



## Jesus Before All

Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God - Part 42  
Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 9:51-62 | August 16, 2010



### Luke 9:51–62

*<sup>51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. <sup>53</sup> But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> And they went on to another village.*

*<sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." <sup>59</sup> To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup> Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

## INTRODUCTION

All righty, Mars Hill, what book are we in? Luke, for two and a half years, two and a half years. For some of you, you call that your freshman year. For us, we call it the book of Luke. We'll spend two and a half years in the book of Luke. Today we look at Jesus before all, Luke 9:51–62.

While you're turning there, I'll tell you that this is a hinge point in the book. So much of Jesus' life and ministry, hinges on what we see in 9:51, which says, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up," That is, returned to heaven. This is after his death, burial, resurrection, ascension that he ultimately would be taken back up to heaven where he had come from as God. "He," Jesus, "set his face to go toward Jerusalem." For Jesus, this is that day. That day is the day when you stake your claim, you determine your future. "This is who I am, this is where I'm going, this is what I'm doing. I'm resolute in this decision. I cannot be dissuaded. I am committed to see this through to completion."

And he is going to Jerusalem, and this is for the purpose of his crucifixion. This is Jesus, with a furrowed brow and a steely gaze, setting his eyes ultimately toward the cross, where he would go to atone for the sins of the world, dying in our place for our

sins as our Savior and God. If this were a movie, this would be when we see that climax point when the hero knows that for him to get rid of the villain, he has to ride into the place of battle and conflict. He needs to lay it all on the line, and risk his life, as it were. And he makes that firm determination that that's exactly where he's going and exactly what he's doing.

## **THE CITY OF JERUSALEM**

And this is that transition point in the book, and from here, Jesus will march, literally, toward Jerusalem, toward his cross, toward his conflict with Satan to defeat and disarm his great foe, and our great enemy. And the way this is going to work is we'll see, in the ensuing months, literally Jesus' months of journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem. And you won't even see Jesus arrive in Jerusalem until Luke 19, and along the way he'll be preaching and teaching and healing and casting out demons. You'll meet some of the people that he serves faithfully today, but he's heading toward Jerusalem.

And up until this point, he's been working in the region of Galilee. As we've examined it: small towns, villages, dozens, hundreds of people; farmers, peasants, fisherman, simple rural folk. But Jerusalem is altogether different. This is the big city. In that day, it was upwards of a hundred thousand people. And if you came from a village of forty, fifty, or sixty people like Jesus did, and you made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to see Jerusalem is quite a sight. It's a city literally set on a hill. It's called, in the Bible, the city of God, and it's a city on a hill, and it's carved out of rock, out of stone. It's a magnificent sight. It goes all the way back to three thousand years ago. If you go there today, ten layers of civilization lie one on top of the other. That's why they keep excavating and digging and finding different aspects of history. It's amazing.

In the days of Abraham, it was just a common, simple area with few, if any people, dwelling, and it is the place where he nearly sacrificed his only son, Isaac. And it was said that in that region, God, himself, would provide. It was all a moment that was pregnant with meaning, that ultimately Jesus would come, the Son of God, as Abraham had Isaac carry his wood, so the Father would have God the Son carry his own wood to his place of bloodshed and death. And Jesus laid down his life, and died in that same area of Jerusalem, which is why the temple also was built there foreshadowing the forthcoming of Jesus. Everything climaxes in Jerusalem. It's mentioned about eight hundred times in your Bible. Today a multitude of world religions would call it their home. Very, very, very significant city.

Now let me tell you this, that I love my job, I really do, and I love the day in which God has chosen for me to work, because I get to take a camera with me and go see things and show them to you. So we got to go to Jerusalem, and I've been able to show you where Jesus was born, and the town he grew up in, and where he was transfigured. And you're gonna later see ultimately where he was crucified, and where they believe he rose and where he ascended from.

You could pray; in the next year we're gonna go to Turkey. We're gonna shoot the seven churches of Revelation, we're gonna shoot the archaeological dig in Ephesus. We're gonna show you more than ever in the future. We want the Bible to come alive. We want you to see it as history, and reality, and not just philosophy.

And so this last year, the tour company was gracious enough to take us on a tour, and to gift to the Mars Hill staff the tickets for our film crew to go with me. So it was a very generous gift. And we actually had this opportunity to go up on top of a building. Some non-Christians allowed us, in the old quarters of Jerusalem, to get to the roof of their building and to film it for you.

Jerusalem is a city that is surrounded with an old wall, and it is very densely packed within that wall. It's hard to walk and shops are close together and tensions run high, and then the city spills outside of those walls. And so, of course, there has been some alteration in two thousand years, but you can get some idea of the topography, and the density of the city from seeing it for yourself. So it's with great joy that I now have the opportunity to show that to you, and then we'll unpack it. Here's Jerusalem as it is today.

