

Let's all go!

Luke 9:57-10:24

So this guy - let's call him Sean - decides that he probably does want to follow Jesus. He takes his time to think about it; he sorts out a few things in his life that are just a bit more pressing than that decision first - re-mortgaging the house, sorting out activities for the kids in the holidays, organising a family do for a big birthday.

But Sean does eventually find the space, and concludes that yes, Jesus is the way, truth and life. He looks forward to life being more settled now - whatever happens, he knows that Jesus is by his side, and things can only be better from here on in.

Then he becomes convinced about the need to share this great news about Jesus with other people. So, thinking that it's all on him to tell his friends because nobody else knows them like he does, Sean starts preparing himself for that. He's not going to start until he feels a bit more knowledgeable.

So he reads up on 'answering tough questions,' tries to get his own life more in shape to appear more changed by Jesus. Finally, he decides he's about ready to talk to people about His King. He's not expecting much will come of it, but gets that he should have a go anyway.

Sean finds a space one day over a coffee shop catch up to explain to his friend that he follows Jesus now. To his surprise, his friend shows real interest, and spends the next couple of weeks asking loads of questions. It gets to a point where Sean's friend starts coming to church with him. So he thinks to himself, 'Yes! One in the bag... Right, who's next?'

Sean starts pressing his brother to talk about life, the universe and everything. Sean's brother knows that he's become a Christian, but his brother doesn't want to talk about it. After his good experience with his friend, Sean puts lots of time and effort into texting his brother, pressing him, trying to get him to open up - but it only causes more and more awkwardness and distance between them.

Apart from that more negative experience, Sean reflects on how things have gone in his life in the last few months, and he's excited. He's excited about everything that he's been able to do for God that he never thought he could do. His self-esteem about what he's capable of has risen, and that's what's giving him a real joy in his life right now.

This might sound like a pretty ordinary experience of a person starting to follow Jesus and let the world around them know about it. But here's the thing - it's the complete opposite of what Jesus taught us being a disciple is like in Luke 9:57-10:24.

We've been thinking a bit in the last few weeks about Jesus correcting and reshaping our attitudes about what being His disciple is like - and we're going to have a bit more of it today. As we go through this, we'll start to unpick how Sean had it wrong, how we might have it wrong, and how Jesus really calls us to be His disciple. We'll learn from Jesus how to follow. How to tell. And how to rejoice.

First of all, in 9:57-62, we read Jesus correcting people's ideas about *how to follow Him*. We've got three people expressing a desire to follow Jesus, and each time Jesus gets them to think again! To think again... about what following Him would really mean.

In v.57, we've got an unqualified, total commitment publicly offered to Jesus: 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus' response is to say, 'Right. Well I'm not going anywhere settled, because I'm homeless. You'd better get used to that feeling too.'

If you're going to follow Jesus, it won't be long before you find out what it really feels like. It's not life made easy from there on in. It's not a 'more settled' place to be. If anything, it's *less* settled. To be Jesus' disciple is to be always ready to move on to where He leads next, never putting down roots and attachments that keep you from going where He calls you next.

Then in vv.59 and 61, we find two *qualified* commitments to Jesus in response to His two word call: 'Follow me.' 'I will follow you, *but first...*' they say. 'First, let me bury my father.' 'First, let me say goodbye to my family.'

These don't seem unreasonable, do they? Actually, in first century Jewish society, there was no greater responsibility for you than seeing that your father was buried properly. It was of first importance, culturally. And when the great prophet Elijah calls Elisha to come with him in 1 Kings 19, and Elisha says 'let me just say goodbye to family,' Elijah is full of sympathy - 'of course, go back - what have I done to you?'

Well, Jesus says something more challenging. 'I'm calling you *now*. Don't put anything in the way of that. Don't use anything, no matter how important,

as an excuse to put off my call to you. You will always find a good reason to put off following me. But I'm calling you *now*. So get on board *now*, before you find the opportunity disappears from your attention or opportunity.'

None of Sean's 'things to sort first' - the mortgage, the kids, the big family do - were supposed to stall him starting to follow Jesus. Nothing that we tell ourselves, or tell Jesus, we need to sort before we respond to His call for what's next in life, is supposed to be placed in the way.

Jesus says in v.62 that looking to follow Him, and then looking back to what you've left unsorted, is like trying to plough a field whilst looking over your shoulder. The problem is, if you do that, you're going to make a made job of it. Jesus wants disciples who will give attention to the call to proclaim and serve the Kingdom of God. And we won't do that effectively if our attention is drawn back to what we've left unfinished.

Sean's not supposed to feel sorted and settled before or after starting to follow Jesus, and neither are we. Jesus tells us here about how to follow - with urgency and attention, and without qualification or condition.

If this ruffles your feathers or makes you feel pressurised, remember this: The call to follow Jesus is always challenging enough to make you frown at it, and always urgent enough that it needs to be grabbed now.

