

Soft Hearts, Steely Resolve

Luke 9:49-62

"No reserves, no retreats, not regrets."

William Borden

Introduction: In 1904 a young man named William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school. His family was wealthy and was heir to a family fortune. As a graduation present, his parents sent him on a trip around the world, passing through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe where he was increasingly burdened by the immensity of hurting people throughout the world. William wrote home announcing his desire to be a missionary, to which one friend replied that he was "throwing himself away as a missionary". In response to this, William wrote two words in the back of his Bible: **No reserves**. William attended Harvard university where excelled at being a light for Jesus on campus. Later an entry in his personal journal was found that read: *Say 'no' to self and 'yes' to Jesus every time*. William began a prayer meeting of one on campus, which led to 1000 out of 1300 students joining him by his senior year. He was known by his teaching of God's Word and prayer, but he matched it with the care for those outside of the campus. He founded the Yale Hope Mission, which was designed to rescue drunks off the streets of New Haven, as well as reaching out to orphans, widows, and the disabled. Upon graduation, he decided to attend Princeton seminary to prepare for life as a missionary. He turned down several high paying job offers. When he father told him he would not work for the family business ever again if he left, William wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: **No retreats**. His desire to work with Muslims in China led him to study Arabic in Egypt. Before leaving he gave away \$500,000 (equivalent to over \$10,000,000 today) and served as a trustee of Moody Bible Institute. In 1913, he travelled to Cairo where he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, the 25 year old Borden was dead. Prior to his death, he wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: **No regrets**.

No reserves, no retreats, no regrets...

William Borden's life does not simply illustrate an exemplary life yielded to Christ, it shows a life that has no explanation outside of Christ. I think too often we have too narrow a view of the transformation that Jesus brings, and can easily make excuses for the lack of sacrifice that is evident in our life. This morning we are going to be confronted with (or confront ourselves with, depending on your perspective) this reality. The first is our view and ability to offer **mercy** to those whom we would not naturally do so, and come to grips with the **cost of commitment to Jesus**. So this morning, let's be honest with each other, honest before God, and honest with ourselves as we see ourselves in light of the truth of Scripture with the goal that we find greater joy in yielding obediently to Christ in all areas of our life, to the point that the words "no reserves, no retreats, no regrets" can be true of us.

Jesus' Changed and Resolute Focus (Luke 9:51)

Luke 9:51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, **he set his face to go to Jerusalem**.

It was clear that things were changing. Jesus was acting and teaching differently, and the disciples could tell, but were not ready to embrace all of it. There was a general sense of excitement and anticipation that the disciples were walking with. They had been given the ability to cast out demons and heal. They were on the inner circle of the Messiah, who showed that He had the power to heal, forgive, raise the dead, and feed thousands out of a few loaves of bread. This filled these men with excitement that they would be at the head table when Jesus parceled out the land in tribes.

However, there was a new narrative that had sprung up. Now Jesus was saying things like “the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised.” Not only that, but they were to live in a state of radical self denial, to follow the path of suffering by taking up their cross daily, and following Jesus. On top of this, Jesus reiterated that true greatness meant becoming least among them, and the pathway to greatness comes from becoming a servant to all. This may have tempered their excitement but did not alter their thoughts.

We come to this section of Luke and we see a major shift in how Jesus went about His ministry. Jesus now **set His face, resolutely, determined, and steadfastly** looking now at the looming hill of Calvary. Luke’s narrative will carry us from here until 19:44, covering Jesus march toward Jerusalem, entering the city at the exact moment to be the perfect Passover sacrifice for us. This also marks the end of Jesus ministry in Galilee, and though He will pass through the area again, He will not linger there nor spend much time preaching and training. So in essence Jesus begins His final **road trip** with the boys, and what we will see is a ramp up of expectation, a clarification of cost, and realistic view of life following Him.

Necessity of Mercy (Luke 9:49-56)

Luke 9:49-56 John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and **we tried to stop him**, because he does not follow with us." ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you." ⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. ⁵³ But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "**Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?**" ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ And they went on to another village.

