master, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.

But Jesus said to him, Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem.

[18:18] And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, Lord, you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?

But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. To another he said, Follow me.

But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home. Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

[19:28] Amen. May the reading of God's word be a blessing to each of us who have heard it being read. Before we come back to this passage, we'll sing once more.

We'll sing in Mission Praise 51. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, not be all else to me, save that thou art.

So we'll stand in a moment and sing these words to God's praise. Thou my best, O Lord of my heart, not be all else to me, save that thou art.

Thou my best, Thou my best, Thou my best, God by day or by night, Waving or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, Thou my true word. I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord.

[20:57] Thou my great Father, I Thy true Son. Thou in me dwelling, And I with Thee won.

Even my battle shields Soar for the bright, Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.

Thou my soul shelter, Thou my high tower. Praise Thou be heavenward, O God of my God.

Wishes I heed not, Nor unto empty praise. Love my inheritance, Now and always.

Thou and the holy, First in my heart. Thy King of heaven, My treasure Thou art.

[22:20] My King of heaven, After victory won. May I reach heaven's joys, O bright and sun.

Heart of my heart, Heart of my own heart, Whatever before, Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

We'll turn back to that passage that we read, And we'll read again at verse 62. Jesus said to him,

It's the last verse in this chapter, Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow, And looks back, Is fit for the kingdom of God.

Before we think about this passage and verse, We'll pray. Our Father in heaven, We ask that as we draw near to you intentionally this evening, That you would draw near to us, And that as we ask for your help, As we open up scripture, We pray that your spirit would be with us to guide us, That your spirit would give us a mind focused upon your word, To hear what it should speak to us.

We pray that these words would be fitting for our ears, And fitting for our minds at this time. We pray these words would be a blessing to us, And an encouragement for us, As we go on following you.

[24 : 12] And we pray that your spirit would just be at work, Be at work, Whether it be to convict, Convert, Or to instill a spirit of perseverance within us.

We pray that it would be ever present and indwelling in your people. And that we, As children of God, May be mindful of the privileges that are ours, That are ours, In and through Jesus Christ, Your Son, And our Saviour, In whom we ask all these things.

Amen. This verse here, No one puts their hand to the plough, And looks back as fit for the kingdom of God.

It almost reminds me of an old elder in Stornoway, Who, I wasn't there at the time, But he said to a recent convert, Well, You've put your hand to the plough now.

Pretty much saying to him, There's no going back. You've committed your life to Christ. Whenever I read this verse, It always reminds me of him.

[25 : 33] It always reminds me of that great mark, That great change that takes place in someone's life. And it's something that sticks out.

It's something that can be a marker for us. Even at the beginning of a new year like this, We can maybe look back to words that people have spoken to us.

We can maybe think about when we ourselves became Christians, And just started following Jesus. Or we may even be at this new year, Maybe again at the beginning of a new year, Thinking, Well, I'm not a Christian yet.

I wish I was. But for some reason or other, I can't quite call myself a Christian. And that's the thing that marks our lives.

And at a new year, It is a mark. It's a mark that we can't avoid. And many people will mark the new year with different ways.

[26 : 39] Many people make a resolution. Whether they really mark it in their minds or not, It might be something that they just decide upon. Maybe something that you've thought about yourself.

Maybe something about you're going to maybe spend less money this year.

Maybe you're going to try and eat less food or puddings this year. Or maybe something about how you're going to speak to one another.

Maybe you're going to try and read your Bible better this year. But often what can quite happen with these resolutions or these decisions that we make, They can fall flat on their face even before January is through.

And the truth of the matter is that nothing changes in our lives. And the only thing that's changed is the calendar that's hanging on the wall. And boys and girls, if I was going to say anything to you, If you're going to decide to set your mind on doing something, Do your best to see it through.

Because it's easy to decide upon something. It's very hard to see something through to completion. Now this passage that we read together, it's not about New Year resolutions.

[27 : 56] But Lucas is marking a change in this chapter as he writes it out. And he's marking a change that we see there in verse 58, a change in 51.

A change in the life of Jesus. Verse 51 tells us that when the days drew near for him, that's Jesus, to be taken up, He set his face to go to Jerusalem.

So Lucas is writing this gospel now. He's made this change. He's made this mark in this gospel.

And he said, from now on, this is going to be about Jesus going to Jerusalem.

Which has all sorts of meaning for Jesus. This is the way, this is the direction that Jesus is focused on going.

There's no change in it. He's heading this way. And why is this significant in this chapter? And we zoom in, we see that change.

