

# Sermon: What's Your Excuse?

Text: [Luke 9:57-62](#)

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**Introduction:** What is an excuse? (*Second College Edition, The American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 474) excuse - 1a. To apologize for ... b. To seek to remove the blame from ... 2a. To grant pardon to; forgive:

Because Jesus makes certain demands on his followers, i.e., there are requirements for being a disciple, many try to justify their lack of commitment. Benjamin Franklin once said: "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else."

In [Matthew 25](#) there is an implied excuse. The excuse: they did not recognize Jesus.

[Matthew 25:44-46 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>44</sup>"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' <sup>45</sup>"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' <sup>46</sup>"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

I actually know someone who did this:

**NO EXCUSE SUNDAY: DEDICATED TO MISSING CHURCH ATTENDEES!**  
To make it possible for everyone to attend church this Sunday, we are going to have a special "No Excuse Sunday": Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep in." There will be a special section with lounge chairs for those who feel that our pews are too hard. Eye drops will be available for those with tired eyes from watching TV late Saturday night. We will have steel helmets for those who say, "The roof would cave in if I ever came to church." Blankets will be furnished for those who think the church is too cold, and fans for those who say it is too hot. Scorecards will be available for those who wish to list the hypocrites present. Relatives and friends will be in attendance for those who can't go to church and cook dinner, too. We will distribute "Stamp Out Stewardship" buttons for those that feel the church is always asking for money. One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to seek God in nature. Doctors and nurses will be in attendance for those who plan to be sick on Sunday. The sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who never have seen the church without them. We will provide hearing aids for those who can't hear the preacher and cotton wool for those who think he's too loud! Hope to see you there!

Because Jesus' popularity is waning and the requirements for discipleship are becoming more clear, prospective followers are coming up with excuses. In our text there are a variety of excuses for not committing to Jesus' mission that really boil down to:

## **I. My Comfort Is First (vv. 57-58).**

**Luke 9:57-58 (NIV)** <sup>57</sup>As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup>Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Matthew's account tells us there are still crowds around Jesus. You can see how someone might get emotionally pulled in and commit to almost anything. *Follow* is the key word throughout! Yet, following Jesus has to be more than an emotional response. He asks us to abandon "all" security. That's something to think about.

### **A. The disciple's excuse**

Even though it is not directly said, we must understand that none of the candidates we will look at today ever probably followed Jesus.

According to Matthew this man was a teacher of the law (scribe). He was an educated man who could read and write, familiar with Scripture, an expert in the Law. Probably he had a position of some importance within his community.

What the scribe was really saying was: "**I will follow you wherever you go** (that's nice)." I suppose this is a little like Teresa's idea of camping. She calls it the Comfort Suites.

I was thinking how important "comfort" is to so many people. We want to be comfortable in our own homes so we invest in big screen-TVs with surround-sound with comfortable seating. We have computerized thermostats to keep our homes at a comfortable temperature. In our cars we have individual controls for the air temperature, and my favorite: controls for seat temperature. Each side of our beds have individual settings for everyone's comfort. We strive to be what some people call "comfortable" financially. We talk about "comfort zones" and making people feel comfortable when they visit our church. We even keep the dying comfortable.

### **B. Jesus' response**

I feel like Jesus could have said: I have come to make you feel uncomfortable, dissatisfied, and even rejected. In Nazareth they had already tried to kill Jesus.

**They asked him to leave Gadara after a demon-possessed man was healed. The Samaritans wanted nothing to do with him, turned him out in the cold, so to speak. Jerusalem, in less than a year, would call for - and get his death.**

**Jesus said that following him would be more than a classroom exercise or camp-like experience. If you decide to follow me, you will feel like a prophet who is rejected by his own people. Jesus did not want to give a false impression like one might get from a recruiter or like the main character in the movie *Private Benjamin*.**

**The Creator of everything is not homeless, but does not use his rank for his benefit or his disciples. He allows God, his heavenly father to provide everything. Jesus' focus is on ministry. Jesus wants to make clear that he is investing in what matters: people. Whenever ministry moves from people to bricks and mortar there is decay already in play. Whenever evangelism is less-funded than parks and recreation (Tillapaugh) for the middle class, the smell of spiritual death is in the air.**

**Another excuse one might hear is:**

## **II. My Schedule Is First (vv. 59-60).**

**Luke 9:59-60 (NIV) <sup>59</sup>He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

**This is the only man that Jesus explicitly calls to follow him.**

### **A. The disciple's excuse**

**At first blush, it may appear that Jesus is being completely unreasonable and insensitive. Back in Jesus' time we see an "emphasis on burying the dead as the foremost charitable work." - *Backgrounds of Early Christianity Second Edition*, Everett Ferguson, p. 416**

**If this man's father had really just died, he would not have been with Jesus. He would have been with his family. Burial was completed by sundown of the day of a person's death. There was also a thirty-day mourning period.**

**It could even have been that it had been a year since the father's death and now it was time to transfer the bones to an ossuary (s. Wilkins, *Matthew*, p. 350).**

**No matter, the main idea here is that Jesus is saying his call to follow takes priority over all other relationships and responsibilities.**

It is believed by most commentators that this man's father had not died, but was either just old or in failing health. "G. Campbell Morgan refers to a traveler in the Middle East who was trying to enlist a young Arab man as his guide. The man replied that he could not go because he had to bury his father. When the traveler expressed his sympathy, he learned that the young man's father had not died, but that this was an expression meaning that he had to stay with his father as long as he was alive" (*The Gospel According to Luke* [Revell], p. 133).

