

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 12, The Fox, The Funeral & the Furrow, Part II. Luke 9:57-62

1. Continuing the conversation from last week, the oppressed are asked to speak of themselves symbolically (Revelations). Fresh in their minds are the terrors of the Herodian era with murder and torture, no one dared speak evil of Rome. They were the power of the land and spies were everywhere.
2. Manson suggests Jesus in a veiled way may have been saying, if you want power and influence ‘go the birds’ who father their nests everywhere, and ‘follow the fox’ who manages his own affairs cunningly. In spite of your expectations, the Son of man stands powerless and alone. Are you serious in wanting to follow the ‘rejected,’ Son of Man? This passage is Christological in nature, ministry is suffering much more than a triumphant fulfillment of that title.
3. We are not told the outcome. The volunteer does not answer. In many parables of J, the p is left suspended. We don’t know if the volunteer tightened his belt, set his face steadfast, joined in line with the others or whether, stunned at the price to be paid and the shocking prospect of a rejected leader, he fell back to the side of the road and watched them pass. Clearly this person mirrors those in every age who glibly offer to follow Jesus with no serious reflection of the price or the implications of following a rejected/suffering master. The leader must complete this themselves.

THE SECOND DIALOGUE:

4. The second would be disciple does not volunteer, but is recruited. Thus we have the central force of mission. Jesus directs three commands to the bystander, they are as follows;

To Another, He said, “Follow me!”

FOLLOW

But he said, “Lord, let me go first

GO

To bury my father. But he said to him,

COST

Let the dead bury their own dead.

But you go

GO

And proclaim the Kingdom of God.

FOLLOW

5. The use of inverted parallelism is noted above. The Greek is very precise. The type of imperative verb indicates a command for a new action. The person involved has not followed and is commanded to do so. His response is often times misunderstood. Plummer believes that the father has died or is about to die. But this interpretation is foreign to the ME scene. Ibn al Salibi comments..."Let me go serve my father while he is alive and after he dies, I will bury him and come." Sa'id makes the same point, a contemporary Arab commentator. This disciple is looking into the future, for he postpones following Jesus to a time after the death of his father (Sa'id). In commenting on this Sa'id notes; "If his father died, why wasn't he keeping vigil over the body of his father? In reality he intends to defer the matter of following Jesus into a distant future where his father dies as an old man, who knows when. Little does he know that in a very short time, Jesus will himself give up His spirit.

6. Sa'id's point is taken. The three conversations are on the road, if the man's father is dead, why is he on the road, taking his time at the roadside? Sa'id's case can be even stronger; the phrase, 'to bury one's father,' is a traditional idiom that the son's responsibility is to remain home with his parents until they are laid at rest respectfully. The present writer has heard this specific language again and again from ME who discuss emigrating. At some point, someone is going to ask, "Aren't you going to bury your father first?" The speaker is usually discussing this with a would be emigrant who is in their 30's. The point is, "Aren't you going to stay and fulfill the traditional duty of taking care of your parents until their death and then consider emigrating? The colloquialisms reflect the same cultural background. In the Syriac of isolated villages of Syria and Iraq, when a rebellious son wants to assert his independence, the father's stinging rebuke is kabit di qurly (You want to bury me!). The point is, "Do you want me to hurry up and die so that my authority over you will be at an end and you will be on your own." Obviously, the same cultural assumption is at work here. Among the Lebanese, and older person can still offer to a younger person a compliment when, as an endearment expression, tuqburni ja ibni (You will bury me, my son!) The meaning is that I think so much of you that I look on you as my own child and sincerely hope that you will be the one who will care for me in my old age and lay me with respect

in my grave. Again, the assumption in governing the idiomatic language is that the son has the duty to stay home until the death of the parents. Then and only then can he consider other options.

7. Here we are dealing with community expectations which can be roughly translated into Western terms as peer pressures. The recruit on the side of the road is saying, "My community makes certain demands of me and the pull of these demands is very strong." Surely you do not expect me to violate the expectations of my community? Yet this is precisely what Jesus requires. The proclamation of the kingdom of God can only mean announcing the Kingdom the Kingdom of God is a present reality. Jesus says that the spiritually dead can take care of the traditional responsibilities of your local community, but as for you, go and proclaim the arrival of the kingdom. (The word you is emphatic in the Greek text).