[28 : 59] But we zoom out of the chapter, are we? But when we look at what's going on in this chapter, it seems to be about following Jesus. We read verse 23, which we didn't read.

It's previous to the passage that we read. But verse 23 says, it's one that we know. And he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.

Jesus is going to the cross. That's the change that Luke is making in the gospel. And Jesus is telling the disciples and all the people that are there listening to his teaching.

Are you going to follow me in the same way? Are you going to be committed in the same way? He's saying, as he goes on to explain, as we see in this passage, it's not easy.

It's hard following me. It's hard to keep going. The disciples in this passage, they go through a variety of experiences.

[30 : 11] They go up to the Mount of Transfiguration. And they come down to realize that they can't do anything of their own accord to try and heal this man's son from this evil spirit.

They go through these variety of emotions, experience when they themselves are following Jesus. But Jesus really brings this teaching, drawing it near it at the end of this chapter, as Luke does, to a focus by mentioning three people that want to follow Jesus or three people that desire to follow Jesus.

And is there anything that I would want to say to us at the beginning of our new year? But to encourage us all to keep going, to follow Jesus.

If there's anything I would want to mark this new year with, is that you've renewed your commitment to follow. Or maybe that you've even begun to follow.

Because following Jesus is what we've been commanded to do. The last few times I've preached, I've mentioned about following Jesus. Because it applies to us whether we're young or old.

[31 : 29] Whether it's our first time in church. Whether it's our hundredth time in church. Jesus asks us to follow me. So wouldn't it be good on the outside of our new year that we decide to say, I will follow Jesus.

Because it's the same for the new Christian. And it's the same for the experienced Christian. And boys and girls, if there's ever a story about following Jesus, I brought this book in.

It's Little Pilgrim's Big Journey. It's a story about Pilgrim's progress. And Pilgrim was a man that was committed to following Jesus.

He was told to follow a light. You can see a light there. And that's like following Jesus. And he had to follow this path. There was many times he got it wrong.

There was many times he made mistakes. He found it very hard following Jesus. But that's the truth of the matter.

[32 : 36] And that's the truth that Jesus does not hide from us in this passage. It's hard to follow me. And I was going to ask a lot of you to follow me.

So what I want to do is really, in the time that we have, look at these last few verses and these three people that Jesus speaks to.

And firstly, I want to acknowledge that there's a dilemma here. And there can be a dilemma here when we're asked to follow Jesus or when we realize that we need to follow Jesus.

There can be a dilemma in our lives. And secondly, where there needs to be a decision that needs to be made. And thirdly, following Jesus asks for devotion.

So we have a dilemma. We have a decision and a devotion that is asked of us. So firstly, firstly, the dilemma. And the dilemma is caused in these three people's experience by what Jesus says.

[33 : 41] Jesus is a truthful word to them. And we have three varied attitudes to following Jesus and what it means to follow Jesus. But Luke, when he writes and records these experiences, he doesn't record how they respond, really.

He doesn't give us the words of their response. And I think what is key also to this passage is that as he's addressing different people, he's speaking to their hearts and he's speaking to their own problems, which is what the Word of God does with each and every one of us.

The Word of God speaks to our hearts and speaks to our problems. Personally and often directly.

And often when he does that, he can present us with a dilemma. When Jesus asks us to follow him. When Jesus asks us to give something up for him. We don't know what to say. So the first man we have there in verse 57 it is.

[34 : 58] There we see that they're going along the road and someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. It implies that this man is fully committed.

I will follow you wherever you go. I'll stick by your side. No matter what. And Jesus says to him, Foxes of holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Jesus has no comfort of a home. Jesus has no security of a roof over his head. Jesus has no promise of a next meal for him to eat. And he's saying to this man that's so keen to follow.

Are you going to follow me into these sorts of circumstances? If it's a personal word to him, maybe it's Jesus asking him to maybe give up that big home that you're living in.

Maybe are you prepared to give up that comfortable lifestyle that you have? Are you willing to trust me to provide for you? I mean, it's a big ask, isn't it?

[36 : 14] The response is silence. The second person here is we find in verse 59 to another. He said, follow me. Notice the difference that that's a command from Jesus.

To follow me. And J.C. Ryle says, what an honor that is. To be called to follow. But his response is, let me first go and bury my father.

Again, a direct and personal word to him. Knowing that this duty lay over his head. Now, I believe in their culture, they would have two burials.

