

# Absolute Allegiance

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[ 0 : 00 ] While they're going, you can turn in your Bible so long to Luke chapter 9. We're not going to read it straight away. We'll get to it in a second. But have your Bibles open there in the meantime. Luke chapter 9 and verse 51.

So as we've spoken about in the last couple of weeks, we start a new series, a four-week series called Simply Jesus. That'll run up until the build-up to Easter when we'll be diving into a couple of, I think we're doing a couple of Old Testament images of the life of Christ and the gospel of building up to Easter.

And then we're going to do our big, big book study for the year, which is the book of Acts, which will take us right through the rest of the year, probably into the new year in the book of Acts. So that's just kind of a snapshot of where we're going.

But here's where we are today. In one of the earliest biographies we have of Jesus' life, which is the gospel of Luke. So Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are our gospels, our overviews, our biographies of Jesus' life.

But one of the earliest ones, Luke, which is written probably in the mid-60s in the first century. Chapter 9, verse 18. Jesus asks his followers quite an important question.

[ 1 : 27 ] He says, who do the crowds say I am? And it's pretty evident if you read the replies that come his way that there is a lot of confusion amongst the people as to who exactly he was, what he represented.

These are the people who are following him, watching him, listening to him preach, and they're confused. Now, I'm a Christian pastor, which means I get to spend a lot of time speaking to people about Jesus, people who go to church, and even people who don't go to church.

People who would identify as Christian, people who wouldn't identify as Christian. And I find that today, even, when I talk about Jesus, there's still a lot of confusion. To who he is, what he stands for, what he's done.

And in some ways, it's actually quite strange if you think about it. It's strange given the fact that from a historical point of view, you could quite easily, I think, make an argument that the Jesus of Nazareth is the most influential figure in world history.

And it's not even actually close. So today, by like just conservative estimates, there are 2.2 billion Christians in the world. That is, people who identify as followers of this first century figure.

[ 2 : 35 ] 2.2 billion. Okay? It's quite a lot. In fact, I'd basically put it to you that you really actually, whether you believe in Jesus or not, you can't make sense of the world as it is today without having some knowledge of Jesus.

Because his influence upon this world is just so pervasive and deep. And so what I want to ask you to do over the next four weeks is I want to ask you to take a journey with me. I want us to take a journey together with Jesus as we encounter him in the Gospel of Luke.

Chapter 9, verse 51, Luke tells us that Jesus set out on a journey. It says, as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

See, although all these people around him are pretty confused about who he is, his disciples, the people who are a little bit closer, his inner ring, they are starting to understand a little bit better at this point in the narrative who Jesus is.

And so when he turns to Peter, who's one of his closest disciples, and he says, he asks him the same question, who do you say I am? Peter answers, you are God's Messiah. Now, Messiah is a term that refers to an anointed one from the Old Testament.

[ 3 : 44 ] Someone who was in the line of King David who would one day come to be the king over his people. The people of Israel waiting for this Messiah to come, this anointed king to come. And Peter says, you're him.

You're that person. You're that person we've been waiting for this whole time. You are him. But then there's a twist in the plot. Jesus is not only revealed as Messiah, but he makes a further statement about himself.

He says, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. So Jesus tells him, I'm going to die.

So he says, I'm going to die. You're the Messiah. I'm going to die. And in fulfillment of that, that foretelling, he resolutely then heads towards Jerusalem to face his death.

And so I want us to journey with him. I want us to go with him through Luke's gospel as he journeys to his own death, listening to what he says along the way, observing what he does along the way, in the hope that we might come to better understand exactly who he is and what he stands for.

[ 4 : 55 ] And I want to start this morning by pointing out that in order to journey with Jesus, you need to give him nothing less than your full allegiance. Nothing less than your full allegiance.

Following Jesus means nothing less than full allegiance. Now, maybe you hear that and you're thinking, listen, I'm not really big on giving my full allegiance to anything, really, never mind some figure from the first century.

