

July 21, 2019

“Disciples of Jesus are ‘All-In’”

In 54 BC, the Roman conqueror Julius Caesar landed with his legions on the shores of Britain. It wasn't the first time he'd been there; a year earlier, he had tried – and failed – to conquer the island. But this time, he was determined to win. The question was: Were his troops as determined as he was?

After he and his men landed, it's said that the first thing Caesar did was march his army to the top of the massive white cliffs that line England's southern shore. From there, they could see all the ships they had arrived in. And they were burning. Caesar had given orders to burn his own ships.

See, he needed his men to be “all-in” to win this campaign. Their hearts couldn't be half in the battle and half back on the boats, thinking about safety and retreat. He wanted them to be “all-in” - so he burned the boats. Now, going back wasn't an option. The only way home was through victory. They had to be “all-in.”

Jesus says something similar to us this morning. On his way to Jerusalem, he taught that following him requires an “all-in” attitude. You can't follow Jesus with half a heart on him and half on something else. You can't follow looking back longing for what you miss out on as you do. He calls us to such a commitment to him that we're willing to sink any ships (so to speak) that would keep us from following him...because that's the kind of commitment he has for us and for our salvation. So listen as the Savior says: Disciples of Jesus are “all-in.” 1) when it comes to God's grace, 2) when it comes to following him.

⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;

⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then he and his disciples went to another village.

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹ He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

I. When it comes to his grace

So Jesus was heading south from Galilee to Jerusalem. And Jesus sent some of his disciples ahead to inform the next village on the road that he was coming – probably, to make arrangements for

their food and lodging. But when they got there, the people refused. **They did not welcome** Jesus – told him to go somewhere else.

See, the village was in Samaria, Luke tells us. And Jesus and his disciples were Jews. And there was a lot of bad blood between Samaritans and Jews. Maybe they were also offended by the fact that Jesus was just passing through their town. His destination was Jerusalem. Maybe some thought, “What, are we Samaritans not important enough for you, Jesus? Heading to Jerusalem, where the important people are?”

Whatever they were thinking...well, Luke tells us what James and John were thinking. **When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”** I suppose it sounds like they were “all-in” for Jesus’ cause. These are some of Jesus’ most loyal disciples: His first followers, in his inner circle. They know Jesus is God...and for a town to reject him like that? It was a slap in God’s face! And that made them angry. How could they treat Jesus like that? Didn’t they deserve fire from heaven for it? Seems like they were zealous for Jesus’ cause.

Turns out they had forgotten what Jesus’ cause really was. **Jesus turned and rebuked them.** Jesus is God. But he hadn’t come into this world to destroy sinners; he came to save them. Jesus was all about grace.

Are you? Or can you see a little of James and John in you? You don’t have to look far in this world to see people slapping your Savior in the face. The atheist who mocks the God you believe in. The people who argue that abortion is a good thing. Those who flaunt sinful lifestyles proudly and accuse you of being wrong for believing otherwise. I think often our first reaction when we see that is a lot like theirs: Instead of compassion, a self-righteous anger. Maybe a part of us wouldn’t mind seeing them get a little payback from God for the way they treat him.

It happens in our personal relationships, too: Someone wrongs us. And our first instinct isn’t to forgive and love in return. It’s to hurt back. Maybe not wish down fire from heaven, but at least a little of the hurt they caused us.

Jesus turned and rebuked them. That sinful attitude is a ship that needs to be burned. Jesus turns and rebukes us, too, and reminds us why he came: Not to destroy sinners, but to save. Yes, that town deserved fire from heaven – even worse! – for how they treated Jesus. But didn’t James and John, too, for their self-righteous anger? Don’t we, for the sins we’ve slapped him in the face with? But Jesus didn’t come to give us what we deserve. He came to save us from what we deserved.

It’s why he was on the road to Jerusalem in the first place. Luke says the time had come for him to **return to heaven**. But the only road to heaven’s glory was through Jerusalem – and the suffering and death on the cross that waited for him there. Where all of the fiery anger from heaven that the Samaritans’ sins, James’ and John’s sins, our sins deserved...would fall on Jesus in our place. Where he would win us what we don’t deserve: Forgiveness for all our sins. Jesus was “all-in” to win us that grace – he didn’t set out reluctantly to suffer all that for us! He **set out resolutely** for Jerusalem, such was his compassion for us.

And here Jesus calls his followers to the same compassion. We who have received Jesus’ grace...Jesus calls us to be all about showing it. Instead of anger, love for unbelievers that longs for their salvation. Instead of payback, forgiveness for those who wrong us. Jesus’ disciples are “all-in” when it comes to God’s grace.