We have all put off committing to something or someone because of what we thought might happen. We might move, something better may develop, it looks risky, etc.

### B. Jesus' response

**"Let the dead bury their own dead,"** Obviously Jesus is speaking in figurative language here. What I believe he is saying is let those who are spiritually dead take care of those kind of things.

Even though many people tied the commandment to honor one's father and mother to this responsibility, Jesus says there are more important duties.

It is my opinion that to spend a million dollars on a rock star's funeral is absurd and immoral. There are many more important issues in the world. Funerals may be important emotionally, but we spend way too much on those kinds of things. What we spend on anti-aging products and other items to make us look good on the outside, could be better invested in more important issues.

**Illus.** When my grandfather died years ago I was criticized for doing college homework in the back of the funeral home. I told the complainer that my grandfather would understand. It may be like what Jesus' said at 12 years old. He said I: **Luke 2:49 (KJV)** <sup>49</sup> "...must be about my Father's business."

Timing and schedules were always foremost in Jesus' strategy. In the first verse of the very next chapter of Luke we see Jesus sending out 72 people as he makes his move toward Jerusalem. Jesus cannot wait on people who want to be excused for whatever the reason. He tells this second man: **"but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

Jesus would later say:

**John 7:6-7 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup> ... "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. <sup>7</sup>The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

I hear sometimes: “I just don’t have enough time.” Brothers and sisters, we have all the time we need to do God’s will, but we do not have time to waste on activities that do not matter.

The last excuse is:

### **III. My Family Is First (vv. 61-62).**

**Luke 9:61-62 (NIV)** <sup>61</sup>Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” <sup>62</sup>Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

This third excuse is not found in the Matthew account, but Luke includes it here.

#### **A. The disciple’s excuse**

This last disciple wanted to excuse himself for a time to say good-bye to his family. This again may have been a problem time-wise. The going-away party would have lasted for a while. Extended family would need to be seen. We do not know, but this man may have even been married and with a family of his own.

But there were probably other factors involved.

Even today, if a Jew or a Muslim convert to Christianity they are considered dead to the rest of the family. There would be a very good chance that this eager follower could be convinced to stay home and reject Jesus’ mission. I know families today who have divided loyalties where one spouse is not a Christian. Paul’s wise advice for those considering marriage to an unbeliever is still true.

**II Corinthians 6:14-16 (NIV)** <sup>14</sup>Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? <sup>15</sup>What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Later, Jesus would say to the large crowds traveling with him:

**Luke 14:26-27 (NIV)** <sup>26</sup>“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup>And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

## **B. Jesus' response**

**“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

This is a little like what the ancient writer had said in proverbial form about 800 B.C. Hesiod had said: “one who will attend his work and drive a straight furrow and is past the age of gaping after his fellows, but will keep his mind on his work” (cited by Darrell Bock, *Luke* [Baker], 2:983).

It is like gawking at an accident along the road and becoming a casualty yourself. Or like the dog in “Up,” the movie, who is easily distracted by squirrels. We live in a dangerous, seductive world that is full of distractions - and that’s not funny. Not every task or activity can have equal value. Jesus says the question needs to be asked: how does this serve the Kingdom?

**Conclusion:** “Let us think often that our only business in this life is to please God” (Brother Lawrence). Donald Gray Barnhouse adds: “It is our business to see that we do right; God will see that we come out right.”

What everyone must finally do in life is determine what is of first importance. If you decide following Jesus is the only way to go, you need to devote your whole life to his mission and purpose. The Apostle Paul understood:

**I Corinthians 15:3-4 (NIV)** <sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

We must intentionally develop and implement ways of telling our friends, family and culture that Jesus is the “only” way to be saved. We must also make sure that they understand to follow Jesus means everything is committed to him. Our vocabulary must change from “my” and “mine” to “His.” God must be first in *every* part of our lives.

D.A. Carson has said: “Little has done more to harm the witness of the Christian church than the practice of filling its ranks with every volunteer who is willing to make a little profession, talk fluently of experience, but display little of perseverance.” - quoted by Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 148

**Our lives really need to demonstrate the kind of faith Abraham had.**

**Hebrews 11:8-10 (NIV)** <sup>8</sup>By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

**What are you looking for this morning? Today, Jesus is still looking for disciples who are willing to follow him. Will you answer the call?**