

They must have known what they were signing was going to cause an uproar. Declaring themselves independent from Great Britain was a bold move that required bravery. Fifty six men signed that document and knew that life would never be the same. Their backgrounds were different but their purpose was common. They were resolute in their desire for freedom.

Who knows if any of them really stopped to consider what standing up to the British would take. They were already at war. Their signatures guaranteed more. How long, no one knew. How much money, no one knew. Worst of all no one knew how many lives it would cost. The disciples following Jesus, I don't know if they ever really considered what following Jesus would really take. Suddenly they were forced to consider new heights of following Christ. What about negativity against them? What about obligations in family life? What about divided loyalties and earthly comforts?

We still face pressure these 239 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Citizenship isn't easy. We still have to be resolute. The lesson of the gospel is still one we are learning as well. We're called to...

**Resolutely follow Christ**  
**Patience in the face of negativity**  
**Willingness to serve with whole heart**

Jesus was inside the boundaries of Samaria, a region hostile to Jews. **“Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. But the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.”** They rejected Jesus and refused hospitality towards him or his disciples. Why? They may have felt offended. Jesus was passing not doing miracles, healing people, and amazing them like he had other places. Passing them by to go to Jerusalem was also an insult to their false religion.

James and John saw this rejection. It wasn't the first time, but this time they couldn't control themselves. **“They asked, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”** Red hot anger burned against these Samaritans who were rejecting Jesus, refusing him common courtesy. James and John stuck up for Jesus. Zealously they didn't want him to have to suffer any disrespect. To get even they figured Jesus would allow them to show a little heavenly fire of destruction. Jesus said no. Not only did he say no, he rebuked James and John. Instead of revenge or holding on to anger they would quietly go to the next town. No fire, no destruction, no death. Only love. Jesus lived the love he spoke about often. See, the time for final judgment hadn't yet arrived. The people of that town would remain on earth because their time of grace wasn't up yet.

Disrespect for Jesus seems to be growing in our time. For some it might seem like an alarming rate. You might think the recent ruling on homosexual relationships is just another example of a society turning away from Jesus. Kids out of control in schools, parents with drug problems, children born out of wedlock, the list of wrongs towards God goes on and on. With a burning passion and fire your anger simmers. Listen to the news about the latest ISIS attack on Christians and that anger becomes a full blown fire. “Wipe them off the earth. Blast them with whatever weapons necessary. They don't deserve to live. They aren't Christians anyway, they don't believe, they never will. Life would be easier if our enemies were gone.” We sound a lot like James and John asking Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven for people who disrespected the Savior of the world.

Maybe that plan sounds good to you. But consider why James and John received rebuke from Jesus and not a nod of approval. Jesus' life would have been easier without these enemies around. While they're at it they could wipe out anyone who ever opposed them, or stood in their way, or argued with them about the truth of God. Bring down fire on all of them. Jesus refused. Fire from heaven would be final judgment. It wasn't that time. It was time for repentance, rescue, and demonstrations of love.

Are we really all that different from ISIS terrorists? Do our sins count less than those of homosexuals, cheaters, or even little white liars? The reality of those statements might chill our insides or make our blood boil. We want to believe our lies aren't as bad as other people. We want to hold out hope that God ranks our cheating lower than others. We're desperate to believe God wouldn't strike us for our “few” sins, but that striking an ISIS fighter for his “many” sins is perfectly fine. But it starts with us, with you. Jesus demonstrates love for you. While you were a sinner he never sought revenge against you. He had every reason to call down fire from heaven, but in love he didn't. He showed you grace. It was undeserved love. Good news for you, any sin you commit, even the sin of wanting to strike down those who oppose Jesus, are all forgiven.

Like a puppy dog cowering in the corner after making a mess and getting yelled at, James and John submitted to Jesus. So do you. You submit to Jesus. Might life be harder because enemies of Christ are around? Yes. But let Jesus handle that. It's his church. It's his grace. It's his plan for rescue. You just live the love Jesus showed you. Demonstrate love for those who you like and those you maybe don't. Demonstrate Christ-like love even for your enemies and those who are pure evil. There may be a time for moving on like Jesus did. He apparently didn't stick around to teach in that town. But they weren't wiped off the earth. We can't seek to eliminate anyone either. Our time of grace continues. So does theirs according to the will of God. God's grace allows us to demonstrate patience in the face of negativity as we resolutely follow Christ.