II. *When it comes to following*

Luke says Jesus and his disciples headed on to a different village. But as they were walking, someone in the crowd comes up to Jesus. And this is what he says: **“I will follow you wherever you go.”** Now that seems like a great thing to say! If Jesus wants followers who are “all-in,” this guy is saying, “That’s me!” You’d expect Jesus to say, “Right on, come follow me!” Instead, Jesus’ response almost seems to throw cold water on his enthusiasm.

But Jesus can see what we can’t. Think of this guy like the teenager who sees the soldiers marching by in the fourth of July parade. He sees the crisp uniforms, the medals, the guns. And he decides right there and then he wants to join the military. He’ll go anywhere, do anything. He’s gung-ho, but he doesn’t understand the reality of a soldier’s life. The months of deployment. The sweat and tears and blood. The commitment, the sacrifice.

So Jesus says to him: **“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”** Jesus didn’t even enjoy what most animals do: They have a home where they can rest their head. Did this man realize by saying, “I’ll go where you go,” he was committing to the same? Was Jesus so important to him that he was willing to give up all comfort and convenience to follow him? Sacrifice what he wanted out of life for what Jesus wanted for his life? Or maybe the better question: Do we realize that following Jesus requires the same? Disciples of Jesus are all in.

Another man meets Jesus on the road. This time, Jesus extends the invitation: **“Follow me.”** He says, **“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”** And again, Jesus’ response seems harsh. **“Let the dead bury their own dead,”** Jesus says. What? There’s nothing wrong with attending your dad’s funeral, is there? That’s a good and even noble thing – what could be more important than that?

Well – Jesus. Jesus is more important than even the most important things in our lives. No good and noble activity, not even a parent’s funeral, can become an excuse to not follow Jesus. Disciples of Jesus are all in.

Now Luke tells us of a third man. Maybe he heard the same call as the second: **“Follow me.”** And he says, **“I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”** Again, seems like a perfectly reasonable request. Elisha asked for the same in the first lesson, and God granted it. I’m hoping to spend time with my family before I head south to Paraguay. Doesn’t God want us to love our families like that? Of course!

But not more than Jesus. Jesus can see the heart, and Jesus can see he’s not in first place there. And he wants him to know that nothing, not even family, can come between us and him. Disciples of Jesus are all in. Jesus says to him, **“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

They’re hard words to hear, aren’t they? We all have this notion that there’s an easier version of following Jesus. That we can follow him with heart half on him and half on other things. And Jesus just crushes that notion here. And I see a bit of myself in all these wanna-be followers of Jesus. Can you? All the times following Jesus would require sacrificing comfort or convenience, and we weren’t willing. All the good and important activities I’ve let become more important than my pursuit of my Savior. If following him ever meant losing relationships with people I love, a part of me wouldn’t want to do it. Disciples of Jesus are all in – but so often we are not. And Jesus says it: Then we are **“unfit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

But it's good to recognize that: We're unfit, we don't have what it takes to follow Jesus. That keeps our eyes on the Jesus who had what it takes. The Jesus who makes us fit to be his followers. Who gives us what it takes to keep following him.

Foxes have holes, birds nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. He's not just telling you what you need to be willing to give up for him; he's telling what he was willing to give up for you. He left the perfect comfort and joy of his home in heaven for you. He traded it for a vagabond's existence here on earth for you. And he never looked back; his eyes were fixed forward on his prize. And his prize was you; his #1 priority was making you his.

He didn't even let his family get in the way of saving you. When his mother and brothers tried to get in the way of his work, he said, "Who are my brothers?" Then he pointed to believers and said, "These are!" Not even his family would keep him from saving you and making you a part of God's family.

Even though that meant being forsaken by the Father himself. Even though that meant the cross – him paying for all the times we've followed him with half-a-heart, or haven't followed him at all. **He resolutely set out toward Jerusalem** to pay that price for you. And he did. Because Jesus was all-in for you, you're forgiven. Because Jesus was all-in to save you, you are fit for his kingdom.

Jesus isn't like Julius Caesar. He doesn't take you to the edge of a cliff and show you burning ships to force you into following him. He takes you to the cross, and shows you how much he loves you. He points you to the heaven he's returned to – the one that's waiting for you – the one that makes whatever he calls you to leave behind for him seem like nothing in comparison. In his word, he keeps your eyes fixed on the cross and your eternal home. That's how he fills your heart with the kind of commitment he calls for here. Making us more and more into disciples who are all in. God grant it. Amen.