*Hi, Pastor Mark here in Jerusalem. You know what's interesting about the book of Luke, at 9:51, the book breaks geographically. We see Jesus move from the region and area of Galilee, and it says that he set his face toward Jerusalem. It is speaking there of old Jerusalem, the city within the walls, the city of King David. The remainder of Luke from Luke 9:51 forward shows Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and then many of the major events, including his arrest, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, all happen right here within the walls called Jerusalem.*

*And as we have been walking around, we have found it difficult to be able to share with you exactly how everything is laid out. That's because the city is so compact. It's hard to get a good panoramic scope of the city. And so we've come up here on the rooftop, and I'd like to give you a brief tour of both the old city and the new city.*

*If we begin off to the left, that is where Jesus ultimately would have been buried, his crucifixion and burial ultimately outside of the city to my left. We swing over to the large mount. Underneath it are a number of graves, and that is, in fact, the Mount of Olives. Jesus prayed, and preached, and taught there. Zechariah tells us that when he returns, Jesus' feet will actually land in that place. At the base of the Mount of Olives is the Kidron Valley.*

*And then in front of me is Jerusalem as was known in the days of Jesus, obviously with some alterations but geographically, the roughly two hundred forty acres that comprise this area, were, in fact, the places that Jesus went. And today is it broken up into four basic sections.*

*Of course, if you would look with me straight ahead, essentially where the crane is, there's a white dome. In that general vicinity is what is known as the Jewish Quarter, and about three thousand or so live there.*

*If we move then a bit to the right, that is the Armenian Christian Quarter. They were a people group that were Christians, and they were oppressed and slaughtered by the Muslim Turks. As a result, they were refugees, and there was some sympathy for them for obvious reason. I'm told the number there is very small, simply in the hundreds.*

*Moving a little farther to the right, there is the Christian Quarter. And the Christian*

*Quarter, we are told, is a few thousand people, perhaps.*

*And then if you look at the remainder of what constitutes the Old Jerusalem, that is the Arab Quarter. That is where the Muslims live.*

*Today, many of you are likely unaware of the roughly twenty-five thousand residents in Old Jerusalem, the City of David. A few thousand of them are Jewish. A few thousand of them are Christian, and the vast majority, in this particular area, are Muslim. And you can tell by the Dome of the Rock, and other mosques that are in the topography, in the cinematography, that Islam has, indeed, taken great root in this area.*

*Looking between the mosques and over the Dome of the Rock, that is the direction toward Bethlehem where Jesus was ultimately born, and the direction toward the Dead Sea, the lowest place on the earth. That being said, I also want to share with you the area up near and off to the side of the white dome up on the hill, that place is known as Mount Zion. You'll hear of that place oftentimes in the Scriptures, and frequently in the Psalms. And it is on that place that David's tomb is to be found. It is there that Jesus ate the Last Supper, the Passover meal with his disciples. And lastly, it is also the place where the Holy Spirit descended on the early church, one hundred twenty believers, on the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost, and that is where Christianity in its new covenant context, and the inauguration of the Christian church, as we know it, happened right there.*

How cool is that? I love showing stuff to you guys, and I really want to thank the elders for allowing me to use all the technology to teach you as best I can. And here's why this matters. I want you to have an idea of the topography of Jerusalem, the size and the scope, as well as the proximity of a lot of major areas that we'll be hearing about in the future of Luke's gospel, in the ministry of Jesus. But I also want to give you a bit of a geographical sketch, because Jesus is journeying from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south, and he's passing through Samaria. And as he's making this journey, we're going to see how various people respond and react to him.

## **JESUS BEFORE TRIBE**

Today we'll see one people group, the Samaritans, and then three individuals, and how they respond and react to Jesus. So the first thing we learn is there's a group called the Samaritans, and they have their tribe before Jesus, and it has to be Jesus before tribe.

We read this in Luke 9:52–56, “And he sent,” that is Jesus, “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 toward Jerusalem.” He's determined to get to the cross. “And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’” Very patient, gracious Christians there. “But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.”

What's happening here? Well, I'll show it to you on a map. Now Jesus, thus far, has been doing the preponderance of his ministry, up north, in Galilee, small towns, villages. He is working around the Sea of Galilee with peasants, fishermen, and

farmers. He's making his multi-month walk toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, toward his place of death, burial, resurrection, ascension. And then he passes through an area called Samaria.

Now let me explain to you Samaria. These people were kind of Jews. These were sort of pseudo jack Jews. That's who they were in that day. They had intermarried with pagans, and they established their own temple, their own Bible, their own religion, their own theology, their own pastors. And the Jews didn't know what to do with these people, because they were just completely cuckoo. This would be like, let's see, Mormon nudist Scientologists. You'd be like, "I don't even know what to do with them," right? "They say they're sort of an offshoot of Christianity, but we don't even know what to do with them."

So what would happen is, as God's people journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem, they would just walk around Utah. They would just go completely around Utah, and they didn't even know what to do with Samaria. And the hostility between the Jewish people and the Samaritans was intense. Sometimes they would desecrate one another's temple and a lot of infighting. "Your temple's wrong." "No, your temple's wrong." "Your theology's wrong." "No, your theology's wrong." "Your Bible's—" Just a total mess. Just an absolute conflict. This weird heretical, bizarro religion springs out of, you know, what was supposed to be faithful, biblical worship of God.

And so Jesus doesn't walk around Samaria, he walks through Samaria, and he sends messengers ahead of him, and here's why. A lot of these towns, as I've said repeatedly, are very small, dozens, hundreds of people. And Jesus is rolling with quite a large entourage. It's him, plus the twelve plus the seventy plus however many other Facebook friends have, you know, followed him on their app, and been able to find him and come along for the ride. So you're looking at, I don't know, eighty, a hundred plus people. And if you're a village of forty or sixty people, you don't have a Ramada Inn. You don't have a Costco or a Sam's Club. You're not set up to receive this many visitors at one time.

So messengers would be sent in advance, "Hey, Jesus is coming. There are a lot of us. Do you guys have any food to eat or place to sleep, or is there a way we could purchase supplies and take care of the ministry team around Jesus, the apostles (kind of like his pastors), the seventy (kind of like his deacons)?" They'd say, "No, we can't accommodate that many." "Okay, then we need to roll into the next town, and we need to figure out where we're gonna lodge, and how we're gonna feed people, and make preparations."

