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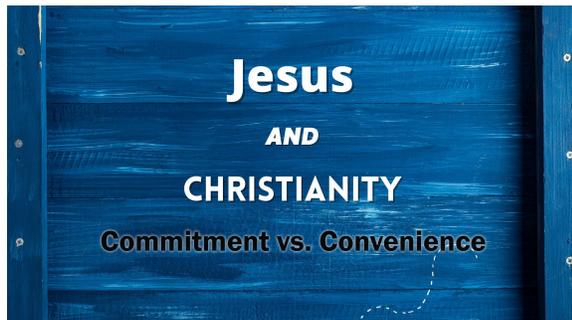
**Title:** Jesus and Christianity #1: Commitment vs. Convenience

**Preaching:** Danny Gulden, lead pastor, Promise Road Campus

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

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There is a lot that the Church has gotten wrong over the years. We have often strayed from the vision and teachings of Jesus. In the process, the Church has excluded, hurt, or rejected people while falling away from the teachings of Jesus. The constant call for the Church is to look more and more like the body of Christ in the world. So, in this new series, Jesus and Christianity, we will talk about some ways the Church has gotten it wrong by drifting from the teachings of Jesus, and we will work to move closer to where Jesus calls the Church to be. We want to explore areas of tension between what the Church has said and done and what Jesus teaches.

To start, I want to give some context to this series. While we acknowledge Jesus as the head of the Church, Jesus was not a Christian. He was a devout, practicing person of the Jewish faith who offered a critique of religious leaders and how they led and their practices. He believed they were desecrating the temple of God. Jesus offered a better way, sent to usher in a new age, the kingdom of God. Most of Jesus's teachings were countercultural to the prevailing wisdom of the day, calling people to a new way to approach God, a new way of caring for others, a new way of life.

Following Jesus's death, his resurrection, and his ascension to heaven, his followers were entrusted with God's mission through Jesus. His followers were left to carry on what Jesus had begun, remembering what Jesus had told them earlier: "You will do greater works than me." It was not until Acts 11 that those who were continuing Jesus's work and mission were called Christians. The two things that most stood out about these people were that they lived differently, and they did not acknowledge the Roman Emperor as the Son of God. It takes place somewhere between the years 42 and 45 AD.

*"Barnabas went to Tarsus in search of Saul. When he found him; he brought him to Antioch. They were there for a whole year, meeting with the church and teaching large numbers of people. It was in Antioch where the disciples were first labeled 'Christians'" (Acts 11:25-26 CEB).*

In Greek, the term Christian means little anointed ones.

Today, we begin by examining the differences between commitment and convenience.

I've realized lately that I enjoy convenience. Last week, I was on Amazon, and we have all grown accustomed to two-day shipping. I went to order an item we needed for the house and discovered that no longer was it two-day shipping; rather I could have this item on my doorstep in four hours. Four Hours! After I ordered, I began to think about the process of getting this item to my doorstep in four hours. I thought about some of the issues in Amazon's working conditions that I have read about and seen on the news. I thought of the people who had worked long hours in less-than-optimal working conditions. I thought about what others might be doing so that I could simply wait on my order to arrive in four hours.

Our world is centered around convenience. Everything is built around making things easier for you.

The truth is that our convenience always requires a sacrifice from others. Your commitment only requires a sacrifice from you.

It is easier for us to imagine others sacrificing something than it is for us to imagine ourselves sacrificing something. That is what a world built on convenience gets us.

It is also why it is difficult for us to really grasp the commitment Jesus asks his followers to make because following Jesus is rarely, if ever, convenient. Even when it comes to church, we like our convenience. A few years ago, my father chaired a building campaign.

In the 9th chapter of Luke, Jesus turns toward Jerusalem, towards the cross. From this point on, there are fewer healings, fewer miracles, and more teachings about what it really means to follow Jesus. He starts talking about sacrifices and the things people will need to give up or leave behind to follow him. This is a hard reading, a hard text; you won't find this in a devotional book.

*Jesus and his disciples traveled along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."*

*Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Human One has no place to lay his head."*

*Then Jesus said to someone else, "Follow me."*

*He replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."*

*Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God's kingdom."*

*Someone else said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house."*

*Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God's kingdom."  
Luke 9:57-62 CEB*

If this scripture sounds strange, even harsh to you, it is. It's one of the pieces of scripture that we read or that we hear, and it makes us cringe.

Someone says they will follow Jesus wherever he goes. Jesus puts this idea to the test.

One says, let me go bury my father, and Jesus says let the dead bury their own

Another one says let me say good-bye to my family and he is told, "There is no time for that."

Jesus's words are difficult, but there is some grace in these words. I wonder if Jesus is telling us the truth in the clearest way he can. This is urgent work. This is important work, so important that there is no time for anything else but sharing and building the kingdom of God.

Perhaps one of the ways in which we have made a mess of Jesus' message in the Church is that we have made following Jesus about convenience rather than commitment.

Hear me when I say that this is not one of those sermons that you have probably heard before that laments the decline of the Church. A sermon that remembers back in the day when there were no sports, no band, no outside activities on Sunday mornings. It is not a sermon about how people need to make more of an effort to come to church. I'm sure you've heard that sermon. I've probably preached that sermon once or twice in my life.

THAT sermon is boring to me. It's tired, and frankly, I'm not sure it's all that relevant. It's also because THAT sermon is usually given to increase church attendance, not increase and grow discipleship and those are two different things. I'm not sure THAT sermon is very life-giving and almost certain THAT sermon will not transform lives and the world.

Maybe another thing we have confused is a life of discipleship and using guilt and cheap tricks to get people to sit in a church.

The Church is a means to an end. The Church is to transform lives and transform the world to be more like God intends lives and the world to be.

There is an urgency to this work. The Church, at its best, equips us to do this work. The Church, at its best, is committed to equipping us to do the work Jesus calls us to do.

The Church has followed when it is convenient, but Jesus wants a commitment from us to follow.

In some ways, the last couple of years of pandemic has pointed us toward the work it takes to follow Jesus. Being online only, we had to find new ways to connect with God through worship. To learn and grow together required us to find new ways to utilize technology. People gave faithfully in uncertain economic times. I think we can appreciate more the power of what the Church can do. We come to appreciate the gift of following in community. Some would say it was easier, but I think we had to work at it. I believe coming out of the pandemic the Church universal can be more committed. I believe we are better positioned to be the hands and feet of Christ, to bring about God's kingdom to the world.

Faith is rarely convenient. The inconvenience of faith allows us to become sidetracked. Jesus makes clear the distinction here between following when convenient or easy and being a follower. He makes the distinction between a group of people who are following him when it's convenient and a community of people centered on and rooted in following him.

One of my favorite acts of ministry in the Church is baptism. There is nothing more blessed than being a part of a person's baptism, of that moment when someone commits to following Jesus. I always wonder when we enter the water if we really know what we are getting ourselves into. I wonder if I know what

I've gotten myself into. The day of our baptism is not a final decision day, rather it is the beginning of a journey where we decide each day. We decide not to live life on our terms but on God's terms.

So, are you wanting to merely follow when it is convenient and easy, or are you ready for something more?

That's the question that Jesus puts before us today.

Let us pray.