What is the obstacle you've put in the way of following Jesus where He is leading you next?

So if the last part was Jesus teaching us how to follow Him, in 10:1-16 He teaches us about how to tell others about Him. Do you remember Sean's plan? Take it on himself, don't expect too much, spend time reading and preparing before diving in, 'bagging' someone for church before moving on to the next person.

Well, it's the opposite of the teaching Jesus gives here. This passage builds on themes that we looked at in 9:1-9, where Jesus sent out the twelve apostles. There we found that to be a disciple of Jesus means to make disciples of others, too. We are disciples who make disciples, apprentices who make apprentices, followers who make followers of Jesus.

And here in chapter ten, we find that that's not just true for the twelve - for the 'Leadership Team.' It's true for the community of disciples - the 72 - *all of us*.

We're all called to get on with proclaiming and serving the Kingdom of God. So - what's Sean getting wrong, as he sets about trying to be faithful to that?

Well, Sean took on this burden of getting on with good news sharing by himself. Jesus teaches in v.1 that we share good news, not alone, but *in teams*. You're not alone in this call to show and talk Jesus to others. Jesus sent this lot out in pairs. So who is your buddy in this?

What are the little teams amongst us in friendship where we pray together for friends and family members? Which other Christians can you have meals or coffee or drinks with where you together share time with those you know and love who don't know and love Jesus yet? Maybe it will be different pairs of groups amongst us in different contexts. But we're a team in this - there's no need to be a lone ranger.

Sean also thought he should probably keep his expectations pretty low - then anything good that happened might be a bonus. But Jesus taught His disciples in v.2 to be very expectant. He said, 'The harvest is plentiful.' Jesus knew there were people out there in the community before their eyes who were totally ready to put their faith in Him, if there were only enough of His followers to get out there and meet them.

He taught His disciples to pray for workers for this plentiful harvest. Well, about a year to a year and a half ago, that was the dominant prayer for our Leadership Team in this church - that God would provide workers for the harvest field.

We believe God's answered that prayer, between people coming to faith in Him and people moving to this area. So be encouraged - you're all an answer to prayer! And be expectant about what God is going to do through you as you go together to share good news about Jesus with people around us.

Sean thought he'd better spend time reading up and sorting his life out a bit before he'd presume to try to talk to people about Jesus. He reckoned he needed properly equipped. Really, this was just Sean once again trying to feel settled and sorted about something to do with his faith - in this case, sharing it.

But Jesus taught His disciples in vv.3-4 to get out there and share good news with both vulnerability and urgency. 'I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves' says Jesus. You can't get more vulnerable than that. Jesus is

intentionally sending us into environments in our homes, work, families and friendships where He knows we're going to feel defenceless.

What are you reading up and building up *for*? Is it *really* because you think you can brush up your life and logic enough to hit on some silver bullet that's going to convince the person you love that Jesus is Lord? Or is the truth of it that you're doing this because you don't want to look stupid in front of them?

What actually matters more to the person you love is that you get on with telling them your good news about Jesus. Even in a state of unreadiness. Because it shows them how much you think it matters, and they matter. And because it's actually urgent that they hear and respond to this.

Jesus says in v.4, 'Don't spend time equipping yourself for the journey with all the stuff... and don't greet anyone on the road.' He doesn't mean that when your neighbour walks past you on their dog walk, you should start rudely ignoring them. But you know the feeling, when you're trying to get to something urgent and important, and you get stalled by some small talk conversation.

Jesus doesn't want us to allow distractions that make us think it's okay to say, 'Aye, okay Jesus, I'll talk to them about you - but this has just come up as I was about to make time to see them, so it'll maybe be next month now.'

It will always be next month before we get on with it. We have become accustomed to saying, 'yes, telling them about Jesus is important, but we'll get there once a, b and c are out of the way.'

As soon as you get clear of a, b and c; you'll find x, y and z turn up to give you another excuse why you just can't make that time. Jesus tells His disciples to be vulnerable and urgent in the task: Ready or not, off you go!

If you don't know where to start, remember what we've learned from Jesus so far - start with the question, 'Who do you say Jesus is?' And think about how you can explain that Jesus is a better King for our lives than we ourselves are.

Sean thought that he was supposed to invest the minimum time required to 'bag' someone to come to church, then move on to bash the ear of his brother who didn't seem the least bit interested. But Jesus taught His disciples in vv. 5-16 to invest quality time in the 'person of peace,' and to walk away from the one who doesn't want to know.

In vv.5-9, we read about the finding the 'person of peace.' The 'person of peace' is the person you encounter in your life who, when you start opening up about being someone who follows Jesus and start to talk about things to do with Him, responds with warmth and interest rather than suspicion and withdrawal.

