

Bethel

Pulpit

Following the Lord Jesus

Sermon Number 466

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 2nd September, 2018**

Text: “*And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but....*” (Luke 9. 61).

The subject here is a vital one: following the Lord Jesus. We have here three different people, all talking about following the Lord Jesus. We do not know their names; we do not know what happened to them afterwards; but we have very clearly set before us the way the Lord Jesus dealt with them and the things He said to them.

Now the first. “It came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” In the account we read this morning (Matthew 8. 18-22), we are told that this man was a scribe, which means he was an eminent man. The Lord Jesus did not have many scribes who spoke kindly to Him. Most of them despised Him and opposed Him, but this scribe came and spoke so nicely and so kindly to Him. But don't you see the faithfulness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Our Lord Jesus told him it was important that he should count the cost. So it is with all who have that desire in their hearts to be true followers of the Lord Jesus. The Lord bids them to be sure that first of all they count the cost.

“Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” Now let us be clear, beloved friends, there is not a more beautiful word spoken by anyone in Scripture than this: “Lord, I will follow Thee.” It did not end there. “Lord, I will follow Thee *whithersoever Thou goest.*” Isn't this the mark of the redeemed that the Lord Himself gives in the Book of the Revelation: “These are they which follow the Lamb *whithersoever He goeth*”? It was most beautiful language: “Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” Now tell me what was wrong with it.

Real religion does not begin there. It comes in measure, in the spirit of it, in the life of every sinner saved by grace, but real religion does not

begin with a sinner resolving what he is going to do. This scribe did not want the Lord Jesus to do anything for him.

This is where real religion begins – sometimes very gently, sometimes almost violently – but the point is this: we need the Lord Jesus. We need Him to do something for us. We need Him to do everything for us. We need Him to forgive us. We need Him to save us. We need Him to wash us in His precious blood. Real religion does not begin with a sinner coming to the Lord Jesus and saying, Lord, I am going to follow Thee everywhere. Mind you, that will come later, when you have come as a sinner in your need, when the Lord has met that need, when He has made Himself known to you, and then, sweetly constrained by the love of Christ, there will be that desire humbly to follow after the Lord Jesus.

“Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” And the Lord put the pathway before him – the cost, the way of life, the way that must be walked out, what there is in a profession of the Lord’s name, what there is in following Him. The Lord will have all His beloved people to be true followers. O but they must count the cost. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.”

It may have been that this scribe was somewhat excited, seeing all these miracles. It may be he thought he was following the Lord into a lovely kingdom, triumphant against the Romans. But the Lord told him what the cost is, who is the One that has to be followed. There is so much in this: “The Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” Is this One who is your hope, this One you love, this One you long to follow, the meek and lowly Jesus, “A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”? “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” Even the little birds, when evening comes, have their nests, and even the creatures that we do not like, like the foxes, have their holes. The Lord Jesus was less favoured than they. “The Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” There is one chapter which ends, “And every man went unto his own house,” and the next chapter begins, “Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.”

“Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer.”

“The Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” And then you think of the dying pillows with which most of the Lord’s people are sweetly

favoured, yet at Calvary the Son of man had not where to lay His head. He bowed His head and died. Now this is the One whom the Lord's people are honoured to follow. It is their honour, it is their privilege. Help will be given, all their needs supplied, but they must count the cost.

“Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” We do not read that this scribe spoke a single word. We do not read he was able to give an answer. We never hear of him again. Now that is the first one. “A certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.”

Now the second one. “He said unto another, Follow Me.” Now there is still the same problem, this need to count the cost, this following the Lord Jesus. But this seems to be a different case altogether, because the Lord began with it, the Lord told him, the Lord called him: “Follow Me.” In the reading this morning in Matthew chapter 8, we are told that this one was one of the Lord's disciples, but he too was having his problems and his difficulties. “He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Well, that seems an innocent enough request. But Jesus said, “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” Many of the godly commentators have felt that the problem here was that his father was still alive. It was not as if his father had died, and he was arranging the funeral. He was willing to follow the Lord Jesus, he was willing to obey Him, but not yet. He must wait until his father passed away.