Grace and mercy are of utmost importance in our lives, because without them we would be destined for judgment, wrath, and hell. Both grace and mercy are aspects of ways God treats us based on His loving, righteous character. A simple definition for each is needed to truly understand the concept. **Grace** is *unmerited favor*, receiving a gift that we did not earn. **Grace is receiving something we did not earn.** **Mercy** is goodness toward those who are in misery or distress. **Mercy is NOT receiving something we DID earn, primarily punishment.** These two concepts are wed together in our salvation as described in **Ephesians 2:1-10**, where God who is rich in mercy (2:4 – not giving us what we deserved as children under wrath) saves us on the basis of grace through faith (2:8-9). We are exhorted to be **merciful to others as God has been merciful to us** (Luke 6:36), because we have been loved and thus can love others.

We live, then, in simultaneous realities of upholding the truth of God’s Word, which calls out both sin and sinner, and love people in a gracious and merciful way. This means that to truly love someone, we must do so IN TRUTH, but they way to be perfectly truthful is to do so IN LOVE. Often people fall on a side of a pendulum of the GRACE/TRUTH paradox. We drift toward the truth, upholding it at all cost, or toward grace and mercy, willingly loving no matter what. The reality is we need to uphold both, not in a 50/50 way, but by emulating Jesus Himself, who was FULL of grace and FULL of truth (John 1:14).

Much like us, the disciples struggled with this concept. We find them having a hard time with people who were casting out demons, but not following them, to which Jesus replied, “Do not stop them.” But even greater, they were upset with those who **rejected Jesus**. Though the word **mercy** is not in this section, the concept and principle is illustrated hugely.

When we face rejection and sinful reality

Jesus left Galilee on His way to Jerusalem and broke protocol a bit to travel through Samaria. He sent His disciples ahead to make arrangements for the travelling band. The Samaritans that were there **did not receive Him because His face was set toward Jerusalem**. A quick word about what was going on here. The Samaritans hated the Jews, and the feeling was reciprocated. Way back in **2 Kings 17**, which took place in 722 B.C, it was recorded why there was such hatred. The 10 tribes of Israel had splintered off into their own kingdom and set up a secondary place of rule in Samaria (as opposed to Jerusalem). However, after years of sinful rebellion, God allowed the Assyrians to come in and destroy Israel, leaving only the Judah and Benjamin left in the south. The Assyrians shrewdly carried off some of the people, but to ensure that no future rebellion would take place, transplanted their own people into the land, meaning there was a cross breeding of Assyrians with Jews, creating a whole new group of people. This not only created a new race (Samaritans), but created religious and cultural pluralism. They set up their own place of worship (which the woman at the well asked about in John 4) and their own version of Scripture (only the first 5 books). This was the main reason they rejected, since Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, which they rejected as a true place to worship.

The Samaritans rejected, and the disciples responded harshly, and both these realities would have been expected and repeated many times throughout the years. Yet Jesus was teaching them a new ethic. Jesus needed to teach His disciples the **inclusive character of the gospel of mercy**. Jesus Himself was **mercy incarnate**, reaching out even to people despised by His fellow Jews to offer the hope of salvation. The disciples needed to understand that rejection was not license to respond in kind or to hate. We live in a day that teaching absolutes, declaring truth statements, and calling anyone a sinner will bring immediate reaction and rejection, and we know that. Our job is to make sure that we respond in love, especially to those who reject us *because* of their sin, and withhold from them what they deserve.

When we drift toward misplaced justice

We appreciate the disciples because they were not only consistent but give us a great window into our own hearts. The sons of thunder, James and John, lived up to their names. In response to the rejection they asked Jesus if He wanted *them* to call down from heaven and consume them! Have you ever felt like doing that? This was audacious, but not without precedent. This is exactly what Elijah did in 2 Kings 1 to soldiers sent from king Ahaziah. These two had just seen Elijah at the transfiguration, so they felt emboldened to follow suit. The problem was, they missed the part of the story that God spared the third group sent to Elijah after the captain appealed for his life, showing the mercy of the Lord. They saw sinful, unrighteous people and they wanted justice executed swiftly and mercilessly.