So they roll into Samaria, "Jesus is coming and here's what's going on." And the Samaritans said, "You know what? We really don't want Jesus, because if he's determined to go to Jerusalem, that mean he's not going to validate our tribe." See, the Samaritan people were a religious group, a political group, a racial group, a cultural group, a social group. They were a tribe. They were like people who, today, have all of their life and identity wrapped up in some tribe or grouping.

They said, "Well, we're willing to have Jesus, providing he joins our tribe. He needs to validate our theology. He needs to go to our temple. He needs to support our leaders. He needs to reinforce our theology. He can't go to Jerusalem. That would

show the world that Jerusalem, and not Samaria, is where God wants to begin his redemptive work. That would show that their interpretation of the Bible is right and ours is wrong. Rather than repenting, we'll reject Jesus." Those are your only two options, repent or reject Jesus. And they don't repent, they reject Jesus. And what they do is they put their tribe above Jesus. They're willing to have Jesus, providing he will support them, and he won't.

Let me ask you, what is your tribe? Who's your group? What's your identity? Is it your family, your race, your culture, your language, your religion, your ethnicity, your political orientation, your sexual preference? Is it your spiritual experience? Is it your cause? I don't know what your cause might be. Many of you are young and cause-oriented. And as long as Jesus supports your tribe, you're fine with Jesus. But if Jesus would call you to repent of your mission or your identity or our community, then he's not welcome.

And the truth is this is how a lot of people work. They want Jesus in their tribe on their terms, and he comes and says, "No, I'm God. You don't tell me to follow you, I tell you to follow me. I don't join your team, you join mine." And Jesus' team is very diverse, different races and languages and nations and cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. And he invites all to follow him, but he does not follow anyone else. He's God. And even religions will do this, and some of you are trying to do this. You say, "I like Jesus, and I'm totally fine with him, providing he does what I tell him, providing he supports what I already believe."

But what if Jesus doesn't support your political party, your cause? What if he doesn't support your national interests or your racial preferences or your cultural biases or your sexual orientation? What if he says, "No, that's not what I'm into. You need to lay that down and follow me and start over." Would you be willing to receive him, or would you reject him? And this is the way that it works.

This is why even religions like to try and stick Jesus on their team. So the Mormons try and have a place for Jesus, and the Jehovah's Witnesses have a place for Jesus, and the Jews try and figure out what to do with Jesus. And the Muslims and the Buddhists and the Bahá'ís and the Hindus. They all try to find a place for Jesus. The general, vague spirituality will find a place for Jesus. Oprah's trying to find a way to Photoshop him, you know, into the set. You know, everybody's trying to find a place. "Oh, he's a nice guy, good teacher. Helped the poor, fed people, loved the oppressed. We got a place for him on our team."

Let me tell you this: Jesus isn't Muslim. Jesus isn't Jehovah's Witness. He's not Mormon. He's not Scientology. He's not general, vague spirituality. Jesus is God. He doesn't join any religion, team, or tribe. He's God. We follow him. He doesn't follow and reinforce us. He calls us to repent and follow him.

And when this message gets to the Samaritans, they're like, "He's going to Jerusalem, and he wants us to follow him? We have a totally different agenda and ideology. Jesus can either submit to us or leave." They lose the blessing of enjoying friendship, fellowship with Jesus.

Some of you have done that. You say, "I'm fine with Jesus, as long as he doesn't act

like he's God, Lord, in charge. As long as he reinforces what I believe and how I behave, then I will tolerate him. But if he calls me to repent, or he shows that I'm wrong, then I will reject him." Please don't do that. The Samaritans did. God came to earth, walked through Samaria, the place where nobody else wanted to go. He extended a hand of friendship, and they rejected it.

## **A TIME FOR SALVATION, NOT CONDEMNATION**

So two of his disciples decide, "Let's call fire down from heaven," right? These are those guys, right? These are the "turn or burn" sign guys, right? These are those guys. "You want to receive Jesus?" "No". "Then you're gonna burn in hell! Next." I mean these not patient guys, right? This is one shot, "turn or burn" Johnny. This is how he operates. James and John.

Now I'll tell you what I like about this, these guys don't lack confidence. They just think, "We can just call down fire from heaven," which that's sort of a big assumption. They don't even tell Jesus, "Hey, we think you should call down fire from heaven." They're like, "We totally got this. Fire from heaven, we're ready to roll if you're cool with that. We think 'Samaria' is Greek for 'kindling,' and we're ready to give it a run," you know?

And what's weird is like this actually happened in the days of Elijah. Elijah is debating the prophets of Baal, and fire's called down from heaven. Now I could see where, yeah, there are times in the Bible, like Sodom and Gomorrah, like the days of Elijah, God brings down fire from heaven. But this is not that day, so Jesus rebukes him. He's like "Hey, Pete and Repeat, calm down. You know, you guys aren't very loving," right? I wonder if Jesus was thinking, "If I was gonna call down fire from heaven, I would start with a few of my own guys who are driving me crazy."

Jesus says, essentially, this: "It's not time." Right, there is a season, a time for condemnation, but this is a season and time for salvation. Jesus is saying, "Look, I'm going to Jerusalem. I'm gonna die on a cross. I'm gonna suffer. I'm gonna atone for sin. You guys can come back to Samaria, we'll send some of my people to say that I've atoned for sin, and conquered sin and death through the resurrection, and let's give the Samaritans another opportunity to receive grace, and mercy, and forgiveness, and salvation."