They would have an initial burial. And then a year later, they would have a second burial. So what the commentators say here is that it's a possibility that he's actually asking for a year's delay before following him.

Before the second burial of his own father. Jesus is saying to him. Are you willing to give up that honor to follow me?

[37 : 27] Are you willing to give up that custom? That responsibility of family duty that is yours? Are you willing to give that up? But notice why Jesus called him.

But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Or go and preach the kingdom of God. His response was silence.

And we have a third man here. Who also comes and says in verse 61. I will follow you, Lord. But let me first say farewell to those at my home.

Jesus says to him. If you're going to follow me, there's no going back. If you're going to put your hand to the plough and look back, you're not the right person for the kingdom of God.

If it's a direct and personal word to this man. Commentators think that, well, maybe this going back would have been a thing that would have persuaded him not to go.

[38 : 42] To go back to his family. To go back to his friends. Again, we find that in Pilgrim's Progress. When he read and he had this burden on his back, his friends persuaded him not to go.

To sleep on it. His friends, obstinate, persuaded him to go back. And went with him for a while. But Christian was persuaded.

Christian would not go back. So here in this bit, we reckon that, well, going back to his family would have persuaded him not to follow.

Now, again, it's a big ask and it sounds, we might say it sounds harsh. But you remember that there's an account in Elisha. When Elisha is called, Elijah comes along and asks Elisha to go with him.

And the first thing that Elisha did was that he went to say goodbye to his family. Which is what he was allowed to do.

[39 : 53] But the second thing he did was that he burnt the plowing equipment that he was using when he was called.

And he sacrificed the animal that he was using to plow with when he was called. He was committed to go with Elijah. He was committed to the cause of God full heartedly before going home.

He was in it 100%. And we see it because he offered what he was using as a sacrifice to God. I'm not going to need this anymore.

I'm going to do what the Lord asks of me. Now here we have, we've got three different people.

Three different voices. Three different people responding to Jesus.

And we all have our own response. Jesus speaks to us even in his own way. And Jesus' words often may present a dilemma before us.

[41 : 05] If he's asking us to follow him. Or asking us to do something for him. As he calls us to do. Michael Wilcock, the commentator, says that God regularly tests the earnestness of men's hearts.

By bringing them to this fork in the road. When it becomes necessary to choose between two ways. Which do we follow? Comfort.

Customs. Or Christ. The test from the very outset has been follow me. When he called the disciples, it was to follow me. We don't have a response from the men in this account.

Why is that? Well, so maybe that we would give our own response. Maybe at the outset of a new year, Jesus is calling us to follow him.

Maybe you're at the outset of a new year and you desire to follow him. But there's something that's holding you back.

[42 : 20] There's an idol. There's an idol. That's you're putting before Jesus. As we heard this morning. Committing to Jesus, it's about putting him first and foremost.

And not be putting him second place. Because that's what's happening every time with each man here. They're putting Jesus second place. They've got something else to do. So maybe, maybe we've got an excuse.

What is that excuse? Or as we heard this morning, what is our idol? What is the thing that's stopping us? What is the one thing that's holding us back?

As David said, name it. And bring it in prayer. If there is one thing holding us back. Maybe, maybe we're too comfortable. Maybe God's asking us to do something that would mean giving up a big home.

Maybe my job is going to come into conflict with keeping the Sabbath day or being able to attend church services. And there's a dilemma going on now.

[43 : 29] Maybe you're worried about family duties you have or family businesses that you're involved with. That you have to give up to follow Jesus.

Maybe you're worried about what your friends and your family are going to see. When you begin to follow Jesus. And maybe you're just thinking as you look at these passages that it's too much of a big ask.

Jesus is asking a lot here of these men. And you might be thinking, it almost seems cold.

It almost seems insensitive, the things that are being asked here. But Jesus doesn't come to destroy our lives. He comes to save our lives. That's a verse that appears in verse 56 and 55 in some versions.

It's footnoted in the ESV. Jesus doesn't want to destroy your life. Far from it. Jesus is about saving your life. And following Jesus is about saving your life.

[44 : 43] But Jesus wants you to put him first place. If there's a dilemma about following Jesus.

Or following his command in our lives to do whatever he asks us to do. It requires a decision.

Jesus isn't hiding how difficult it is to go on. Maybe you've begun and maybe you're into, maybe you've begun last year following and now you're into this year and you're thinking this is hard.

I didn't think it would ever be this hard. Jesus isn't hiding the fact that it's hard. Jesus is putting his cards on the table here to everyone that's listening to him.