There is a huge lesson for us. There are times when we respond to the evil around us and want to execute the same justice, but most times for us it is out of fear. Notice that they took justice into their own hands, in their own timing, and their own way. Jesus did not ask them to do it, but they wanted to do Him a favor. We must remember that God will ultimately bring justice and will judge righteously in His timing. We'll see this in the next chapter as Jesus condemns certain cities for their sin. Our role here is NOT JUDGE, BUT HERALD. Our heart should break for sinful people of every shape, experience, and depth of depravity. Our role is not to HATE, but to LOVE. We are called to bring the light of the gospel to people who love the darkness. We are to have compassionate mercy on those who have yielded themselves to a life of sin and misery. Yes, we vote our conscience, but we do not try to legislate the change of someone's heart. The sin that we are most horrified about is our own, not someone else's, and we marvel in the fact that God would save a wretch like me, and respond in kind to others.

When we forget our true mission

Luke records that Jesus **turned and rebuked them**. The ESV (English Standard Version) is correct to leave out a phrase that is included by other versions (including the NASB): *You do not know what kind of*

*spirit you are of;*⁵⁶ *for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*" It rightly puts this in italics, since it was not in the earliest manuscripts but was added by a later scribe, most likely to explain what Jesus meant by His rebuke. This was not needed but does not mean it was not consistent with what Jesus taught elsewhere (Luke 19:10; John 12:47). Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Our true mission is just that: to seek and save the lost. This does not mean we compromise the truth. It does mean that we are not living our lives in fear, retribution, or temporal judgment. Our arms need to be as inclusive as the truth will allow and as wide as mercy demands.

This is so important as we contemplate reaching the world around us. In the next few weeks we will grapple with the broken systems of marriage and sexuality, which will leave countless people empty and wrecked. We must respond in truth but also in **tender mercy** as we interact with people who have sinned and experienced life in ways we couldn't imagine, yet by God's grace we receive. If we get this wrong, we are not only ineffective, but we miss the whole point of the gospel. We must be ready to meet with and love messy people, which means things will get messy for us. We interact with the Samaritans of the world, those who we would naturally want to call down fireballs from heaven, but instead invite them to our dinner table. That is truth and grace/mercy working together.

Cost of true Commitment (Luke 9:57-62)

Luke 9:57-62 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "**I will follow you wherever you go.**"⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."⁵⁹ To another he said, "**Follow me.**" But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."⁶¹ Yet another said, "**I will follow you, Lord, but** let me first say farewell to those at my home."⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Matched with a gentle mercy is steely, rugged, persevering commitment. As Jesus walked along the road to Jerusalem, he encountered rejection, but also those who desired to follow Him. However, not all who gave initial compliance and a verbal desire were ready to embrace the full force of following Jesus. That distance between verbal desire and the cost considered separates the mildly interested from the true disciple. Here we see **3 distinct encounters** with people on the road who had roadblocks to truly follow Jesus. Jesus knew their motives and intentions, blocking the path of those not fully in.

Cost of our personal comfort (57-58)

The first encounter was with a man who seemed a prime candidate for salvation and discipleship. He came to Jesus and declared he would follow Jesus **anywhere**. Matthews narrative has the man address Jesus as "teacher", so this man was intrigued by Jesus' teaching, and was willing to follow to learn from the up and coming Rabbi. I'll be your pupil and listen to your lectures along the way. This sounds like one whom Jesus would welcome with open arms, especially in light of what He just taught about mercy.

Yet Jesus saw below the shallow commitment, much like the teaching about the rocky soil earlier. Jesus reiterated to this man that if he was after creature comforts, if he was after a better reputation or a larger resume, he was barking up the wrong tree. Jesus entered His ministry without owning property, had no long term monetary investments, and was not accepted by the intellectual elite.

What did this man illustrate? This man wanted the benefits of following Jesus, but did not want the sacrifice. He wanted the short-term yield but did not consider the long-term cost. This happens when

we want to add Jesus, but do not want our life to change. We want Jesus to fix problems, help us when we are desperate, and forgive us, but we do not want Him to mess with the status quo of our life. I want to keep relationships, my money, my plans, my dreams, my comfort, and my reputation, but I'm ok with saying I'll follow Jesus. The problem is Jesus NEVER minced words about the cost of following Him (Matt. 10:16-22), we simply refuse to listen.