See, as long as you're alive, there's a chance, and yeah, the Samaritans blew their opportunity. They didn't have a right sense of urgency, but Jesus is not to be dissuaded. He's gonna go and atone for sin, and he's gonna be patient with them as he's patient with you, as he's patient with me, and as he's patient with his own disciples, James and John. He's really patient with us. It doesn't mean we should be lazy or not have a sense of urgency. But it does mean that as long as we're breathing, it's not yet the time of condemnation.

Now, once somebody dies, there is fire from heaven. Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed once for a man to die, then judgment." You die, it's over. Nothing more can be done. You're judged. It's heaven or hell. That's the way that it is. No reincarnation, no second chance, so have a sense of urgency, unlike the Samaritans. But as long as you're alive, it's not yet the season of condemnation. There's still the invitation to salvation by followership of this man, God-man, Jesus Christ.

## JESUS BEFORE COMFORT

As he's continuing his journey, we then see three people come up and have very interesting conversations with Jesus, and like the Samaritans, each has this error of putting someone or something ahead of Jesus, and they're happy to have Jesus provided he's in second place. As long as he's not first priority, as long as he's not first treasure, first love, first commitment, he's welcome to be somewhere in the list of priorities, but not in front.

And so we see this with a man who has comfort before Jesus. And the truth is, it's always Jesus before comfort. In Luke 9:57-58, "As they were going along the road, someone said to him," So a guy comes up, "'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man,'" His favorite title of himself from Daniel, God in the flesh, "'has nowhere to lay his head.'"

So again, this guy walks up to Jesus, "Jesus, I want to follow you. I'm gonna go wherever you go." Jesus says, "You sure about that? Before you sign up to follow me, let's make it clear that it's not going to be easy. I'm a homeless guy who's flat broke, gonna get crucified. You ready to sign up to follow me wherever I go? You okay with that?"

And see what happens sometimes in Christianity is in an effort to get people to pray to receive Jesus, we lie to them. "Oh, you're sick, come to Jesus, he'll make ya healthy. Oh, you're poor, come to Jesus, he'll make you rich. Oh, you're sad, come to Jesus, he'll make ya happy." People come to Jesus and say, "You know what? It didn't work. I'm more broke than I was. I started giving him 10 percent, that didn't help anything. I was sad, now I'm really sad, 'cause now I know how sinful I am. My circumstances haven't changed, but my awareness of my shortcomings has only increased. And I used to have a friend, now I don't. Man, life has gotten really hard. I didn't get healed, I got cancer. This isn't working. I'm disappointed with God. Jesus, I thought were a piñata, where's my stick? How does this work? Where are all the goodies and the trinkets and the blessings? This is kind of hard."

Let me tell you this right upfront, following Jesus is the best life, but it's certainly not the easiest. And what he is essentially telling this man is, "If you want to follow me, I don't know where I'm sleeping tonight. If you want to follow me, I don't know what I'm eating tonight. If you want to follow me, that's fine, I'm just telling ya, this is gonna be a rough road for us."

And you'll take that deal if on one side of the scale, you have all your possessions and your comforts and your security, and on the other you have Jesus, but you treasure Jesus above all, and say, "You know what? I would rather be broke and sick and sad with Jesus, than rich and healthy and seemingly happy without him. I'll take Jesus, whatever the cost." And it's this issue of Jesus before comfort.

See, some of you, you live under this myth that if you walk with Jesus, everything's gonna be great. Just so you know, you're following a broke homeless guy who got betrayed by a friend and murdered. That doesn't mean that for you and me, the path of followership is always going to be an easy one, but it's the best one. So I tell you that

up front. I want you all to become Christians, and I know this isn't much of a sales pitch, right? This isn't much of a sales pitch.

You know what? We're not selling anything. We're offering God as the gift, not what he gives, who he is. God is the gift. God is the treasure. God is the joy, his name is Jesus. And I don't want to sell you Jesus in a way like a marketer or an advertiser or a salesman. I want you to know the truth going into it. To follow Jesus could mean a very hard path of life filled with joy if you treasure Jesus above all. Amen? Amen. So it's Jesus above comfort.

## **JESUS BEFORE SECURITY**

Secondly, another man comes to him, and his issue is that he has security before Jesus, and it's always Jesus before security. Here is the story. Luke 9:59–60, "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.'"

Now these next two guys, they're gonna use the same language. They're both going to say, "Jesus, I want follow you, but first, let me do this." What they're saying is, "Jesus, I want following you to be my second priority. My first priority is something else. So how about if we negotiate a deal that my first priority, I can pursue, and you will permit followership of you to be my second priority."

Some of you would be that way: school, first priority; career, first priority; recreation, first priority; some kind of security, first priority; and I want Jesus to accept second position. That's the issue.

Now admittedly, this is one of the most difficult sayings of Jesus in the whole Bible, 'cause it looks like Jesus is being mean. "I want to go bury my dad." "No." "It's my dad." Like, how many of you, you got a dad, you love your dad? I love my dad. If I went to Jesus and was like, "Jesus, I love ya, I'm gonna follow ya. I gotta go bury my dad." He's like, "No, don't do that. Let the dead bury their own dead." I'd be like, "I read this book that said honor your mother and father. I'm very confused now," right? That book being the Bible, if you're new. It says that in the Ten Commandments. It says to what your mother and father? Honor them. This is very confusing.