It is the person who is at peace being with you and talking with you about Jesus. Jesus teaches His disciples in vv.5-9 to find the people like that, and invest time with *them*. 'Do not move around from house to house,' Jesus says. Once you've found your person or people of peace, stick with them. Don't spend two weeks praying for and meeting up with them, then ditching them for your next 'project.' Stick with them. Disciple them.

In vv.10-15, Jesus spells out what you do when people show you they don't want to know. *Just leave it.* With those who show no interest, who are hostile towards you, who keep conversations about Jesus at arm's length, who are suspicious of the 'Jesus' stuff in your life - 'Shake the dust off your feet' and just move on.

Don't waste time and effort there. It's just annoying them, draining you, and what's worse, distracting you from the people of peace you're supposed to be sharing Jesus with.

There's no fruitfulness in Sean bashing his brother's ear for six months whilst his friend who has just started coming to church is floundering with all these questions, doubts, hang-ups and sense of being left to get on with it.

Who is the 'person of peace' in your life? How do you invest time with them to talk about Jesus and the Kingdom of God?

So we've seen Jesus talk about how to follow, and how to tell. Finally, in vv. 17-24, He's going to teach His disciples about how to rejoice. I guess the word 'rejoice' sounds pretty religious. What does it mean? My Collins English Dictionary says: 'to feel or express great joy or happiness.' And that's the biblical idea - it's to celebrate something joyfully.

What do you celebrate joyfully - in your heart, or even in some more visible way? The seventy two disciples who come back from their mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God in Jesus 'returned with joy' we read in v.17. They're all excited because of the things they've seen and done.

'We've even seen demons submit to us in your name Jesus!' Wow. Evil powers being driven out, people listening to their message and putting trust in Jesus - these seventy two are buzzing because, perhaps to their surprise, there's lots of things they've been able to do for God.

Sean was a bit like that, too. He's excited because his friend has started coming to church, and he's kind of pleased that it was through him stepping out and going for it. He feels joyful because of what he has done for God. It encourages him that God would work through even him in that way. And that's where he's getting his joy in life from.

But Jesus says to His disciples in v.18, 'You've seen a few wee demons driven out of people? Well, don't get too full of yourselves. I've seen Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.' There's just a hint here that Jesus doesn't want them to start getting cocky about what they can do for God, like the disciples we read about in chapter 9.

But there's also an encouragement for these seventy two disciples in what Jesus is saying - yes, you really are part of the mission that is seeing darkness, evil and sin overthrown in this world. But just remember that you are only able to be part of it in reliance upon me.'

Have a look at vv.19-20. Jesus gives this group of disciples extraordinary authority and power. If you'd been equipped by Jesus like this, would you joyfully celebrate that? Well, Jesus got them refocused in v.20. 'Don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.'

That's where Sean has gone wrong. He's rejoicing in his new, exciting experience of his friend coming to church. He's celebrating what he can do for God, to his great surprise. But he's lost sight of where his real joy, identity and celebration is - *Sean's name is written in Heaven.*

Sean is a child of God - in God's family, right now. And he's going to be part of it forever, all because of what Jesus has done for him in living, dying and rising again. *That's* what Sean should find his joy and celebration in.

What happens when Sean hits a point in life where he doesn't feel like he can do anything for God? Nothing's coming off, every way he tries to serve God feels fruitless. Well, if He'll listen to Jesus here, his joy won't be gone - because his joy is in the fact that Jesus has set him free for life to the full, now and forever, through Jesus alone.

What do you joyfully celebrate? How much do you think about Heaven? About what God's got in store for you, because of what Jesus has done for you? If we really thought about it, wouldn't it put everything into perspective? Including the little victories and the little frustrations that we feel as disciples along the way?

Finally, in vv.21-24, we get a glimpse into what Jesus rejoices in. v.21 says that Jesus was 'full of joy through the Holy Spirit' when He said to His Father, 'Father, you're brilliant, because you've revealed all these things about you to humble, ordinary, everyday people; instead of the rich and powerful and academic elite of the world.'

It tickles Jesus that the people in the world who everybody thinks are so wise, clever, and important, don't understand who Jesus is or what brilliant things He's bringing to this world - and that God the Father especially loves to bless ordinary, humble, everyday people with discovering the eternally transforming truth about Jesus.

The guy who gets overlooked at work all the time. The mum who gets no recognition for the incredible effort that she spends every day. The isolated person who gets forgotten and is left lonely. Young children. People with developmental disabilities. These are the people to whom God loves to show Himself.

Jesus rejoices, not because of your ability or strength or achievements - but because you know God as Father. Even someone as ordinary as you and me.

So here's some lessons for Sean today, and for you and me too. Don't let anything stall you in following Jesus where He's leading you next, or stall you in talking about Him with those around you. Don't do it on your own - buddy up.

Don't jump around in drive by, pot shot evangelism with loads of people in spite of their response to you talking about Jesus - invest time and vulnerability with the person of peace in you life. And don't rejoice in what you have done for Jesus - but in what Jesus has done for you to give *you* eternal life.