Well, whether that was so or not, we are not sure, but the point really, the answer to the problem here, lies in this word *first*. The Lord Jesus said, “Follow Me,” and he said, “First.” He had something had to come *first*. It seems perhaps the most lawful thing there could possibly be, a most honourable thing, but it was *first*. Beloved friends, *this* comes *first*. The Lord Jesus will not have anything to come *first* before obedience to Him, not even the burial of a beloved father. The things of God must surely be first. Surely we have to preach these things to ourselves. Aren't these things in which we falter, in which we fall? We quote these things; we say these things. We love Scriptures like this: “That in all things He might have the preeminence,” but it is this word *first*, and that is where many of us stumble.

Let me ask you that question quietly, lovingly, tenderly: is the Lord Jesus always first in your life? Is He first in your choices? Is He first in your decisions? Is He first in your behaviour. “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

“He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me *first* to go and bury my father.” This was a vital commandment from the Lord, and it required immediate obedience. There was a difficulty and a problem in the way, but the Lord Jesus said, “Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” It would seem from a reasonable assessment of this verse that it was completely different from the first man; that here was one who had his difficulties, his problems, his objections, but when the Lord told him he had to go and preach the kingdom of God, it is our hope and belief that he went.

Of course, there is that well-known occasion in the life of John Kershaw. His beloved father had died. You remember how his father used to punish him severely when he was a boy, and then he saw the difference, and later his father left the Independent chapel he attended and went to listen to his son. It was a great sorrow for John Kershaw when his father died, and of course in those days they could not wait long for the burial. It had to take place soon. John Kershaw had this great decision to make. He had been advertised to preach in Yorkshire on the very day the funeral was to take place, and he knew there was going to be an exceedingly-large gathering, people walking over the moors from many directions. He knew there was no way whatsoever in those days of communicating, of letting them know he could not come. He begged the Lord for His decision, and the Lord said, “Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” He said, “I was not present at my father’s funeral, but I was the chief mourner.”

Then we come to the third case. “And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee.” He was like the first one. He was beginning by saying what he was going to do, but the trouble here is this little word, this important word, *but*. “Lord, I will follow Thee; *but*. ” Now the Lord Jesus will never accept a religion like that, with the *buts* in it. We want to speak lovingly, tenderly and graciously. Our chapels have abounded with it. People have openly said it: “I am willing openly to profess the Lord, but I cannot go unless my wife comes along with me.” I remember one person saying to me, “Well, the Lord has blessed me, and I am perfectly willing to follow Him,

but I am waiting till I am married and I have been able to pray in my own house before I am ever called to pray in the house of God.”

These *buts* abound. I could mention so many of them. I am willing to follow Thee, Lord, but.... There is something here in my pleasures, something here in my home. I cannot really give it up. Lord, I am willing to follow Thee, *but*. There are so many of these *buts*. The Lord Jesus will not accept them. It is “all the heart, or nothing.” I know, beloved friends, all of us fall very far short in this.

“And another also said, Lord.” The first one – well, all of them – spoke very reverently and kindly to the Lord Jesus. They called Him, “Lord,” in that day when so many despised Him, when so few would acknowledge Him as Lord. But you see the faithfulness. O what a delight it was for the Lord Jesus when there were those who denied self and took up the cross and followed Him. You remember how His heart was touched when He said – this is the opposite – “Ye are they which have continued with Me” – not just who profess to follow at the beginning. You knew there would be difficulties, but, “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.” It was a delight to the Lord’s heart when He saw sinners lovingly following Him and persevering, but the Lord Jesus was so faithful.

“Another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.” Well, it is just like that second case. You would think it was a very reasonable request, that before he left all to follow the Lord Jesus, he could go back home to his friends and family and bid them farewell. What was the difficulty here? Two words: *looking back*. The Lord Jesus knew where his heart was. The Lord will not have any of His true followers to be those who are looking back, who keep looking back.

Look how the Apostle Paul so graciously set out the opposite. “This one thing I do” – no looking back – “forgetting those things which are behind” – no looking back – “and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The analogy there: it is a race. Now if you want to win the race, you cannot keep looking back. You cannot keep glancing behind to

see what others are doing. It has to be singleness of eye. It has to be looking forward. It has to be pressing towards the mark.

“Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.” The Lord knew where his heart was. You may say that in the case of Elisha when the Lord called him, the first thing he did, he went and said farewell to his father and mother. The Lord knew where his heart was and Elijah knew where his heart was.