Did Jesus love his parents? Yeah. Did he love his mom? Did Jesus love his mom? Totally. A friend of mine said it well, he said, "Jesus loved his mom without being a mama's boy." Some of you gotta thread that needle, gentlemen. All right, he loved his mom without being a mama's boy. Even from the cross he looks down, there's his mother, Mary. He looks at John, who's like a kid brother to him and a good friend, and he says, "Hey John, look after my mom, Take care of her, I love her." He's making preparations for his mom. He loves her.

So what's going on here? What's Jesus saying? I tell you what he's not saying, he's not saying what the cult leaders say—and sadly, I have seen cult leaders use this verse and others like it to isolate people from family and friends, to pull them out of healthy community, to cause them to be emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, physically vulnerable.

I'll give you one example. I actually argued over this verse with a young woman. Early on in the days of Mars Hill, she started coming to a few services. She was quite young, perhaps nineteen or twenty, and I would classify her as very emotionally fragile. Very sweet gal, but she had been abused, traumatized. Her life had been very hard. She was essentially a runaway from a very traumatic home, and she hooked up with a very charismatic—I mean that in the sense of a big personality—spiritual leader, self-proclaimed spiritual leader. I think I know where his spirits came from. They weren't from God.

And he was an older man who set himself up to prey on particularly young girls who didn't have a father figure and were emotionally fragile. Really dangerous, nefarious situation. And he told her, as well as these other girls, verses like this. "You know, Jesus says to not even talk to your parents, so don't call them, don't meet with them, don't talk to them. They're dead to you. Follow me. Be part of my little circle of followers like Jesus had." And he put himself in the position of Jesus, essentially, and he isolated them from family and friends.

And she was very confused, and I met her, and I'd pick her up on occasion that she'd be willing to go to church, and talk to her along the way. She didn't have a car, she needed a ride. And I remember telling her, "This is really not healthy. This has all the psychological trappings of a cult. This has all of the grooming for sexual abuse, and for you and these girls to be taken advantage or committing crimes to pay the bills for this guy. This is gonna end really bad, and I don't want that for you. Let us help you get out of this. Let's get you some support." And she said no.

She said no, and we argued over this very verse. "Jesus said to hate and leave and ignore your mother and father, and that's what I'm doing." "No, I don't think, sweetheart, that's what Jesus was talking about." She ended up disappearing, leaving with this cult leader. They traveled a lot, wandering all over so that you couldn't maintain any contact with them.

And then I saw her a few years ago, she dropped by Mars Hill. They happened to be passing through town again after many years, and she came up and said hi. She said, "Yeah, I'm still with that group. And yeah, you're right, it's gotten pretty dark." And I mean, I can tell by the look on her face, she was in a rough place. I said, "You can still get out, and we love you, and we would love to help you get out. And we've got way more resources than we ever did. We'd do anything to help you. Please, would you be willing to leave?" "Well, you know, I'm worried about the other people in the group, and what if he's right?" And she's still very confused and refused to get help and disappeared. Very sad.

Is Jesus like that? Is that what he's doing? Is he is a cult leader taking impressionable people to surround him and telling them to break off all ties with their family, and to ignore their mother and father? Very dangerous stuff. No, that's not what he's doing. That's not what Jesus is doing.

So what is going on here? Well, let me give you some cultural background that I think the original hearers would have understood the context in a way that we don't, so we need to pack in how that culture worked to interpret and understand what is occurring here.

In that day, it was very much expected of children to honor their mother and father, based upon the Ten Commandments' exhortation to do so. And as your parents got older, you're supposed to look after and care for them. And as they were dying, you were definitely supposed to be there for them. And when they died, there were very strict and orchestrated procedures by which you were to prepare their funeral and their burial, certain music and meals and gatherings and clothing and wailers; and this is a big event. This encompasses the family. This takes days. The whole neighborhood, the whole village is invited. This is a very big deal.

And what I can infer from that is that when he says, "Jesus, I totally want to follow you, but first, let me go bury my dad," number one, his dad's not dead or even dying. If his dad were dying, where would he be? With his dad. If his dad were dead, where would he be? At the funeral, overseeing the affairs of the family.

Here's my presumption. I don't think the dad is anywhere near dead. His dad's got years, maybe decades to live. And what he's telling Jesus is "I totally want to follow you, Jesus, but if I tell my parents I'm following you, they're kind of devout Jews. I don't think they're gonna be really excited about this. Furthermore, if I don't hang in there and obey them, and if I don't see them through to their death and do everything right, I'm not going to get my inheritance. My inheritance is big." This is how it worked, you take care your family, and then they give you a big inheritance.

So I think what he's telling Jesus is this, "Someday, some year in the future, I'm gonna follow you. Remember my face, I'll be back later. In ten, fifteen, twenty years when my dad dies, and I get this big fat inheritance check, then I'm gonna be a Christian. I'm gonna tith off the top, and I'm gonna follow you, and I'm gonna preach and go into ministry, and it's gonna be great, someday, but not today."

And for that man, I believe, it is security over Jesus. He wants the approval of his family, and he wants his inheritance more than Jesus. And it has to be Jesus above security.

How about you? See, some of you are like that, you're like, "I will totally, wholeheartedly, passionately follow Jesus once I'm out of college. In college I'm busy studying. I don't have time for church, Bible study, prayer, community group. I don't. I need to get school knocked out 'cause that sets up my future. That will help me be secure." Or some of you, you're single. You're like, "I'm in my twenties and twenties are all preparation for rehab." That's just what you do. You just get cold sores and prepare for rehab. "And then when I turn thirty, when I get married, when we have kids, I'm gonna get so serious about Jesus, you just wait. I'm just saving up all the enthusiasm, and it's just gonna, it's gonna lurch forward in an instant, just wait."

