

Luke 9:59

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

Analysis

And he said unto another, Follow me (Ἀκολουθεῖ μοι, Akolouthei moi)—Jesus takes the initiative, issuing a direct, authoritative summons. This disciple doesn't volunteer; he's called. **But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father** (ἐπίτρεψόν μοι πρῶτον ἀπελθόντα θάψαι τὸν πατέρα μου, epitrepson moi prōton apelthonta thapsai ton patera mou)—the request appears reasonable, even pious. Jewish law and custom made burying parents a sacred duty (Tobit 4:3-4), one of the highest expressions of filial piety.

The phrase **suffer me first** (ἐπίτρεψόν μοι πρῶτον) is crucial. The man doesn't refuse Jesus; he requests delay—'let me do this first, then I'll follow.' But any 'first' before following Christ is idolatry. The man may be asking to wait for his father's death (which could be years away), honoring family obligations before discipleship. Or his father has just died and burial rites will take days. Either way, Jesus's response (9:60) treats the delay as disqualifying. Kingdom urgency permits no competing priorities, even legitimate ones.

Historical Context

First-century Jewish burial customs required immediate interment (usually within 24 hours) followed by secondary burial of bones after decomposition (about one year). Family obligations were sacrosanct—the Fifth Commandment required honoring parents, and burial was considered the ultimate expression. Jesus's seemingly harsh response must be understood against this cultural backdrop,

where He demands priority even over Torah-mandated family duties, claiming authority greater than Moses.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What 'reasonable' or even 'righteous' delays are you placing before obedience to Christ's call, and how does this man's example expose the danger of 'first' letting you do something else?
2. How does Jesus's demand for immediate response challenge modern discipleship that treats following Christ as compatible with pursuing career, comfort, or family plans first, with kingdom service deferred to later?

Interlinear Text

εἶπεν	δὲ	πρὸς	ἕτερον	Ἀκολουθεῖ	μοι	ὁ	δὲ	εἶπεν
he said	And	unto	another	Follow	me	G3588	And	he said
G2036	G1161	G4314	G2087	G190	G3427		G1161	G2036
Κύριε	ἐπίτρεψόν	μοι	ἀπελθόντι	πρῶτον	θάψαι	τὸν		
Lord	suffer	me	to go	first	and bury	G3588		
G2962	G2010	G3427	G565	G4412	G2290			
πατέρα	μου							
father	my							
G3962	G3450							

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 16:24 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 6:33 (Parallel theme): But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

1 Kings 19:20 (Parallel theme): And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

Haggai 1:2 (References Lord): Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

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