As Jesus continued to resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem he came into contact with three individuals, each wanting to resolutely follow Jesus. Their reactions are similar to ours and can teach us something about how followers of Christ are to act. What does it mean to resolutely follow Christ?

The first came without restrictions. **“I will follow you wherever you go.”** He wanted to follow Jesus. Whatever goals or hardships Jesus had would also be his. Jesus saw this man’s true heart. His initial enthusiasm would quickly go away. He was like a little boy who goes to see a football game and immediately wants to be a football star. Initial enthusiasm for that quickly fades as two practices a day start in the heat of summer, potential for injuries mounts, and every waking moment is filled with practice and lifting weights. When Jesus points out, **“foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”** it was a wakeup call to anyone who would follow Christ. Creature comforts of earth won’t matter to the follower of Christ. We might even figure that Christians have it good in the world. Blessings and no troubles. But when trouble comes anyway we want to hold on to comfort and the easy life. Persecutions for being Christian cause us to wonder if we’ll lose our homes, our freedoms, or our way of life. Are we ready to lose all of that to stay close to Christ?

The second, Jesus asked to follow. **“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”** Now, if the man’s father had already died it wasn’t unexpected for him to take care of the arrangements. If the man’s father hadn’t died but he wanted to wait until he did, that may signal an excuse to postpone following Jesus until it was more convenient. Either way Jesus knew his heart. **“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”** Sounds harsh, but the kingdom of God must have top priority. What family members or close friends are keeping us from Jesus? Caring for family members is important. Getting jobs. There are responsibilities in life. But when they interfere with our relationship with Jesus suddenly we’ve really chosen them over Christ. Even a spouse should never come between us and our Savior. Nothing can be more important than the kingdom of God.

The third asked to follow Jesus but only after some personal matters. **“I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”** Jesus also knew this man’s heart. He knew his loyalties were divided. Family goodbyes might turn into begging him not to go. His heart might be easily torn and he might look back and choose family over Jesus. Following Jesus requires single minded focus, like looking ahead when plowing a field. Looking backwards results in crooked rows. A big house with the perfect garage and perfect land would be nice. But if that nice house is an hour from church and keeps us from attending regularly to hear God’s Word, how nice is it? Or even being here on Sunday mornings. Our minds might be thinking that next week we’ll take off. It is after all the only day we get off. We could sleep in. We’re looking in both directions with divided loyalties. Can we resolutely follow Christ with our whole hearts when our heart might be looking back to something else?

Jesus does make a strong point, even harsh sounding. But don’t miss his point for you. Following Jesus is about sacrifice. Not how you might give up some part of your easy life to follow Jesus. Not that you might choose church over job. Not that you might make it two of four Sundays a month. Those sacrifices don’t mean anything. Jesus’ sacrifice for you counts for everything. Consider what depths of loss Jesus suffered for you. He had no home, experienced a loss of honor, died a humble and painful death. His worst suffering by far was taking your sins onto himself, yours and everyone’s. Carried them, paid for them, and forgave them. Forgiving them because you are his first priority. You are his single focus. Calling you out of this sinful world is all Jesus has set his mind to do. He is resolute to love you.

Knowing Christ’s love, you can now sacrifice to serve and follow Jesus with whole hearts. You can because of God’s grace. New priorities are worked in your heart through Christ. Priorities on how you spend your time, where your money goes, and where you invest resources all with the intention of serving Jesus. You understand what following Jesus looks like and you come back often to his Word to not forget.

Firmly resolute, the signers of the Declaration of Independence went forward into the unknown. Only resolutely following Christ can we go into our unknown. That ability to follow comes from Christ’s call through his Word. It’s a call to be patient even when negativity attacks us. It’s a call for serving Christ with our whole heart. Only in Christ can we resolutely follow Christ.