Of course, the most solemn case, and it is left there as a beacon light to us, and that is Lot’s wife. In places out at sea there are these beacons or these buoys or these warnings – there are rocks here, danger here, keep away from them and avoid them. One of these beacons is Lot’s wife. Very many years afterwards our Lord Jesus in His ministry said, “Remember Lot’s wife.” You say, All she did was just look round to see what was happening. Yet the Lord turned her into a pillar of salt. It was immediate death and destruction. Why? He knew where her heart was. You remember the circumstances – Lot in the city of Sodom, the city being destroyed by fire – and Lot’s wife went a long way in religion. In a sense she was like Orpah. You could not tell the difference between Orpah and Ruth, but Orpah was one of those who looked back, and because she looked back, she went back to her idols and her gods and went back for ever.

Lot had been almost dragged out of the city of Sodom by an angel. But look at Lot’s wife. She was one of these who came out with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees. She was one of these who had witnessed all these wonderful happenings in Lot’s life. She had even been spoken to by an angel. She was even brought out of Sodom. But she looked back, and why did she look back? Because her heart was still in Sodom, and her heart was still in the world. She did not want to leave it. She wished she could return. “Remember Lot’s wife.” And the teaching of “Remember Lot’s wife” is this: beware of looking back, because it is the first step to turning back.

“And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but....” It is this *but* that is the trouble. “*But* let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.” It seems quite an innocent thing, but the Lord knew where his heart was. There is just another thing in passing. Some people – and I want to speak very carefully – some people will always put their own family first, and sometimes they put their own family first when their own family is in the wrong. J.C. Ryle, the famous bishop of Liverpool, said he

had found that godly men would take the most severe rebukes, but if you mention their children, they would turn against you in anger. How many people there are who do something, and it is not right, it is not good, it is not to the honour and glory of God, but they do it either to please their children, or because if they did not do it, their children would be displeased. It is this point of singleness of eye. We all come short here. It is this point of Jesus only.

“Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” He knew that this man was looking back, and the Lord Jesus used a very interesting illustration: a ploughman. Now I do not know much about ploughmen or agriculture, but apparently ploughing is a very skilful thing. It is not an easy thing. You have to keep your eyes fixed every moment. You must not be distracted, and literally if you look back, then when you look forward again you are starting the plough the wrong way. This has almost become a proverb in our chapels: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back.” We have to look forward; we have to look Christwards, heavenwards.

“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Years ago when I first preached at Gower Street, Mr. Green the pastor told me an interesting story. He had a case where a very old man applied for church membership and baptism, and they were so pleased about it, but afterwards that old man was so troubled and so tried. He made a decision: at the weeknight service, when it finished, he was going to see his pastor and say, “Please leave it; I feel I just can’t go forward.” He went with that intention. When Mr. Green announced his text, it was this: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” The old man could not stand that. He had to fall before it and go forward.

“Lord, I will follow Thee; *but....*” Well, this is a solemn subject, but there is such a principle that runs through it, this following of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It must come *first*. It must have the preeminence. There must not be any of these sinful *buts*, these exceptions, these *ifs*. May we be given grace, constrained by the love of Christ, to be true followers, to deny self, to take up our cross, to follow Him.

My brethren, why these anxious fears,
These warm pursuits and eager cares
For earth and all its gilded toys?
If the whole world you could possess,
It might enchant; it could not bless;
False hopes, vain pleasures, and light joys.

Remember, brethren, whose you are;
Whose cause you own, whose name you bear;
Is it not His who could not call
His own (though He had all things made)
A place whereon to lay His head –
A Servant, though the Lord of all?

If wealth or honour, power or fame,
Can bring you nearer to the Lamb,
Then follow these with all your might;
But if they only make you stray,
And draw your hearts from Him away,
Reflect in what you thus delight.

Jesus has said (who surely knew
Much better what we ought to do
Than we can e'er pretend to see),
“No thought e'en for the morrow take;”
And “He that will not for My sake
Relinquish all, 's unworthy Me.”

Let no vain words your souls deceive,
Nor Satan tempt you to believe
The world and God can hold their parts;
True Christians long for Christ alone.
The sacrifices God will own,
Are broken, not divided, hearts.

Great things we are not here to crave;
But if we food and raiment have,
Should learn to be therewith content.
Into the world we nothing brought,
Nor can we from it carry aught;
Then walk the way your Master went.

J. Hart