

Christ Sets Us Free
From Misplaced Loyalties
Luke 9:51-62

When I was a boy, my brothers and I found three little birds under a tree in front of our house. I don't know what had happened to their nest or to their mother. But these three little birds had just hatched. My brothers and I decided to raise these little guys.

It turns out that they were just little English sparrows--those little, gray birds that we see around here all the time. But we got real close to those little birds. Eventually they grew their feathers, and we took them out and taught them how to fly. We would hold them about a foot off the couch and drop them. They would instinctively flap their wings, and land softly. In a matter of a day or two, they all three learned to fly. However, one of them didn't like to fly. He preferred walking. The other two would fly up in a tree, and he would hop over to the tree and hop up the tree to where they were. After awhile, they would fly to another tree. He would hop down the tree, hop over to the tree they were in and hop up to the branch they were sitting on.

We worried about him. We thought there might be something wrong with him. But it was puzzling, because when we dropped him, he could fly just fine. It wasn't that he couldn't fly. He just didn't want to fly.

One day we figured out why he didn't want to fly. We were outside with the three birds. They were up in a tree. Suddenly a flock of sparrows flew into the tree. They began chirping among themselves, getting acquainted. Then the flock flew off to a tree in another yard. The two sparrows flew off with them. But this little sparrow sat there. He kept looking back and forth between the flock and us. All of a sudden it hit us. This little bird didn't want to fly because of his loyalty to us. We didn't fly, so he didn't want to fly. Maybe he didn't want to embarrass us by flying when we couldn't. I don't know. But you could just see his little mind working. He was having to make a decision. Was he going to be a bird or a human? Was he going to fly with the other birds? Or was he going to spend the rest of his life hopping around on the ground with us?

We are like that little bird. We were created to fly spiritually, but many people never do. Last week, this week and next week I am talking about how we were created for greatness. We were created to soar in the heavens. We were created to be holy and righteous. We were created to fellowship with God. We were created in the image of God, to be children of God. We were created to be like Christ.

But there are restraints which hold us down. We can't rise to the heights until we are set free from them. Jesus can set us free. Last week we saw how Jesus set a man free from the demons which made him crazy. He inherited those demons from his crazy neighbors and relatives. We all do crazy things because we make each other crazy. But Jesus can free us from all that craziness and help us be in our right minds, just as he did for that man.

Today, we see that some of the restraints that hold us back from fulfilling our destinies are misplaced loyalties.

In today's scripture we have Jesus calling three people to greatness by becoming his disciples. As Jesus was itinerating, he invited people to become his disciples. He was inviting them to let him teach them how to fly. We don't become what we were created to be without

being shown the way. And Jesus is the one who shows us the way. Last week I made the statement that we are not born to be sinners. It is not our nature to sin. We don't come into the world sinners. Someone asked me, after that service, if I thought that a child raised apart from society would automatically be a righteous person. No, we are not born sinners, but neither do we come into the world as saints. We have to be shown the way. Jesus is the way.

So, Jesus invited people to follow him.

One man said, "Yes, I'll follow you wherever you go." Jesus' response was, "Foxes have their holes and birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." In other words, if we follow Jesus, we will not be at home in this world anymore. Jesus wants us to understand what we are getting into. This will not be an easy journey. We will no longer be guided by the way people expect us to act. Becoming what we were created to be means leaving behind the comforts of family and home.

Jesus invites two others to follow him. They both want to follow him, but they both have the same problem: They have a strong sense of loyalty to their families. One says, "I will follow you, but first let me go bury my father." Now you need to understand that this is an idiom. An idiom should not be interpreted literally. When I say, "You're pulling my leg," I'm using an idiom. I don't mean you're literally pulling my leg. This man's father was not dead. "Bury my father" meant, "Let me take care of my parents until they die. Then I will be free to follow you." The other disciple asked to go back and say good-bye to his family before he followed Jesus. He wasn't saying, "Let me go home and grab some things and tell my family where I've gone. I'll be back in a few minutes." He was saying that he needed to travel back to his hometown, spend a few weeks saying good-bye to his family and friends, get his business in order and then when all his obligations were taken care of, he would be free to follow Jesus. To the one Jesus said, "Leave the dead to bury the dead." To the other he said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is worthy of the Kingdom of God." He was saying basically the same thing to both of them: If we are to be Christ's disciples, he has to come first in our lives. We cannot say, "I'll follow you after I have taken care of my other commitments." Our commitment to Christ must take precedence over all other commitments.

So, how can we serve Christ with all our hearts when we have other responsibilities? We have families and friends. They are counting on us. We can't let them down, can we?

No. And that is not what Christ calls us to do. He was not saying that we should simply abandon our commitments to follow Christ. No, we should place those commitments in Christ's hands and fulfill them in obedience to Christ. Christ knows far better how to care for the people in our lives than we do.

When our kids were in school, I had no idea how we would get them a college education. We had tried to put aside money for college funds, but there just was no extra money. A woman who happened to be a member of the church took my daughter under her wing. This woman was the debate coach at school, and she turned my daughter from an insecure girl to a confident young woman, as she trained her to be a successful debater. My daughter got a scholarship to Sarah Lawrence College, a very fine college in New York, in part because of her success as a debater. My son decided he wanted to go to West Point. Now, to get into West Point you not only have to meet their standards for grades, athleticism and character, you also have to be recommended by your congressman. I didn't even know who our congressman was. But when the people of the church and the town found out Jonathan wanted to go to West Point, they went to work. Each congressman gets to make ten appointments to West Point. However, because West Point only accepts 1,000 new cadets each year, a congressman does well to get his first one

or appointments accepted. Because of the support the people of the church and the community gave my son, our congressman made our son his first three appointments to West Point.

When Christ called me to the ministry many years ago, I could have said, “Well, Lord, first let me raise my kids and get them educated. Then, when I’ve met that obligation, I’ll go into the ministry.” I’m so glad I didn’t. Christ has taken far better care of my family than I could have on my own.

We have many loyalties and many obligations. But we should never allow those loyalties to cause us to say not now to Christ. If we put Christ first, Christ will take care of everything else.

Back to the little sparrow: After a lot of thought for a little bird, he finally decided to be a bird. He flew off with the flock. But over the next couple of months, every now and then when we would be out in the yard playing, he would suddenly appear. He would fly into the tree in our yard and sit there and chirp at us. I got the feeling he was checking on us. We were fine, and so was he. He was flying, as God intended.

When we fulfill God’s intentions for us, everyone is better for it. Let Christ free you from the restraints of misplaced loyalties, so that you can fly spiritually, as God intended for you to do.

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