

Be Careful What You Say to a Cockroach

By Pastor Greg
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Matthew 8:18-22

Bunkertown COB

Walter started working in the mailroom for the biggest corporation in the world. He liked his job, but working down in the basement caused him to often daydream about what it would be like to be a junior executive or even chairman of the board. One day Walter noticed a small cockroach creeping around. Just as he was about to step on it, he heard a small voice scream: "Don't kill me! Please, don't kill me! I'm Milton the cockroach. And if you spare my life, I promise to grant all of your wishes." That sounded like a pretty good deal to Walter. So he spared Milton the cockroach's life. Walter's first wish was to get out of the mailroom and be a junior executive. Milton granted that wish. Next Walter wanted to become one of the vice-presidents of the corporation. That wish was granted too. As a matter of fact, Milton the cockroach kept granting every one of Walter's wishes until Walter was finally elevated to Chairman of the Board with an office on the top floor.

Walter was very happy. Every so often he would say to himself: "I am Walter. Everyone respects me. No one is bigger or better or more important than me." But one day Walter found a little boy who was praying. He asked the boy, "Are you praying to Walter?" "Of course not," said the little boy with a smile of innocence. "I'm praying to Jesus!" Walter responded, "Why are you praying to Jesus? I'm the chairman of the board of the largest corporation in the world. What can Jesus do for you that I cannot?" The little boy replied, "Jesus loves me and Jesus saved me." Walter was quite disturbed by this turn of events, so he sent for Milton the cockroach. "I want to be like Jesus," Walter told Milton. So Milton the cockroach granted Walter's wish and Walter went back to the mailroom in the basement.

Like many, Walter didn't fully understand what it means to be just like Jesus. Maybe we don't quite understand as well. What does it mean for us to become like Jesus? In order to call ourselves a Christian (which literally means Christ-like) what must a person do to be His follower? Well, before we run off thinking we've got this all figured out, consider the story of three other would-be followers of Jesus.

¹⁸ Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side *of the sea*. ¹⁹ Then a scribe came and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” ²⁰ Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” ²¹ Another of the disciples said to Him, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” ²² But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.” ¹ (Matthew 8:18-22). Luke, in his gospel, adds a third excuse given by a “would be” follower of Jesus. ⁶¹ Another said, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.” ⁶² But Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.” ² (Luke 9:61-62)

To the scribe, Jesus says that to follow Him results in pursuing things other than your own comfort and security. I mean, why else would Jesus point out the absence of these things. Perhaps the scribe had seen the crowds and watched the miracles, so he figured that following Jesus was the popular thing to do. Maybe he thought about the prestige and honor he would gain from being associated with Jesus. But Jesus, knowing the thoughts of all people, saw the motivation behind the eagerness of this scribe.

Then there is the man who wanted to bury his father first. Now although Jesus’ reply seems quite harsh, the truth is that there was a good chance his father was still alive. According to Jewish law the man would not be out in public if his father had just died. Basically, what this man is saying is that he will follow Jesus once he gets his life in order. And if this is what the man was implying, I think we can better understand Jesus’ response. Jesus points out that we should proclaim the kingdom of heaven at all times, not just when it is convenient.

Lastly is the man who thought about his family. Although this seems to be a kind and caring gesture on his part, Jesus saw something else. You almost wonder if this man wasn’t looking for his family’s approval to follow Jesus. And if this man continually seeks the approval of his family, Jesus says that he will be lured away by trying to please others instead of God.

¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

The Scribe was too eager because he didn't fully understand what it meant to be the servant of many. The second disciple in this story really didn't sense any urgency or see the simplicity of following Jesus in his day to day life. And the third disciple appeared to be more interested in pleasing people rather than God. What these three men needed to know (what we all need to know) is that there is more to following Jesus than just making a simple choice. There is a big difference in knowing the path and walking the path. And the sooner we recognize this, the better.

Jesus has given clear instruction on how we need to conduct ourselves in this world. "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. ⁴³ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

³ (Mark 10:42-45) Becoming a Christian (a Disciple of Jesus) is serious business.

And Jesus tells us to not begin until we have counted the cost (Luke 14:28).

Becoming a disciple involves surrendering our lives to His leading and His guiding.

We lay down our rights and privileges for the good of others. We become His ambassadors, choosing to work for God's glory so that He is praised. We give Him all our talents and skills so that they may be used to for the work of His Kingdom.

But there are just too many people who want to follow Jesus without changing a thing. Their lives are no different today than they were yesterday. These are the people who never do anything for Jesus because their lives are just too busy right now. These are people, like the second and third disciple in this story, who start making demands upon Jesus. "Sure I'll follow You", they say, "But here are my conditions". "Just so long as You don't ask me to teach!" And these are the people who want to follow Jesus without ever stepping outside of their comfort zone.

I wish we knew what became of these three men after Jesus pointed out what it truly means to be His follower. Did they change, or did they simply walk away. What difference might others be able to see in your life if you became like Jesus?

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.