Some you are saying, "As soon as I pay off my college debt. I really don't have time for Jesus right now and to mature in a relationship with him, 'cause I'm really trying to pay off my college debt. As soon as I get that debt knocked out, Jesus, I'm telling ya, I'm gonna be red hot. I'll be ready to go." And oftentimes people just continue to push it out into a future life stage. "Someday when I get everything else lined up, my life is secure, things are in order, when I've got extra time or money, then I'm totally

gonna follow Jesus, but not today, someday.” But Jesus is saying, “Today.” There needs to be a sense of urgency.

And when he says, “Let the dead bury their own dead,” what he’s saying is this, “Someday your parents are gonna die. And those who are spiritually dead, unbelievers, they can even bury the physically dead.” Why? Well, because there’s nothing you can do for a dead person. It’s over. There’s no reincarnation. There’s no second chance of salvation. So Jesus is looking at this man basically asking, “How many years of your life do you want to blow? You could be serving the living.”

So what he tells him is, “Go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Look, go preach, go teach, go lead a community group, go plant a church, go do evangelism, all right, have a sense of urgency. Don’t blow another day, week, year, decade, don’t blow it. Go do something, ‘cause if you wait, you’ll never do anything. And even if you do something, what about all of those people that you will not have loved, not have helped, not have taught, not have reached, not have served? What about them? What about all the living people who still have a shot at salvation? What about them?”

And I would ask you, what security is more important for you than Jesus? And I’m mindful of a guy some years ago. He had a nice wife, he had beautiful kids, and he’d started this company that had great possibility. And I said, “How come your family comes to church alone? I don’t see you very much. How come your family goes to community group alone, and we don’t see you there either, and what’s going on?”

He said, “Well, I’m gonna get there. Here’s my plan, I’m gonna build up this business. I got this great opportunity. I think we’re gonna hit the jackpot. I’m gonna sell it and then I’m gonna retire, and then I’m gonna totally have time for Jesus and my family. That’s what I’m doing.” “No, you need to walk with Jesus and your family right now. That day may never come, and even if it does, you’re wasting all the time between now and then to follow Jesus as a father, as a husband, with your family.” He said no. His business went well, he is divorced. His family is destroyed.

And the myth that he believed was, “If I put security before Jesus, I can have both.” No, no, you can’t. Because if you worship security as an idol, as God, and you devote your whole life to it, it will fail you, disappoint you, and destroy you. But if Jesus is in first position, the rest of life will work itself out. And it doesn’t mean you’ll be rich. It doesn’t mean you’ll be successful. It doesn’t mean you’ll be profitable, but it does mean you’ll be with Jesus, and he’ll get you through it.

I can promise you this man would be still married to a sweet gal, tucking his kids in at night, and not having a tragic shipwrecked life that is verging on the brink of absolute disaster, as he is a guy who is beside himself with selfishness and grief and bitterness and addiction; he could have avoided all of that if for him, Jesus was just ahead of his pursuit of what he considered to be security.

We want good for you. So when Jesus looks at this man and says, “No, not ‘someday I’ll become a Christian and follow Jesus,’ today.” That’s my exaltation to you, today. Is this that day for you, that day where your whole life swings on that hinge? And someday in the future when people ask you your story, say, “My life was like this, and there was this day that I decided to follow Jesus first, and that’s where everything

changed.” And that’s what he’s inviting this man to have is that day. He’s not saying hate your parents, but he’s saying love God first and most.

## **JESUS BEFORE THE PAST**

Lastly, another guy comes to him, and he wants to have the past in front of Jesus, and it is always Jesus before our past. Luke 9:61–62, “Yet another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but—’” There it is again. “‘Let me first,’” you see that? I’ll follow you, but first. That means, “Jesus, you’re second.” Never works like that. “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 plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

What he’s saying is this, “Jesus, I totally want to follow you, but first, I have something more important I need to do. I need to go home, and I need to tell my family and friends that I’m now gonna become a Christian, a follower of you and gonna give my life to ministry. But first, I need to go back, and talk to them.”

Now, what he’s asking is not necessarily a sin. It’s the same thing that Elisha asked Elijah back in 1 Kings. Elijah was a prophet of God. He was a preacher, gives us Scripture, and God chose for him a successor to carry on his ministry named Elisha. Elisha went to Elijah, his mentor, and said, “Can I go back and tell my family that I have had a course correction in life, and now I’m going into ministry?” Elijah said, “Please do.”

So the Bible records that Elisha went home, told his family and his friends, “I’m going into ministry. I’m leaving. Love you, pray for me. I’m going for it. I’m gonna go preach and teach or plant a church or go to Bible college or seminary or missions,” you know, this is the equivalent. The Bible says that they had a big feast, and that Elisha burned his plow, okay?

Now, this is a big move for a guy. In that day, you’re a farmer. You’re plowing your family’s land that’s been handed from one generation to the next. It’s not like our day with modern machinery where you’re sitting in your tractor with air-conditioning, and your iPod, and, you know, Wi-Fi. You either have an ox that’s dragging your wooden plow, or you’re pushing your wooden plow. You’re plowing your field.

Most of us have no idea what this is like. Right, most of you are like, “Carrots come from the store.” No, actually they come from the farm, and somebody there has got to plow the dirt to get the carrots, and then somebody else drives them to the store. Right, and some you do a little gardening. You have a hoe, and you’re like, “Look, I grew a carrot.” Congratulations.