Because in the next chapter, he's going to send out 72 for his cause. 72 that would follow his example with the gospel.

[45 : 47] But Jesus isn't hiding from us how difficult and hard it's going to be. The things that we have to give up. The things that it's going to cost us. He's asking us to deny ourselves.

Take up our cross. Give up everything that we have. And follow Jesus. No matter what.

If the cards are on the table. Jesus is putting the cards on the table. Yes, it's going to be difficult.

Yes, it's going to ask a lot of you. But it's going to save you.

Cards on the table. Decision is to be made. What do you say? So first is our dilemma. Secondly, it's our decision.

When you decide on something. It sort of implies action. You're going to do it. What are you going to do? And if we're focusing on verse 62.

[47 : 00] No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. That's how he concludes with these three. Are you going to commit to following?

Are you going to decide to follow this man Jesus no matter what? Are you persuaded and enabled as the catechism tells us to embrace Jesus Christ more than anything else?

No matter what? No matter what? No matter what? Because that's the language that's used here where it says put your hand to the plow. It implies grasping something and not letting go of it.

Laying hold of it. Seizing it. Arresting it. Committing to it. Will you commit? Will you commit? To Jesus Christ and following him. And if we're honest, the thought of committing can be a hindrance to many of us.

Especially when it comes to Christian life. We often ask ourselves, how on earth can I commit? How on earth will I be able to follow Jesus? I look at others and I know I'm not following as good as they are.

[48 : 17] I look in my own heart and I see it's full of sin. I see these idols that distract me. I know if I commit I'm going to be inclined to go back. I know I'm going to be tossed to and fro for the things that are in the world.

My flesh will desire these things. And as Paul says, I'm going to do the things that I do not want to do. And the things I want to do, I'm not going to do them. And there's a battle that goes on with the Christian.

And maybe there's a battle going on in you tonight because you're worried about committing. How on earth could I commit? How on earth could I follow and see it through to the end?

I know full well I'm a sinner. And I know full well I'm going to fail. And I know full well I'm going to let the Lord down. And I know full well I'm going to be a bad witness some days.

And I know full well I'm not going to honour Christ's name as I wish I would. Because I know full well my strong isn't holy enough. And that can be the thing that can stop us from committing.

[49 : 20] But in a sense you're absolutely right if you're thinking like that. Because we're not strong enough.

God is our refuge and our strength. And it's far better to have this humble attitude. Relying and trusting on God.

And every step that we take in this journey and following. Realising we cannot do it. And realising we need the Lord Jesus every single day. We need to pray.

We need to read. Because you know a weak and humble man that lives their life like that. Will outshine a thousand others that think they can do it themselves. When they know they're not strong enough.

But they know their only hope is to follow Jesus Christ. We sung in Psalm 121. Because it says there.

[50 : 28] A great promise. The Lord shall keep thy soul. He shall preserve thee from all ill. Henceforth thy going out and in. God keep forever will.

God will keep you. And for the weak man J.C. Ryle says that. We need not be afraid to serve Christ. But it ought to make us begin carefully.

Begin humbly. And with much prayer for grace. Because a Christian. He doesn't decide because he can. He doesn't decide because he think he can do it himself.

He decides because he knows he must. He knows that there's no other way that I can be saved from eternity and hell. And that effectual. Effectual call of God.

Makes that decision. In a sense easy. Because he knows he must. He's called by God. And he's heard the gospel.

[51 : 38] And he knows if he doesn't believe in Jesus Christ. And give his life to him. He'll be lost. And he's heard all this. And he knows for sure. I need Christ. And I know the most important thing in my life is Christ.

And that grace is absolutely irresistible to him. So that the decision really. Isn't even his. Because he's been called.

Because he's been called. He's been elected. From before the foundation of this world. To hear this message. And to respond to it. And he knows his own weaknesses. And he knows his own failings. But he must. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said. To hear it as Paul said.

To hear it as Paul said. for me. And we can say probably with all reverence if we speak about Jesus and the decision that he made for you, we carefully say that it was an easy decision because he loved you so much that he wouldn't lose you and his joy was to have you restored to be with the Father. He knew the experience would be hard but he knew that nothing else would do. Nothing else would save you, nothing else would buy you back, nothing else would redeem you. And so he committed to the greatest of difficulties to go into that cross and set in his face towards

[53 : 32] Jerusalem and all that it meant for each and every one of us here. He took that flogging for you, he took that abuse and mocking, the crown of thorns in his head and he laid his hand on that wooden cross to be pierced with these nails for you. The most difficult of circumstances. But it was all for you. Because of his great love for you.