And so what I want to ask you, if you're in that situation, is I want to ask you to hear Jesus out. Think carefully about the call that he issues here to come and follow him.

Okay, so you can turn your Bibles. Luke 9, verse 51 to 62. Listen to these words. As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers on ahead who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the people there did not welcome him because he was heading for Jerusalem.

[ 6 : 00 ] When the disciples, James and John, saw this, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them? But Jesus turned and rebuked them. And then he and his disciples went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus replied, foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

He said to another man, follow me. But he 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.

Still 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 a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's ask for God's help as we study this. Father, your word is truth. Your word is our life. Won't you speak life into our hearts this morning?

[ 7 : 01 ] By the power of your spirit, won't you take the words of scripture and embed them in our hearts in such a way that we are transformed, in such a way that we are changed by what we see, by what we hear. This is a supernatural work of your spirit.

And so we pray that your spirit would do that exact thing this morning. Have mercy on us, we ask. For Christ's sake. Amen. So we read all the way from verse 51 there, but I really want to focus in on verses 57 to 62, those three encounters.

Jesus has three interactions with would-be followers of his. People who were possibly kind of in the broader band of his disciples who'd seen him do some of the miracles, seen some of the teaching, and now as he is resolutely heading towards Jerusalem, they're like considering like, well, maybe we want to get in on this thing and get on the bigger bandwagon and go with him.

So see three things here. Jesus demands allegiance to himself over personal gain. Jesus demands allegiance to himself as a matter of urgency. And Jesus demands allegiance to himself as of first priority.

So over personal gain as a matter of urgency and as a first priority. Here's the first one. Over personal gain. Look at, back down to verse 57. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

[ 8 : 22 ] And Jesus replied, foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. So the first young man comes along and he says, I want to go wherever you're going.

Jesus, wherever you're going, I want to go with you. And he's incredibly passionate. He's incredibly enthusiastic. With that sort of attitude, he's the kind of guy you want to come to church, right? He's a person who says like, oh, Sunday seminar, where do I sign up?

Oh, you need a welcome person at the door? Can I sign up for that? Oh, you need someone to help the deacons? Hands up. I'm there. I want to get in this. I love everything about this church. I want to get on board. And so it's quite peculiar then that Jesus doesn't go, well, welcome on board.

Here's your sign up sheet. Drop it in the box on the door on the way out as you go out. Rather, he seems to push him away. Repel him.

Now, why does he do that? Seems that Jesus knows there's something in his heart that makes him unfit for discipleship, for journeying with Jesus.

[ 9 : 25 ] Now, what is that? What is it exactly? Well, more than one writer, commentator, has looked at this passage and pointed out that this individual is likely looking to attach himself to Jesus because he sees some real promise in Jesus.

In other words, he sought some sort of advancement by aligning himself with Jesus. Jesus has got a growing following. The crowds are getting bigger that are following Jesus.

Now he's heading towards Jerusalem. He's heading towards the capital where the Romans are entrenched. If things go really well, like maybe the crowds get bigger by the time he gets to Jerusalem so that when he gets there, he takes over.

He ousts the Romans and he starts a new Jewish state. He's going to be the new ruler in town then. Being close to him is going to get you places. He's going to get you prestige and power and status and wealth, the things you want in life.

And so this guy wants to attach himself to Jesus for his own gain, for his own advantage. Now we can see that that was probably what was in his heart because of the way that Jesus responds.

[ 10 : 29 ] Deflecting away from advantage and privilege. Here's a guy who wants Jesus, not so that he can have a relationship with Jesus, but so that he can get what he really wants.

So that he can get the stuff that he really wants. I don't want you, Jesus. I want your things. He's using Jesus. That's what we call it. If you want to follow Jesus in order to get anything other than a relationship with God through Christ, then you might be using Jesus this morning.

When I was a young kid in primary school, I can remember that one of the absolute, absolute biggest fears in our little social circles that made up our school was that you were being used by your friends.