8. THE THIRD DIALOGUE:

And another said,

"I will follow you, Lord,

But first let me (go) and take leave of those at my home."

FOLLOW

GO

And Jesus said,

"No one who puts his hand to the plow,

COST TO HIGH?

And looks back

is of any use in the Kingdom of God."

9. Like the first volunteer this would-be disciple brashly offers to follow the master. Like the recruit in the second dialogue, he has a precondition. This condition is often translated, "First let me go and say farewell to those at my home." This request seems as legit as the that of the recruit before it. Surely he would be allowed to go home and say, "good bye." Elisha when asked to follow Elijah asked time to 'kiss my father and mother," (1 Kings 19:20. His request is granted and he even took time to butcher and roast a pair of oxen. It is not reasonable that this volunteer's request be granted? The answer can only be found in the examination of the exact request.

10. The Greek word traditionally translated as “to say good bye to” is “apostasso.” It can mean to say “good bye or take leave of.” In the NT, 4 times it’s referred to as ‘taking leave.’ The RSV typifies the NT understanding from four texts.
Mark 6:46, “After he had ‘taken leave’ of them, he went into the hills.”
Acts 18:18, “After this Paul... took leave of the brethren.”
Acts 18:21, “But ‘taking leave’ of them.”
2 Cor. 2:14, “I did not find my brother Titus there, so I ‘took leave’ of them.
11. Only in Luke 9:60, do we see the Greek translated as “saying good-bye.” The distinction between the two translations is important in ME culture. The person who is leaving must request permission to leave from those who are staying. The people who remain behind can say, “good-bye,” to those leaving. This gentle formality is observed to the letter all over the ME in both formal and informal occasions.
12. The one who leaves asks permission to go, “With your permission?” Those who remain behind may respond, “May you go safely, God go with you, May you go in peace.” (Rice) Such responses are granting the permission requested. The RSV Translations listed above properly observe this distinction in all four cases quoted. Jesus and Paul in each case are the ones leaving someone else. Thus they properly ‘take leave of’ those who stay behind. On more formal occasions in the English speaking world this idiom is not entirely lost. At a banquet the guest “takes leave of the host,” in spite of the fact that ‘take leave of,’ translates in all other cases as “apostasso” in modern English versions, in this one case the real intent of the texts has been obscured by translating, ‘say good bye to.’
13. The real point is that the volunteer is asking for the right to go home and get permission from ‘those at home,’ (His parents). Everyone listening to the dialogue knows that naturally the father will refuse to let the boy wander off on some questionable enterprise. Thus the volunteer’s excuse is ready made. Shedding crocodile tears he can loudly insist that he wants to go, but his father will not permit him.
14. overlooked in discussion of p as they do not fit the story of p as an extended story. Yet Jesus communicates His views by means of concrete

comparisons. 2 p/proverbs occur in these dialogues. Each is a 'mashal' as defined by 1st century Palestinian usage. We choose to include this trilogy under the umbrella of p usage in Jesus' speech.

15. We interpret Jesus response to the first brash volunteer as a classical use of the p method of communication. These three cameos need to be considered together because of the literary structure of the three forms of a single unit and similar subject matter. We turn our attention to the structure.
16. Louw views this structure as phrase structure and on the traditional exposition of the individual's words. This is too strong, both are needed, Louw's explanation needs to consider the culture informs the text, but this does draw attention to the literary structure in the text as is and it is helpful. The analyses above allow a number of interlocking features worthy of not to surface.
17. Very often in the Bible we work with three stanzas (Bailey). Typical, the first and third stanza are linked in a number of special ways. In this case there are four clear points of comparison that establish such linkage. In the first and third stanza the person is a volunteer. He offers to follow. The second person in the middle dialogue is a recruit, he is called by Jesus to follow. Secondly, in the first and third stanza Jesus answers with imagery from the outdoor world. The first is nature and the second is farming practices in the Palestinian countryside. The dialogue in the second one has no p, in its place is a direct command. The imagery here is in the customs of the society, not from nature. Third in the case of the first and third, there is only one statement by each party. The second dialogue has three speeches. Finally, the literary dialogue in the first and third is identical. The ideas follow +Go + a p. By contrast the 2nd one is inverted parallelism, with the themes of Go-Cost +Cost-Go-follow/Proclaim. We see this same structure of the three stanzas as a step parallelism tying the outside stanzas together and the central stanza breaking into inverted parallelism in Luke 15:4-7 (Bailey).
18. In addition to the features that link the first and third dialogues, a number of semantic links tie the 2nd and 3rd together. Each ends with a reference to the Kingdom of God. Each person pleads that they are willing, "But first.....". Some features tie all three together. Obviously the themes of Follow+Go+Cost are the focal points in each dialogue. The first is willing to Go and Follow, but has NOT considered the cost. The second is asked to