What we’re talking about here is if you want to eat, you need to plow your field. To plow your field, you need your plow. And when Elisha burns his plow, what he’s basically saying is “I’m not coming back. There’s no plan B. I’m fully devoted in my followership of God, and I’m gonna go where he wants me to go, say what he wants me to say, do what he wants me to do, be who he wants me to be. This is what I’m doing.”

It’s like that story where soldiers land on a beach, and they take a beach, and they’re proceeding forward for war, and they just burn the boats. Those are guys who are

saying, “Win or lose, we’re in it till the end, and there will be no retreat, there will be no return to our former way of life.” It’s like that.

Now, in this instance, this man says to Jesus, “I want to do what Elisha did. I want to go home, and I want to talk to my family, and I want to let them know.” Now, I think I know what’s going on here. Jesus knows this man’s heart. Jesus knows this man’s heart. We’ve seen repeatedly that Jesus knew their thoughts or Jesus knew their heart. He knows what’s going on. He knows if this guy goes back, he’s never, he’s never gonna move forward.

I get this all the time at Mars Hill. You know a gal will come up. “Oh Pastor Mark, I’m thinking about becoming a Christian, but, you know, my boyfriend who’s living with me and sleeping with me and eating my food, watching my television. You know, before I commit, I want to go home and talk to him.” “No! No! No! Don’t talk to him. He’s not helpful at all, at all. Don’t go back and talk to him. You don’t make this decision together. We’ll never see you again. He’s gonna talk you out of it. No.”

See, some of you are like that, you’re like, “Oh, but before I go forward, I want to go back.” You know, “I want to go back to the frat and finish off my year. I want to go back to my buddies and go do stupid things and drink some more. I want to go back to my old lifestyle. I want to go back to sleeping with those people. I want to go back to those proclivities, back to that spiritual—I want to go back for a little bit, hang out in that lifestyle and, yeah, then I’m gonna be a fully devoted follower of Jesus.” “No, don’t go back, you’ll never go forward.”

J. C. Ryle, he was an Anglican bishop in the nineteenth century, said, “Those who look back want to go back.” That’s right. See, it’s not a problem to look back at your life and say, “Boy, that was a wreck. Wish I wouldn’t have done that. There’s something to repent of. I need to learn from that.” That’s an evaluation of your life.

This is looking back with longing. This is revisionist history. This is what the Israelites did. They were in bondage and slavery in Egypt to Pharaoh who thought he was God. For four hundred forty years he tormented them, he beat them, he killed them. He was bad to them. God liberated them. They’re walking around the desert, and what do they do? Complain. “Ah, you remember the good ole days in Egypt?” “Yeah, Egypt rocked. I miss Egypt.” “Really? You were a slave! You were a slave.” “Yeah, but at least we had food to eat.”

Oh, gosh, but see, we laugh, but then we’re like that. Some of you, you’re like, “Oh, yeah, I’m a Christian, but man, remember high school?” Really? Really? Really? “Oh, high school was awesome.” Really? “Remember, oh, man, remember college? College was great.” Ask your liver, was it that great? Was it that great? See, we tend to romanticize and perform revisionist history on the past. “Oh, it was awesome.” Jesus is saying, “Don’t look back like that,” because what happens is you’re gonna ruin your life.

## **PLOW A STRAIGHT ROW**

You’re gonna ruin your life, and he uses this analogy of plowing, and I love this analogy. Let me tell you what Jesus is doing. Jesus is plowing his row, all right? Even geographically from Galilee through Samaria all the way to Jerusalem right to the

cross, here's what Jesus has done. That's his row to plow, so he uses this analogy.

Jesus has got his hand on the plow. He's got his face set toward Jerusalem, that's what we read, and he is just pressing forward to the cross. He's not looking back. He's not saying, "Boy, I remember when my life was easier. I remember when I didn't get criticized. I remember before I started preaching and teaching publicly and casting out demons, boy, the good ole days." He doesn't look back at all. It's forward to the cross.

And Jesus plows his row in a straight line, and he picks up this analogy and he says, "Your life is like a field, and God has apportioned to you a row to plow. And you need to put your hand on the plow, and you need to set your eyes toward the New Jerusalem that will be coming down out of heaven," the one the ascended Jesus is preparing for us right now. And just like he plowed a straight line right into Jerusalem, we need to plow a straight line right into the New Jerusalem, and not be looking back.

Eyes forward, hands on the plow, feet always moving, working hard, doing our best till we see him face-to-face. And what he says is, "If you don't do that, you'll take your hand off the plow. You'll stop plowing or you'll look back." What he says is, "You can't plow a straight row looking back, you can't." It's a great analogy.

"Well, I could have married that person. I could have done that. Boy, I could have had that. I could have enjoyed that. No more getting drunk, oh boy. I gotta give up my gambling addiction, dang it. I can't be selfish. Oh. Wow, they're attractive. Dang it. I could have—if I lied, or cheated, or stole, or man," and you're double minded, and you're conflicted. And some of you feel that in your soul. It's like, "Okay, Jesus, I got my hand on the plow. Oh, wait a minute, I'm not sure." Then you look at your life, and it's all crooked row.

It'd be like today—don't do this, but it'd be like driving home saying, "Okay, I'm gonna drive home looking over my shoulder, just to see if this principle is timeless." And as the air bag deploys and Jesus shakes his head at you, 'cause you'll meet him face-to-face, you'll realize, "Yes, this is a timeless principle. I can't go straight and forward while looking backward," can't do it.