Again, he passes little letters around. This is like before. We didn't have cell phones and things like that at school, so we would pass letters around and someone would say, hey, so-and-so is using you. And they would crush you. Completely crushed. They didn't want you for you, but for what you brought to the table.

Like maybe you had a garden that was bigger than the other garden, so the kids wanted to come play at your house after school. Maybe your parents were more lenient than other parents, so the kids wanted to come play at your house. Or maybe you had TV games.

[ 11 : 41 ] So we didn't have Xbox or PlayStation. We had TV games. They were making a comeback at the moment, but we had TV games, and people maybe wanted to come play at your house because you had TV games. But you always feared being used.

That people didn't want you for you. That they wanted your stuff. Because being used by someone is such a selfish and dehumanizing experience.

Now, if it's that bad amongst mere mortals, imagine what a slight upon God it is that we would use His divine Son as a means to an end. See, if you're using Jesus, you haven't got a God that you worship.

You've got a genie, a personal assistant who kind of grants you wishes, grants you your whims. And your spirituality, here's the thing, if you've got that, your spirituality is going to become extremely shallow and unsatisfying in a very short while because God, here's the why, because God is not always going to give you what you want.

So subconsciously, you're going to be coming to church, and you're going to be saying things in your heart of hearts like, I diligently follow Jesus, I'm diligently following His ways, reading His Bible, now I deserve some things to go well in my life.

[ 12 : 58 ] I deserve my finances to go well. I deserve that home loan, I deserve a spouse or a romantic partner or a relationship. And so when stuff then goes bad, and you don't get those things, well then you doubt God's goodness.

God's not good. God's not good. But you were using God. It's your personal assistant. You can't do that. It's not how you relate to the creator God of the universe.

Timothy Keller, the late pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York, he kind of explains the absurdity of the situation. He says this, he says, If the distance between the earth and the sun, which is 92 million miles, was the thickness of a piece of paper, the diameter of our galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high.

And our galaxy is less than a speck of dust in the part of the universe that we can see. And that part of the universe might just be a speck of dust compared to all the universe. And if Jesus is the son of God who holds all this together with the word of his power, is this the kind of person you ask into your life to be your personal assistant?

You see how ludicrous it is? Any attempt to follow Christ must be to the goal of following Christ, and not the goal of any sort of personal gain.

[ 14 : 25 ] Look how Jesus responds to those who would seek personal gain from following him. He says this, he says, What is he kind of cryptically saying to this young man?

He's saying, you know nothing. You do not understand me at all. You are totally misunderstanding me. You're misunderstanding what I've come to do. I haven't come to advance your agendas. I've come to be homeless.

Rejected. Excluded. Marginalized. And ultimately killed. But through that I will achieve my agenda. The salvation of souls. So there's this upside down picture.

The son of man has no place to lay his head. The son of man is kind of Jesus' favorite way of referring to himself. It's an Old Testament image that denotes power and majesty.

Divine glory. The son of man, with the power of majesty and divine glory, the son of man doesn't have a place to put his head down. It's homeless. He doesn't have any apparent earthly gain. You want to align yourself with Jesus, the son of man, for your own gain?

[ 15 : 39 ] Well, the son of man doesn't even have a home. You don't understand him. If you're trying to get earthly gain out of him. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, famous Welsh preacher of the last century, puts it this way.

He says he's the paradox, the mystery. He's the enigma, the God, the man, the ruler of everything, yet the one who has nothing. Jesus turns to his would-be followers and he says, Oh, wait a minute.

Let these things sink down into your ears. I am going to die. I'm going to be tried. I'm going to be condemned. I'm going to die in utter helplessness. I'm going to suffer shame, ignominy, death, death itself, burial, grave.

I'm going to die as an apparent failure. Are you ready for that? Do you understand it? Oh, no, says Christ, you don't understand it. I don't save men by teaching.

