



Discipleship Is Demanding

Luke 9:51-62

He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord;

but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

June 26, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures: 1 Kings 19: 16b, 19-21, Galatians 5: 1a, 13-14, 16a, 1, Luke 9: 51, 57-62

Leroy "Satchel" Page, the legendary baseball pitcher in what was once called the "Negro" Leagues before Blacks were welcomed into the so-called "Big Leagues," was also well known for his wise and hilarious axioms about life in the world of his time. Here are a couple examples: "Age is a case of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it don't matter." Here is still the best known: "Don't look back, something (or somebody) might be gaining on you."

Interestingly, Jesus says something similar in a gospel passage: "Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the Reign of God."

Somewhat like Satchel Page, therefore, Jesus also said some astonishing things during his days of preaching the Reign of God. One thing is absolutely clear: Jesus had a radically different perception of life in this world compared to what he called the Reign of God. For Jesus the phrase Reign of God simply meant the way life in this world would look if God had his way. In other words life in the Reign of God is of supreme importance compared to life in the world. If one wishes to follow Jesus and live in God's Reign, then some important decisions or choices will need to be made.

At this point in the gospel passage, Jesus makes some astonishing suggestions. First, a follower of Jesus says: "I want to live where you live." Jesus replies, "Foxes have dens, birds have nests but the Son of Man does not have a place to lay his head." To be clear, Jesus is not saying that one cannot have a home. What he is saying is that there are ideals more important in life than your house and your domestic tranquility. In other words, life is a matter of ultimate value. In short, don't look back.

Another follower of Jesus says: "I want to follow you, but let me go home first and bury my father." Jesus responds: "let other people do that; follow me". Again, Jesus is not saying that respect for one's father is unimportant. Rather, he is saying, following me in the Kingdom of God is more important. Once again, don't look back, keep up the pace; other matters in one's life are more important.

Finally a last person says to Jesus. "I want to be your follower, but first let me go back and say farewell to my family." Again, Jesus replies that domestic matters, family, marriage and children may be important but not as important as following a definite spiritual way of life.

Now for those of us living in a world so different from the world of Jesus, all this may sound crazy, but the question we still must ask is this: how do we align our secular values with our spiritual life? Somehow we must find room for both, keeping all things in perspective, never looking back, keeping up our speed, otherwise something may be gaining on us.

Prayer Thought – Paraguay

We praise you, God of all creation, for your mercy is vast, and your greatness beyond our comprehension. In peace we pray to you and seek your blessing for all children in their daily life; for their families, friends, and all who nurture and teach them.

We confess our shortcomings and ask your forgiveness. Grant us wisdom as we strive to be examples and teach all children of your true and lasting peace.

We pray for this community, the nations of the world, and uphold the people of Paraguay in our prayers. Grant wisdom and strength to all who work for just and peaceful communities for all persons.

We seek your blessing of peace for the children who suffer from sorrow, fear, poverty and violence. May their needs be met and worries removed. Heavenly Parent, surround them with your Spirit of protection and love.

We pray in the name of our big brother, Jesus. Amen.

One in Christ Moment

When is a person actually saved? At what instant is he assured eternal life in heaven with God? Is it when he prays to Christ to save him? Is it when he walks an aisle in a church? Is it when he is baptized? Is it when he publicly declares his devotion to Christ? Is it when he passes from this life to the next after rigorously following a religious system? In brief: What is the "defining moment" of the salvation experience?

The *defining moment* of the salvation experience is that nanosecond period of time when a person decides (an act of will) to turn from every other confidence and to only trust (place one's total faith) in Jesus Christ for one's personal salvation. It may come as a result of a message from a minister encouraging the person to "ask Jesus to come into the person's heart" or "repent of sin and trust in Jesus" or "call upon the name of the Lord," but the defining moment is nothing more than "an act of the person's will." Once the person "wills" such a decision, he is instantaneously saved. He may think that his subsequent prayer to Jesus Christ or his walking down an aisle in a church in public profession is what brings salvation, but he would be wrong.

God only requires genuine "faith" to be placed in His Son, and such faith is an act of the will. God made man in His image at Creation. A primary component of the "nature of God" is *self-will*. Man is not a robot with a predetermined and unalterable destiny. Man has been given the ability to make choices and the freedom to use it. Only in this way, by the freedom to choose God and His way, is God ultimately satisfied and glorified by man, the pinnacle of His creation.