What are you looking back at, regretfully, mournfully? What do you feel like in your life would be better if it weren't for Jesus? What do you feel like Jesus is withholding from you, not granting to you? You can feel that silence in the soul, can't you? "Yeah, I do think I would have that were it not for Jesus, and sometimes I want to go back." He says, "No. It's all a mirage. It's all an illusion. It's all a lie."

Feet moving, eyes forward, hand on the plow. Keep your row straight. If you want to have any harvest in your life, if you want to have any fruitfulness in your life, you want your life to count for God. You want to live a life with no regrets, plow a straight row.

And I'll close with this, and I think this is interesting. We don't know what these men did. We don't know. It doesn't tell us what they did. Did they choose their tribe, their comfort, their security, or their past over Jesus? We don't know. It's as if Luke leaves this question hanging, and we have to answer it for ourselves.

“Will I follow Jesus first, right now, no looking back, or not?” That’s the question for you and me. For some of you that means you’re gonna become a Christian today and follow Jesus. This is that day for you. For others of you, you realize, “My life is just a crooked row. I push for a while, and look back, and then push a little more, and it’s real crooked, and it’s time to really be wholeheartedly, fully, by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, devoted to following Jesus, wherever he takes me, whatever that means.”

And in the providence of God, I want to share with you why I’m really filled with joy today. Gracie said that, she said, “You’re very happy today.” I really am. In the grace of God, I woke up today just overwhelmed by the fruitfulness that surrounds me. Just really in awe. It’s like my eyes opened up, and all the evidences of God’s grace, and all of the fruit of the life that he’s given me to enjoy.

And I don’t say this in a boastful way, because I’m not without sin, and there have been times when I have made my row crooked and God, in his grace, has gotten me back on course. But for me, that day came twenty years ago, the day that I realized, “I belong to Jesus now, and I’m gonna read my Bible. I’m gonna pray. I’m gonna repent of sin. I’m gonna go to church. I’m gonna be under spiritual authority. I’m gonna be in Christian community,” and I hope you hear this humbly, by the grace of God, I’ve never looked back.

My wife would tell you, she’s known me since I was seventeen. I got converted at nineteen. I’ve never backslid, never. I’ve always read my Bible. I’ve always studied. I’ve always went to church since I devoted myself to Jesus. There’s never been a day that I didn’t. Have I been perfect in that? No, no, no, not at all. But to say that twenty years later, by the grace of God, trying to plow one straight row till I see Jesus, it works. There’s a harvest. There’s fruitfulness. Good things happen.

And in the kindness of God, I get to preach this sermon today. It’s one of the reasons I’m so happy. It was eighteen years ago today that I married Gracie. This is our anniversary day. It’s our anniversary day. And I knew that she loved Jesus, and she wanted to follow Jesus, and she and I both wanted Jesus to be first. Last thing I needed was a woman who would put me first. We’d have all kinds of problems.

I knew that for her Jesus was first, so I asked her—I didn’t ask her in this way, but, you know, “Do you want to put your hand on my plow?” I wouldn’t have said it like that, it’s not the most romantic. It’s not the most romantic, but you know, “I gotta plow this row. You want to plow this row with me, and put your hand on my plow, and we keep our eyes forward together?” And that’s what we’ve been doing for eighteen years.

There’s Gracie and me eighteen years ago today. For you men who are like, “I don’t know if I have the capacity to attract a sweet glorious woman,” there’s hope for you. Look at me, look at her. You realize, I got the good end of that deal for sure. God answers prayer, and he still does miracles. There it is.

And for eighteen years, Grace and I have been trying to plow our rows straight, and we’ve been faithful to one another. And we’ve worked through sin, and we do love

each other, and we're happy, and we've been totally faithful to each other; physically, emotionally, the whole deal, everything. We're happier than we've ever been. I love her. I adore her. We have problems, usually I cause them, but by the grace of God, we get through them.

It was fourteen years ago that Mars Hill Church started. We had the core group, and we're getting ready to launch, and since then it's just been okay, eyes forward, hands on the plow. Try to keep this a straight row, and all this fruitfulness. Thirteen years ago, Ms. Ashley was born, my sweetie pie, my oldest daughter, and we got to enter into the season of parenthood, and we have five beautiful kids.

And I can tell ya, life with Jesus is not the easiest, but it is the best. And if, by the grace of God, you're willing to receive Jesus in first position, which is truly who he is and what he deserves, he's God, and to put your hand to the plow, and to work hard, and to plow a straight line of holiness and obedience and humility and repentance without looking back, there's a harvest of fruitfulness. And there are no regrets at all, and it's the best life there is, and I want that for all of you. So I hope that this is that day for you.

Father God, I thank you on this great day. I thank you that eighteen years ago today, you entrusted to me a woman that I absolutely adore and I enjoy. I thank you, Lord, that in our marriage, she has you first and me second, that she has her priorities in order, and that God you have saved us from ourselves. I know that apart from you, my life would be one really cooked row with little fruit, all of it bad. But because of your grace and your mercy, the row is much straighter than it would have been, the harvest is much greater than it would have been, and the fruit is much sweeter than it would have been. I pray that for my friends, Lord God. I pray that it would not be a commitment to their tribe, a commitment to their comfort, a commitment to their security, or a commitment to their past, but it would be a commitment to you, Lord Jesus, that would mark their future. And I ask for this grace upon my friends in your good name, Amen.

*[End of Audio]*

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*