He would not have been put off or put that second place in his life. No. He would not turn his back on Satan's face towards Jerusalem. He would not delay heading towards Jerusalem. He would not delay it at all.

Because he was absolutely devoted. He is our example of following, of devotion.

Because following Jesus requires devotion. So we've had a dilemma that can be presented to us. We've had a decision and finally and briefly.

Jesus asks for us to be devoted or committed to him. This verse asks us to put our hand to the plough. But the one who looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God.

[55 : 21] So how are you going to plough? If you're going to devote yourself to following Jesus, how are you going to live out your life of devotion?

The key feature of a plough is that it only works one way. Boys and girls can tell me that. The only way a plough works is by going forward. By being pulled forward. It doesn't work going backwards. We need to have our eyes. We need to have our eyes set on Jesus. We don't have our eyes. It's beneficial to look back in our experience. But briefly. As the plough will concentrate forward. He'll look back briefly, but he'll concentrate on going forward. The plough has an eye focused. And he would have then these days had his hands set on the plough. But he's following an example that's been set for him.

[56 : 28] He's following a reference. He's got his tractor tire in the furrow. He's got his eye on the line that's been set. He's following the example of the furrow that's beside him.

His reference is Jesus Christ every step of the way. He's not comparing himself to others. He's not spending his time looking back and worrying about all the mistakes he's made. And looking back and seeing how squint his ploughing is. Looking back and seeing where he stopped. The plough works best when it's going forward. The plough works best when it keeps a pace. When it's going too fast, it doesn't work right. If it's going too slow, it might dig down. But a steady pace. Following an example. Following Jesus. So how are we going to plough? What's our life of devotion going to look like?

[57 : 36] Are we going to follow Jesus Christ's example? Of giving everything. To save his people. Are we going to live our lives to give everything to give honour to God?

The plough. The plough. The plough. It's not ploughing for no reason. He's ploughing with an intention. That seeds will be sown and that a harvest will come. And the Christian as he ploughs and looks forward. Lives his life devotion. Not for his own glory. But for the glory of God. For the harvest that will come. The Lord's harvest. The Lord's glory. What is our life of devotion going to look like? If we set our mind on Jesus and follow him. It will be to the glory of God.

[58 : 43] So this new year. May we mark it by following Jesus. Whether we're beginning. Whether we're going on. Whether we're a young pilgrim or an old pilgrim. Whether we're facing great battles. Or whether we're facing Napoleon in Pilgrim's Progress. Whether we're at beautiful castle in Pilgrim's. Whether we're in the heights. Or whether we're in the depths. Jesus asks us to follow him. Maybe he's given us a dilemma. Maybe we need to give him a decision. But he's asking for devotion. And full devotion. And full commitment. 100%. To give your life. Committed to following him. So if there's anything.

[59 : 49] At the beginning of our new year. I would like to say. To each and every one of us. And to myself. Is to commit our lives. All the more. To following Christ. And I pray these thoughts. To be a blessing to us all. So we'll conclude our time together. By singing. Sing Sam's version. Of Psalm 63.

Sing Sam's version. Psalm 63. The words will be on the screen. O God. We'll sing from verse 1 to 8. O God you are my God alone. I seek your face with eagerness. My soul and body thirst for you. In this dry weary wilderness. And we'll stand to sing. These words to God's praise. O God you are my God alone. I seek your face with eagerness.

[61 : 03] I seek your face with eagerness. My soul and body thirst for you. In this dry weary wilderness. I seek your face with eagerness. I seek your face with eagerness. I seek your face with eagerness. I seek your face with eagerness. Your power and glory held my gate. Far better is your love, far life. And so my lips will sing pure grace. I'll bless you, Lord, throughout my life. I'll raise my hands to you in prayer.

[62 : 31] My joyfulness will sing your praise. My soul is packed with riches, fair. Upon my bed I lie awake. And in my thoughts remember you. I meditate throughout the night. And keep your constant love in you. Because you are my help alone.

In shadow of your winds I sing. You hold me up with your right hand.

[64 : 06] To you, O God, my soul will pray. I'll conclude in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we ask that you would be with us. We ask that our souls would cling to you.

In our own pilgrim journey through life and experience.

That you would be with us. And that we would say, You, O Lord, are my God. And there is no other to whom I can go. So be with us as we part.

Whichever us and keep us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.