I don't save men by gathering armies. I don't save men by legislation. I'm going to save men by being arrested, by being condemned, by being led as a lamb to the slaughter. I save men by dying on a cross.

[ 16 : 43 ] I save men by being buried in a grave and then rising from it. Do you understand that? Jesus demands absolute allegiance to himself over personal gain.

Using him for personal gain is to completely, completely misunderstand him. Secondly, Jesus demands allegiance to himself as a matter of urgency.

Look at the next person, verse 59. He said to another man, follow me. But he 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. Now here Jesus actually seeks the person out. This is not a passerby that says, I want to follow you.

Jesus goes to this person and says, hey, come follow me. And the person seems to make a fairly reasonable objection. Let me first go and do the decent thing of burying my dad.

[ 17 : 44 ] And then I'll happily come and follow you and join your band. And Jesus' reply seems pretty cold and heartless. Like I would fail pastoral class 101 if I had a response to someone who was grieving like this here.

What's happening here? It happens, it has to do with urgency. Urgency. You see, we know from the customs in the ancient Near East, and actually from the details here, that this person's father probably wasn't dead, but just aged.

If he died already and the funeral processions were in place, Jesus wouldn't be having a conversation with him. So what most commentators think he's saying is, he's saying, first let me go be with my aged father until he dies.

And then I'll come to you. And the emphasis in the text is on the word first. First let me do this. And Jesus says, no. First, come follow me.

Do it now. Don't wait. Don't come up with a thousand legitimate excuses for not straight away following me. Don't do that. Come now. It's urgent. As a pastor, I see this over and over and over and over and over again in the lives of people.

[ 19 : 02 ] Particularly younger people or particularly people going through transitions in life stage. I see people who like Jesus. They're not fighting with me about theology or Jesus. They like Jesus.

They like the church. They like the idea of salvation. They like the Bible for the most part. But they don't immediately throw themselves into Jesus as a matter of urgency. Why?

Well, because there's always some other big, noble, important thing in their life that they first want to get sorted out before they come to Jesus. Say, in Augustine, 4th century bishop of North Africa, before he was a Christian, he went to go hear a great preacher, Ambrose, in Rome.

And he was convicted by what he heard. But his life back home was full of illicit sexual relationships with prostitutes and concubines.

And so he reputedly prayed something like this. Lord, make me pure. But just not yet. Now, I've seen that sentiment a hundred times.

[ 20 : 04 ] A hundred times. I just want to travel a little bit more. And then I'll come back to get settled in the church and get involved. I just want to get all my studying behind me. And then I can really concentrate on my spirituality.

I just want to get a little bit further ahead in my career. Get that job security. Get that salary security. And then I'll be able to contribute meaningfully to ministry. I just want to get the kids settled in school.

Get a routine. And then I can get back on track. Jesus says, let the dead bury the dead. That's what he says to your noble ideas. I think what he means is this.

He means the parts of this world that are passing away, the dead parts, will deal with themselves. The dead will bury the dead. The ordinary business of life will go on.

He's not demeaning that. He's not saying it's unimportant. But he is saying you've got to have something above that. Of first importance. The dead can bury the dead. But only Jesus can raise the dead.

[ 21 : 05 ] Only Jesus can take your life beyond the ordinary. In fact, infuse the ordinary then with real life. Because he is the one who brings life out of death. Don't delay. Don't come up with good, genuine excuses.

Throw yourself into Jesus now. Maybe you're sitting here right now and you're humming and hawing going, should I go to a Sunday seminar tonight? Should I go to a Thursday pre-meeting? Should I go to a Wednesday pre-meeting? I think this passage tells you what you should be thinking about.

Immerse yourself in him, in his church, in his word. Follow him with everything that you've got. Now, that's the urgency of the text. And you might actually just find, as you do that, that all those other things, your career, your studies, your family, your aspirations, actually begin to all be filled up with new life.