Cost of our personal gain (59-60)

The second interaction was with a man Jesus approached. He called the man to follow him, to which he said, "**first let me go bury my father**". This seems like a very reasonable request. Even today we get bereavement leave from even the most stingy bosses, so what was the hold up with Jesus not letting this man go and bury his pop (especially since the OT was clear that it was a sons duty to care for a father in death - Gen. 25:9; 35:29; 49:29-50-13)

The issue was: *he dad was not dead yet!* (I'm feeling much better!). Jews would bury the dead immediately upon death, since they did not embalm. When he requested to go take care of his dad, he was trying to buy time until his living dad would die, allowing him to receive the inheritance of a son. Leaving immediately would cause that inheritance to be put in jeopardy. Remember, when the 12 left to follow Jesus, they left everything (Matt. 19:27; Luke 5:11)

What does this man illustrate? Jesus told this man to let the dead bury the dead, and in this case he referred to **priorities**. The spiritually dead are concerned with temporal matters, but those who follow Jesus have a greater agenda. The man was to leave behind an inheritance that brought temporal wealth for one that was eternal and unfading. Does that mean a follow of Christ should not take care of dying parents, cannot receive an inheritance (or even leave one), or take care of temporal issues? Not at all, but that is not the point. The point is the issue of **priorities**, and which reality dominates our life. Are we committed to the proclamation of the kingdom of God, or is that somewhere down the list? This is much more revealing of our heart, and how dearly we cling to earthly wealth as opposed to our all in commitment to His kingdom. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that we CANNOT serve both God and money (Luke 16:13)

Cost of our personal relationships (61-62)

The third interaction is perhaps the most difficult and cuts the deepest. A man volunteered to follow Jesus and offered the seemingly slightest of stipulations: let me first go home and say goodbye to my family. Seriously, what kind of hard heart would deny such a request. This is what every parent wants to do before their kid goes off to college, gives their daughter away in marriage, or send a son off to war. At least give me an opportunity to let them know (and this was not without precedence - Elisha asked for the same thing of Elijah before he followed the prophet - 1 Kings 19:20 - let me go kiss my mom and dad). The problem was not that saying goodbye was wrong, but the fact that his **family ties were too strong to break away from them**.

*"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, **he cannot be my disciple.**"*

Luke 14:26

Did Jesus really mean this? Is this hyperbole? We either have to explain this away or embrace its reality.

What does this man illustrate? Following Jesus trumps every possible human relationship, and He never will come in second. What Jesus uncovered in this man was the fact that as he would start down the road, he would desire to go home and be with family, leaving Christ. The illustration was of plowing a straight line in a field, which would be impossible if one continued to look back instead of fixing a

forward gaze. That is exactly the call to follow Christ: forsaking all, not looking back, but fixing our gaze on the author and perfecter of our faith.

Each of these three really illustrate the same point, which Jesus made already and will continue to make. He is not seeking our followers who simply **say** they want to follow, but those who willingly yield their lives to Him, placing themselves in His hand and following Him whatever the cost. When we do this, we begin to experience lives like that of **William Borden**, of whom it was written on his epitaph:

*A man in Christ
He arose and forsook all and followed Him,
Kindly affectioned with brotherly love,
Fervent in spirit serving the Lord,
Rejoicing in hope,
Patient in tribulation,
Instant in prayer,
Communicating to the necessity of saints,
In honour preferring others,
Apart from faith in Christ,
There is no explanation for such a life.*

-Epitaph of William Whiting Borden (1887-1913)

Questions to ponder:

What people do we have a hard time being merciful to? What sins of others are particularly hard for us to deal with in others?

On the scale of truth and grace/mercy, where do you tend to lean? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this?

How do we grow in our ability to show others mercy? Why is this so important if we are going to actually reach, disciple, and welcome into our family those who are devastated and broken by sin right now?

What tension do you feel in your mind and heart with the 3 examples of those desiring to follow Jesus?

What areas do we have the hardest time giving up to follow Jesus?