

Are we following the Lord? (3)

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Let us turn to **John 8: 12**

John 8: 12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

It is important for us not only to appreciate the Lord Jesus as the Light of the world, but also how we can through Him have the Light of life; and to do that we must learn to follow Him. So let us consider further what it means to follow Him.

Luke 9: 61-62

61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."

62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

A passage like this is not so easy to understand because as it comes through to us, it might seem that this person's request was rather reasonable. He said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." It seems something quite proper; he wanted to follow the Lord Jesus but he wanted to bid farewell to those at home.

So the reply of the Lord Jesus may seem not very appropriate to us because He said, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." These are very severe and strong words; that this approach by this person rendered him not fit for the kingdom of God. So what was the Lord Jesus seeking to communicate?

From the context of the way the Lord Jesus conducted Himself, what He taught and how He lived, we can say that basically, it has to do with what is truly important in life to us and how we make our choices on the basis of what we truly value.

This man said, "I will follow You, Lord" so that was good, he wanted to follow the Lord. But the question is: how much did he want to follow the Lord, how far would he be prepared to go to follow the Lord? It is easy to say, "I will follow the Lord" but the Lord Jesus said we must count the cost, we must know what it means to follow Him. So this person said, "...but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." "...first" – so that is first: "I must do that first, otherwise I cannot really go with You."

If the response was correct, it is possible that the Lord Jesus might allow him to say good-bye to those at home. If for example, he had said, "Lord, I will follow You immediately if that is what I should do, but if it is appropriate in Your sight, I would like to say good-bye to those at home", that would be a different spirit.

This brings across to us the importance of our loyalty to God. How much does it mean to us to follow Him? Would other things come in the way, stop us, or cause us to waver, cause us to pause, cause us to be not so prepared to move with the Lord when He calls?

The Lord Jesus put it this way: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

The issue here is looking back. It is not wrong to say goodbye to those at home; what is wrong here is looking back. He wanted to follow the Lord Jesus but he was looking back; he could not fully leave other things behind.

God wants us to honour our parents; God wants us to develop meaningful relationships and in meaningful relationships, there is certainly a place to say "Goodbye".

But when it comes to the kingdom of God, when it comes to our relationship with God, we must be careful to recognize that this relationship must surpass all other relationships, all other contexts.

We can say that in this situation, it was an issue of emotional attachment. It was not based on moral, practical value, eternal consequences; it is emotional attachment. And this emotional attachment can at times be valid, at times not valid; at times meaningful, at times not meaningful.

There are some people who may have a mechanical toy and having played with that toy for a few months, they may become so attached to the toy that when the toy does not function any more, they cry and cry and they are very depressed. It is a toy, it is mechanical but emotionally, they become very attached; they cannot be separated from it.

Well in other areas, it may also apply that way. A person who is addicted to drugs, his emotions are also drawn to that; others are addicted to television programmes; others to certain kinds of songs. There are many things that we can be drawn towards and emotionally very attracted, and this can hinder us from doing the things that we know we ought to do. So this is an area we need to consider.

If we put our hand to the plow in the sense that we say, "I will follow You Lord," let us seek by God's grace to mean it with all our hearts, with all the intensity that we can have in our hearts and lives to live for Him; and only in that context do we consider other things; and all other things must be in a context of what is meaningful to the Lord.

We have to discuss with Him, we have to bring it before Him; we must make sure that it is pleasing to Him.

Otherwise, whatever we do will conflict with our relationship with God. So, we can say we love God, we will follow Him but if we do things that are contrary to that, then we are working against what we say we believe in.

Looking back, hesitation is something that occurs when we are not very sure of things. You want to buy a house but you are not very sure, you hesitate; you want to make a trip, you are not very sure, you hesitate.

But when it comes to following the Lord, you must come to a point when you no longer hesitate: you know whom you believe, you understand what it costs, you are prepared for what it means, so you do not hesitate anymore. You must walk with Him, live for Him, move with Him.

So if we want to have the Light of life, then our following the Light of the world must be absolute, total, complete.

How does this work out in daily life situations? How do we put this into practice?

The apostle Paul was very conscious of this. In his own life he ensured that he would live that way and he sought to teach others to do likewise.

1 Corinthians 7: 29-31

- 29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none;
30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;
31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

Was the apostle Paul saying that those who have wives should divorce their wives; those who are weeping should stop weeping; those who rejoice should not rejoice anymore; those who buy must not buy, must not possess? Is that what he was saying?

Obviously not – what he was saying was: it is in order to do these things; to have a wife, to weep, to rejoice, to buy is not wrong in itself, but we must make sure that these do not hinder us from our devotion to the Lord.

So those who have wives should be as though they had none: “as though” means it is not truly so but it is “as if”.

So the meaning is: You have a wife but you function as if you do not have a wife; so you fulfil your responsibilities towards your wife, you appreciate her, you relate with her but because of your devotion to the Lord, you live as if you are single: you are single-hearted for the Lord, you are devoted to Him, you are not distracted by your marriage; you live for the Lord with undivided devotion. That is what it ought to be.