The sort of life that you could never actually manufacture by yourself. Jesus' call is urgent. Follow Jesus. Then thirdly, Jesus demands allegiance to himself as a first priority.

So here's the third encounter. It's in verse 61. Still another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family. And Jesus replied, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

[ 22 : 29 ] So this guy offers to follow Jesus. But after he's gone home to say farewell to his family. And it's pretty similar to the previous one. Not following Jesus because of something that's good and right.

But the difference here is that the emphasis is not on the timing of following Jesus, but on the value we place in following Jesus over other good things that we also value.

So again, listen here carefully. I don't think that Jesus is saying it's a bad thing to say farewell to your family, to find value in family. But I think he is saying in kind of a form of stark, stark, stark contrast that no value, no matter how good and right, can be the chief value in your life ahead of following him.

No value. You can't serve Jesus in something else as of equal values, equal masters. That's why Jesus famously says in the Sermon on the Mount, you cannot serve God and money.

And you can substitute a bunch of different things in there for the word money. You've only got enough space in your life for one ultimate chief concern, one ultimate master. You can only ultimately set your gaze in one direction.

[ 23 : 36 ] And he illustrates that with plowing here. If you're plowing a field and you look back, you'll stop plowing in a straight line and you'll veer off and start going all crooked.

Now I know absolutely nothing about farming and the agrarian world, so I had to like find out about what he meant here. But I do know something about cycling. And it's the same thing with cycling. I know this from hard experience.

If you are trying to drive in a straight line and you look back, the next thing you're going to be bumping up against cars that are parked on the left hand side of the road. There were no marks on the car, so I didn't have to go and tell anyone afterwards.

You can only have one central vision. One central vision for your life. Now you might say to me, Stephen, well why should I pick Jesus as that one central vision above every other good thing in this life?

Why pick Jesus above career? Why pick Jesus above romance, above family, above personal pleasure? Why pick him as your central vision? I'll tell you why.

[ 24 : 45 ] Because his central vision is set on loving and redeeming you in obedience to his Father. Verse 51, we were told that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

He resolutely set out for his death. Single-mindedly, he set out to redeem you. He didn't look back.

He didn't get all distracted by all the other necessary and good things he could have occupied himself with. There was plenty of more people that needed to be healed. Plenty more demons that needed to be casted out. Plenty more teaching he could have done, but he doesn't.

He resolutely heads to Jerusalem. He resolutely heads to the cross. He resolutely heads to the nails. He resolutely heads to the thorns.

Away from the comfort of home. He resolutely heads towards being buried with the dead. And he does all of that single-mindedly with your salvation in front of him. Single-mindedly gave up his life to strip your life from sin and from shame and hopelessness and death.

[ 25 : 55 ] So friends, yes, Jesus does call you to absolute allegiance. He's not here as an add-on. Like, hey, I just need to make my life a little bit better, so let me add Jesus on as a kind of a side thing here.

To say nice words to me when I'm feeling down. To comfort me when I'm having a rough time. Jesus is not asking to be that. He's not asking to be just one of many things in your life.

He is calling for absolute allegiance from you. But not before he gives absolutely everything of himself for you.

And for your salvation. You've got to follow something in this life. The idea of kind of just bumbling through this life without following anything, it doesn't exist.

You've got to follow something. And I suggest you're going to be hard-pressed to find a greater love worth following the love of Christ. Your career is not going to bleed for you. Your wealth is not going to be pierced for you.

[ 26 : 58 ] Your status is not going to humble itself and wear a crown of thorns for you. Christ will do those things for you. Christ has done those things for you.

I think Isaac Watts is the greatest hymn writer of all time. I know Charles Wesley isn't probably the most famous. He wrote more hymns, I think.

He won the award by just content production. But I think Isaac Watts is the best hymn writer of all time. And his most famous hymn is the hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. And in that hymn, you can see that Isaac Watts understands this exact point.

Because he writes these lines. Will you give yourself to Christ this morning?

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