

“ARE YOU FIT TO FOLLOW JESUS?”

Luke 9:57-62

Dear Redeemed,

Are you in shape? That’s a loaded question for many of us. I know some of you are, but I’m still not going to ask for a show of hands as to who is and isn’t.

NFL training camps are less than a month away. Players come to camp just below game shape from a year-round training program. When they step on to the practice field, they are expected to withstand hitting and getting hit right on the first day.

It wasn’t that way when I played high school & college football. Training camp was boot camp where the coaches whipped my teammates and me into shape with endless conditioning drills. After two-a-days for two weeks, I started to feel a little bit less pain than I did after the first couple of days. It was still grueling, but that subsided after a while. In other words, I was getting fit to play.

Fitness is fine and there’s plenty of time & money spent on doing that. Some estimates claim anywhere from \$40-60, even \$100 billion. But how often do we give such a commitment to being spiritually fit. I don’t mean that we can be in such good shape that we can get to heaven on our own. I mean the kind of genuine commitment to following Jesus the way He expects us to follow him.

Our text is Jesus’ fitness plan for those who call themselves His believers. This plan takes focus. This plan takes commitment. This plan takes dedication to follow the Good Shepherd in this sinful world all the way until He takes us to heaven. Are you fit to do that?

“ARE YOU FIT TO FOLLOW JESUS?”

1. COUNT THE COST
2. KNOW WHAT’S FIRST
3. ALWAYS LOOK [PLOW] AHEAD

1

Jesus is nearing the end of his earthly ministry. He has about 6 months to go and the clock for his suffering and death is ticking down quickly. As true God, Jesus is **truly FIT** to going through with this even though he knows all this. Jesus is **FIT** for a cross on which to suffer and die. Jesus is **FIT** for His Father to forsake him. Jesus is **FIT** for a tomb in which he would be buried for 3 days. Jesus is **FIT** for a resurrection that he would prove to his disciples and others for nearly 6 weeks after the fact. Jesus is **FIT** to return to heaven’s glory from where he came to this sinful world.

Six verses before our text, Luke says: **AS THE TIME APPROACHED FOR HIM TO BE TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN, JESUS RESOLUTELY SET OUT FOR JERUSALEM.** (Lk 9:51) He kept his face set on his purpose. He was determined to complete the goal of redemption of the world and nothing would deter him off that path.

While on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters three different scenarios of so-call “**follower wannabees**”. They all have one characteristic in common: they think they are fit to follow Jesus. But in the first case, we discover that being fit means “**COUNTING THE COST**”.

AS THEY WERE WALKING ALONG THE ROAD, A MAN SAID TO JESUS, “I WILL FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU GO.” He sounds admirable. He claimed that no sacrifice would be too great, no hardship too difficult. In his mind, he concluded that he was fairly fit to follow Jesus until Jesus warned him about the cost. **THE FOXES HAVE HOLES AND BIRDS OF THE AIR HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NO PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD.** To follow Jesus would mean to be without a permanent dwelling place here on earth, unlike the foxes and birds. It would require moving around because the work of Jesus was more about heavenly things than earthly things. Jesus wanted him to realize that pursuing a big home, a big salary, and earthly comforts was not his main goal. Rather his agenda was seeking and saving the lost, and all these earthly treasures were not a part of that agenda. Could he count the cost of following Jesus?

Jesus is not saying these blessings are wrong to have. But they do not make one fit to follow Jesus because our sinful hearts can put all our energies on the bigger, the better, the brighter, and the beautiful and divert our attention from the need for a Savior. How often have people come to membership in the church either as transfer or converts to the Christian faith. And while some remained active, I’d have to say that a higher % of those individuals soon fell away because the cost was too great to follow Jesus. Something got in the way. Going to church every week became too much. Worshipping our Lord cost them too much of their time. Serving Christ was too much to sacrifice and became a distraction from serving themselves and their needs.

Are we fit to follow Jesus? Does the cost become too much, too high, too great to be his disciple who worships regularly and commune frequently? Is it too much to give up when our own sinful pleasures and treasures guide us instead of God's Word in the way we live, think, speak, and follow? How often the church admonishes a member who is living in sin with someone who is not their spouse. Yet when God's law is applied and the call for repentance is spoken, the response is **"I won't give up that relationship. What they're saying is it costs too much in my life."** Jesus says: **YOU ARE UNFIT TO FOLLOW ME.**

The Supreme Court's ruling on the redefinition of marriage and the Texas filibuster on abortions do nothing to help people be fit to follow Jesus. But why would they? Those rulings were instigated by people who wanted to their wills, not God's. Changing that would be too high a cost. We fight for what WE want, not what God wants. And Jesus says: **YOU ARE UNFIT TO FOLLOW ME.**

2

Being fit to follow Jesus also means **knowing what's first.**

Jesus tells a second man: **FOLLOW ME – BE MY DISCIPLE.** But the man replied, **"Lord first let me go and bury my father."** To Jesus' call, this man seemed ready only IF Jesus gave him time to wait for his father's death and then bury him. Notice the **"BUT"** and the **"FIRST"**? Jesus' point is one of priority. There are many who are spiritually dead – they are the ones that need the attention now, not a father who could take years to die yet. **Knowing what's first** makes you fit to follow Jesus. The urgency to proclaim the Kingdom of God is of more importance. This man could let others take care of those burial duties. The spiritually dead are always on hand to bury the physically dead.

Jesus says: **SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU AS WELL.** (Matt 6:33) Conflicting loyalties and priorities do not make one fit to follow Jesus. Jesus isn't saying don't take care of your parents and family. But He is saying that our earthly concerns will not bring us into His kingdom.

The Gospel of Christ only does. Knowing that first and foremost leads us to follow Jesus' love, cherish His sacrificial death on the cross for us, and treasure the life of forgiveness, eternity, and salvation He has earned for us. That's #1 because that the only possession we have that lasts forever. Jesus said: **STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DO NOT DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN AND STEAL. FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO.** (Matt 6:20-21) **That makes you fit to follow Jesus!**

3

Finally, Jesus' fitness plan requires that we **always look ahead,** plow ahead in life with total commitment.

A 3rd disciple wannabee claimed **I WILL FOLLOW YOU, Lord, but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.** Jesus does not want people looking back when they follow him. This man was not fit because a part of them regretted the departure. His desire to see family was stronger than his desire to serve the Lord. Remember Lot's wife—she had to take one more peek back at Sodom & Gomorrah. There was still something she longed for in her heart & that made her a 5'4" block of salt.

Jesus knew this man wasn't fit to follow him either. He said **NO ONE WHO PUTS HIS HAND TO THE PLOW AND LOOKS BACK IS FIT FOR SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** I cut my grass in different paths. One time it's this way, another time it's that way. To get it straight means focusing on one spot and looking straight ahead to get to it. Try mowing with your head turned back. That'll make a crooked cut if you ever saw one. **OR A FARMER PLANTING HIS FIELD...** eyes straight to get rows straight.

To be fit to follow Jesus, we need to always look ahead – focusing on his mercy and love to lead us through this sinful life with his forgiving grace which has forgiven our sins and opened heaven's door to us. We look ahead to his eternal blessings packed in heaven waiting for us. We don't look back for one more peek at what we're leaving behind, but with 100% commitment look ahead with resolve to follow Jesus all our lives until He calls us home where believers are together forever. In the meantime, worship Him in true faith. Keep Him your #1 priority as He guides your hearts and lives in His Word. Do that with joy and peace and **YOU WILL BE IN GREAT SHAPE TO FOLLOW JESUS.**

AMEN