follow. He wants to go home, but is told to go and proclaim the Kingdom. The cost of discipleship is put in the form of a command. The third wants to follow and like the second, wants to go home first. (The old Syriac version has the verb “go” in this text and we suggest that it may be original. In any case it is implied). He, like the first is challenged to consider the cost. At the same time, the first and third are not identical. There is a progression. The first man offers to follow unconditionally and is challenged to consider the cost. The last volunteer seems to have done so. He offers to follow, but with a very specific condition. With all three interlocking parallelism in mind, we examine each dialogue in turn.

THE FIRST DIALOGUE: (Luke 9:57-58)

A man said to him,	
‘I will follow you	FOLLOW
Where every you go.’	GO
And Jesus said to him,	COST TOO HIGH
“Foxes have hole,	
And the birds of the air have roosts.	
But the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”	

19. The p has no cultural riddles, and it may have two levels of meaning. The first would be disciple represents the force of the mission. He is drawn in to join the community of disciples, no one draws him. Yet his understanding appears shallow. Said notes, “He does not understand that ‘follows’ means Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the tomb.” The idea of following a rejected, suffering Son of man would come as a jarring shock to any first century Jew. In Daniel, 7:14, “The Son of man is to have dominion, glory and kingdom and, all ‘nations, peoples, and languages shall serve him!” The reader of Luke in Luke 9:22 reads that “The Son of Man must suffer.” Here the volunteer is not given details, but only a graphic picture of total rejection. The point is not only “You, too may have to suffer privation, and have you considered this? You also, must consider your motives, remember that you are offering to follow a ‘rejected leader!’” “Roosts,” is a better translation than nests, the birds always have roosts, but build nests

only at a certain times of the year. The point is (partially) that even the animals and birds have some place to rest, but the Son of man has none.

20. Aside from the obvious level of meaning drawn from the nature of foxes and birds, a political symbol may be involved. T.W. Manson points out that the 'birds of the air,' were an apocalyptic symbol in the intertestamental period referring to gentile nations. The 'fox' was a symbol for the Ammonites, who as Manson says, were a people racially akin to but politically enemies of Israel. In similar fashion, Herod's family (Due to Herod's Idumean parentage was racially mixed and was always seen by the Jewish population of 1st century Palestine as being foreign (Stern). Jesus calls Herod Antipas, "that fox," Luke 13:32, Manson writes, "The sense of saying is that everybody is at home in Israel's land, except true Israel. The birds of the air, (Roman overlords) the foxes (Edomite interlopers) have made their position secure. The true Israel is disinherited by them, and if you cast your lot with me and mine with you, you will join the ranks of the dispossessed and must be prepared to serve God under those conditions."

21. In the author's view, the political overtones of the sayings of Jesus are often overlooked. If one lives in the ME where every religious breath has political overtones is obliged to consider some rarely asked questions of the text. The extensive use of p with their somewhat veiled symbols, the cryptic phrase, "Those who have ears, let them hear." So the resisted pressure to make him into a king, the need to cross to the north on various occasions out of a Galilee into non-Jewish provinces and many other passages indicate that a political dimension was constantly a part of the world in which Jesus lived (Manson). Even so here, the oppressed people are seldom allowed to declare publically that they are oppressed.