

THE COST TO FOLLOW JESUS

Luke 9:51-62 Text vs. 62 *“Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Do you know what it means to put your hand on a plow and then look back? Have you ever plowed? You know, standing behind an animal pulling a plow you’re holding onto while trying to keep a straight line and make a straight furrow in which to plant a crop? Well, Jesus lived in an agricultural age. His hearers were very familiar with what He was talking about. For a plowman to be successful, he *must* concentrate not only on the way to go, but make sure he is always forward and not being distracted by anything behind him. If he starts looking back, his plow line will become crooked. And when that happens, the plowed field will not yield a full harvest. So, this lesson is to show you how God has called you out of this world to do His work. When you respond to His call, you must never try going back to where you were. Oh, you might tend to look back. If it happens, you might regret it when you realize you’re keeping yourself from doing good work in God’s Kingdom. When God calls you, you’re expected to give your best. Give it your everything! You’re called to love God with all your heart. With all your soul. And with all your mind. Looking back will keep you from doing that! Worst of all, you might even *let go of the plow* and go back to your old, worldly ways. So, if a person doesn’t finish the job God has given, that person will not be fit for His kingdom. How can God trust you if you haven’t done your part?

16 years ago, when our church undertook replacing all the windows in our Sanctuary with stained glass windows, I sponsored the window right over here to my right. It’s in the corner nearest this pulpit. I call it *“Never Look Back”*. I used verse 62 from our lesson this morning for it: *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* I named that window *Ministry*. Not just my ministry as Pastor of this church. It represents all ministries. The farmer in that window represents a minister plowing a field full of obstacles. Rocks to symbolize hardships. The grain field? It’s ripe unto harvest about which Jesus taught. The goal? It’s the church at the end of the rainbow. That’s Everglades Community Church! This church! And the rainbow symbolizes eternal life. As does the dove. The Bible shown is what ministry is built upon!

. . . . I still have a small pocket Bible given to me by my mother when I was 12 years old. When I was 15 years old away at a church Summer Camp at Falls Creek, Oklahoma, there was an evangelist there that week by the name of Charlie Taylor. He preached. And I was inspired by him. Later, I handed him my little Bible to sign. He did. And beneath his signature he wrote my name and added Luke 9:62. That’s what I had inscribed for that window. That’s the way I have lived my life! And it’s our lesson for today: *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* That verse of Scripture has led me all through my 70 year ministry. I’ve never forgotten it! In our lesson today, there were some people who thought they wanted to follow Jesus. At first glance, they thought they really wanted to be disciples of Jesus. But Jesus knew their hearts! He knew their desires. He knew they weren’t serious! They all had excuses! One man said, *“I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at home”*. Another said, *“Lord, let me first go and bury my dead father”*.

So, what’s the meaning here? It’s if you really mean to follow Jesus, you must put aside all those other things in this world and focus your life totally upon Jesus. There’s no looking back! A lot of people are good at coming up with *“buts”* in life. You know. You’ve heard them. They’re good at giving excuses. Excuses for this. Excuses for that. The best excuses are found in churches. *I will worship you Lord, but....* And a whole lot of *“buts”* may follow.

. . . . Dale Barrick, former Pastor of Great Hope Baptist Church in Carlisle, PA got so tired of hearing all the excuses of why his people didn’t attend church he came up with an idea. He said he was going to have a *NO Excuse* Sunday. There would be - - - Cots in the church aisles for those who like to sleep in on Sunday. Blankets in the pews for those who said the Sanctuary’s too cold. Handheld fans in the hymnal racks, like ours, for those who found the Sanctuary too warm. Sand boxes under the pews to put your feet in if you preferred being on the beach. Televisions sets for those who would rather watch Sunday church services on the screen. Poinsettias and lilies for those who came to church only at Christmas and Easter.

Another Pastor came up with more. . . . Stop watches for those who want the Sunday Service to end in exactly one hour. Plus, a whistle to blow to stop the Service if it ran over. Putting greens in the side aisles for those who enjoy golf. Full face masks to hide the faces of those who have been gone so long they are embarrassed and feel funny about coming back. Fishing poles at the baptistry for those who would rather be out fishing. Someone to come knock on your door every Sunday so you can get back to going to church every Sunday.

This could go on, but the point is, we’re good at making up excuses. And Jesus doesn’t want excuses! He wants faithfulness! He wants commitment! Not just being regular at Sunday Worship. But commitment in all areas of your life. A committed life for Jesus means you’re free, as Paul says. Free to live life in Christ. Not bound by the law. Because the Gospel has freed you up to serve. Serve your neighbor with the freedom you have received from Jesus. But it’s a freedom

that's difficult to live with. Because it places a burden on you. A burden that says, *I am free to live, as long as my freedom doesn't infringe on the rights of others. I am free to serve, as long as I remember I am serving out of love. And that love means I have a sympathetic heart for others.*

That's what this is all about! It's the plow on which you have placed your hand! But if you're always going to "look back", what does that say spiritually? Well, it shows a desire for the old ways. Have you ever heard someone give a testimony about their being saved? And after you heard it, you wondered if they had really given up very much? They seem to think more about how bad they used to be, and what it would be like to have their old way of life back. But what can be appealing to past opportunities that were wasted? Looking back means, you're looking in the wrong direction. Paul said it so well in Philippians 3:13-14, "*... forgetting those things that are behind* (and I think he means both the good and the bad) *and reaching forth unto things which are ahead, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*". You have to keep your eyes focused on what God's called you to do! Not always thinking about what you left behind. Not dreaming how life might have been if you had not chosen to follow Jesus. It's dangerous! It's like when you're driving down the road and always keeping one eye on the rear-view mirror. That will never do serving Jesus.

There's a Bluegrass Gospel Song Johnny Cash sang called *Life's Railway to Heaven*.

The words are:

Life is like a mountain railroad, with an engineer that's brave;
We must make the run successful, from the cradle to the grave.
Heed the curves, and watch the tunnels; never falter, never fail.
Keep your hand upon the throttle, and your eye upon the rail.

Chorus:

Blessed Savior, Thou wilt guide us, Till we reach that blissful shore;
Where the Angels wait to join us; In that train forevermore.

Yes, keep your hand upon the throttle, and your eye upon the rail. That's says it all! "*No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.*" Your responsibility to Christ is to be His follower and help others to become Christ followers. Stand firmly on the Word of God! Don't look back! Don't worry about what others may think of you! As a Christian, you believe the Bible. No other book is worthy. You as a believer. We as the church. Together we must treat the Bible as the authority in our lives. And Jesus Christ as our Savior. You must never look back! "*Look for service in the kingdom of God.*" AMEN.