Same thing for those who weep: it is in order to weep when things go wrong, when things are difficult, painful; it is not wrong to weep. But if we are devoted to the Lord, we cannot allow these things to preoccupy our hearts, to affect us such that we cannot function properly in our walk with God – we become so sad that we cannot carry on in our fellowship with the Lord, in attending to the things that He wants us to do.

Likewise those who rejoice: they are promoted, they do well in exams, they are so happy and they forget all about God. It is very easy for that to happen too. Yes, it is in order to rejoice if things happen that you find are good, but your devotion to God must always be primary.

Those who buy, as though they did not possess: so many people may find it very easy to be captured by the things they possess; they become very important to them.

But we are called to live as though we do not possess anything. Whatever we have is offered up to God; it is available to Him. He can dispose of them in any way that He sees fit; it is all offered up to God: It is the intensity of our lives in our devotion to God; it is our focus on Him who has loved us and given Himself up for us.

Imagine: if the Lord Jesus were hesitant about the cross, what would have happened? All of us would have perished. If He was not sure whether He would go to the cross, when the situation became difficult He was not so prepared, how could He be the Saviour of the world?

The Lord Jesus was steadfast.

When He decided to leave heaven to come to this world, His commitment was complete. And throughout His time on earth, He never wavered. He knew that the event of the cross would be a very, very difficult experience for Him, but He still said, "Not My will, but Yours be done". In the garden of Gethsemane, He was in great anguish but he persevered in this path. He went to the cross willingly, like a sheep led to the slaughter.

He was prepared to sacrifice His life, give it up for our well-being.

If we think of that, should we not be prepared to offer up our lives to Him in a similar kind of spirit: that we are willing to do His will, move with Him, go through whatever He sees fit to fulfil His will, and we will not allow anything to hinder us, to stop us from that direction?

Matthew 10: 37-39

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

The Lord Jesus is not saying that we should not love our father or mother, we should not love our son or daughter; He is not saying that. He says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me".

What does it mean to love father or mother more than loving Him?

This is not a reference to emotional attachment in the sense that if you are more emotionally attached to the Lord Jesus than you are to your parents then that is a good thing, that is a right thing. He is not referring here to how much we are emotionally attached to Him.

When He says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me", He is referring to value: How much do you value your father or mother in comparison with how much do you value Him?

How important is He to you?

So if our lives are such that anyone or anything in this world is more important than what the Lord wants of us and our relationship with Him then He says we are not worthy of Him.

When the Lord says we are not worthy of Him, He does not mean that those whose love for Him is not perfect will be rejected by Him.

We all know that the disciples failed again and again in their love for the Lord. They called Him "Lord, Lord" but did not do the things that He said, but the Lord still treated them as His disciples.

But here He is telling us the underlying principle: if we do not value Him that much, we are not worthy of Him. That is the principle.

But God in His grace may still help us: though we are not worthy, though our love for Him is not so deep, not so great, He is prepared to help us. He is patient, He is kind, He is gracious; He may take time to teach us.

And so He taught the disciples through difficult times to learn how to love Him in the right way.

But we must bear in mind this principle: if we do not love Him above all else, we are not worthy of Him, we are not responding in a manner that we ought to.

And so He says, "... he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." So the cross tells us that we must put to death whatever hinders us from following the Lord. The cross tells us we must take a path which may be very difficult if this is what the Lord wants of us.

And so He says, "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

Many people want to find their lives and that means they want to live a life that they are satisfied with. But that satisfaction is very much in terms of personal inclinations, what the world can offer, emotional satisfaction.

When we do that, we will lose our lives: we will not be able to have true value in our lives, eternal life.

But “he who has lost his life for My sake will find it” – if we are prepared to give up our lives to the Lord, then we will find our lives: there will come about a transformation in us so that there will be quality, there will be meaning in our lives.

So if we want to follow the Lord, we must deal with this area of emotional attachment to anything in this world or anyone in this world.

Emotional attachment by itself is not wrong but when it is not based on meaning, when it conflicts with our devotion to the Lord, then it becomes negative and we need to deal with it.

It applies to all areas of life, to all situations that we go through, and it is an area that is very difficult to deal with.

We may not realize it and very often, we may say, “Yes, I will follow the Lord, I will do His will” but we may not realize that in practical terms, we often are not doing that because of our own emotional inclinations, attachments.

This is an area that is very difficult to change. Something that you like and you have been doing for many years, it is very difficult to give up.

And so we find that many relationships are based on emotional attachments. So one moment, two persons can be very deeply in love and mean everything to each other; sometime later, they can become enemies. It is something that can just happen because the emotion is no longer there.

But if relationships are based on meaning that is stable then that relationship remains stable in the midst of changing circumstances, situations of life.

So, following the Lord means we concentrate on meaning: we love Him because He is good, because He is trustworthy, because He has given up His life for our wellbeing, so we can trust Him and we can always trust Him, no matter what the situation may be.

If we go by emotional attachments, there are many things that we can be attached to from time to time, but they may not last and the meaning may not be there.

So then as we come before the Lord, let us ask Him to help us understand what it means to follow Him, so that we can have the light of life and such that we will be able to shine that light to help others to find life.

Let us ask the Lord to help us to review our lives and where necessary, to change on the basis of His guidance and His enabling.