

Luke 9:51-62
Pastor Steve
7/26/2020

Don't Look Back

I have to admit something to all of you. After living in multiple communities that are close to farms, I'm still a city boy. Farming is still something I don't know much about. But even though I know so little, what Jesus said in the gospel makes perfect sense to me. He said that when you are plowing a field you can't turn around and look back at something you've gone past. Because if you do that, what you're plowing in front of you won't be good. There won't be nice even, straight rows. Your field will be a mess and so will your crops. When you're plowing you can't look back and take your eyes off of what you want to get done.

As far as plowing goes, this is just common sense. But Jesus point isn't about farming. It's about us. He uses it to teach us about our lives as his followers. When it comes to being believers we have a focused goal in front of us so Jesus tells us: **don't look back.**

Since it's simple, you might think this would be something that only people who are new to the faith need to hear. But that's not what we see with James and John. On the way to Jerusalem the group was passing through Samaria. Messengers went ahead and tried to get things ready for Jesus and his followers but they rejected him. Samaritans didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah and they didn't even want him coming through their town. It was harsh treatment for people passing through the area like some normally did.

When James and John saw this, they didn't keep looking forward at what needed to be done. They thought this insult deserved their focus in

a big way. “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” These brothers had heard Jesus preach so many times about forgiveness, about how everyone needed to hear that he was their Savior, but they got stuck looking back at an insult. “But Jesus turned and rebuked them.” He was teaching them, **“Don’t look back** and get caught up when you are insulted. Your focus needs to be on the goal.” And they kept going looking ahead to the next village.

Many others who had probably heard about all the miracles he had done, about how he was the best teacher in the synagogue that anyone had ever heard, wanted to follow Jesus too.

One of them boldly came up to them as they were traveling and declared, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Now that’s the attitude of someone with their focus in the right place! But Jesus wanted him to fully consider what he was saying. “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

So Jesus helped him understand just how hard it would be to do this. He said, “The Son of Man...” When Jesus calls himself the Son of Man he is making the point that he is true man and true God... He lived just as you and I do, needing somewhere to get out of the elements and a place to sleep in peace. And he’s true God. The all-powerful God who made all things and can do anything. But for Jesus and his followers their focus couldn’t be on where they’d stay and how comfortable they’d be. Following Jesus meant not looking back at that.

On the way another person got a personal invitation. “Follow me.” Jesus said. But the man 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.” Here we see where the focus should be: proclaiming the kingdom of God. Telling people that the Savior has come. And what gets put under that? A man burying his

father. Woah what are you saying Jesus? For the sake of the goal big sacrifices need to be made.

But remember this in context with everything else Jesus said. He taught people to care for family members. He said love one another. Not burying your father seems to go against this. But it wasn't the burial that was the problem. It was the man's heart. His priority apparently wasn't proclaiming the kingdom of God. He got caught up looking back at family affairs. Jesus made that clear in a dramatic way.

And we have one more example of getting stuck looking back when a man said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." And that's when Jesus used the farming comparison. "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

What isn't Jesus saying? He's not saying don't show love in everything you say and you do. He's not telling us that earthly blessings like our homes are bad. He's not telling us to ignore our families and get rid of our responsibilities we have.

What is he saying? Don't focus on the wrong things! **Don't look back!** There is a single goal that should be first in all things and for his followers, proclaiming the kingdom of God has to be first priority.

We heard two examples of what it looks like when believers don't look back and stay focused on kingdom work.

Think about Paul in 2nd reading. He lists all those terrible things he went through but where was his focus? Sharing the gospel!

Think of Elisha in 1st reading. He burned his plow and killed his oxen. That was how he made a living. That was his life saving gone up in smoke. But he did it because serving God's people was most important!

Jesus tells us here to make proclaiming the kingdom first above everything else. Does that make you feel uncomfortable? After hearing these examples, who of us can say we follow Jesus like that all the time?

We don't always keep our eyes focused ahead on what we're supposed to. Proclaiming the kingdom of God all too easily gets pushed way down in our priority list. Looking back and losing focus on the mission of the church is something Christians struggle with.

So when it came time for Jesus to keep his focus on what was coming, "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Maybe a better way to translate that, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. He kept his mission as the first priority in all things and didn't look back at anything else as he accomplished it. He went to the cross and died for all the times we've lost focus and messed up our priorities.

When we see what Jesus did, it's hard not to keep focused on that and share it with everyone. How does that look in our lives?

For some, it means giving up comfort and familiarity for the sake of the kingdom. Maybe that's working up the courage to invite family and friends and people in our neighborhoods even though it can be scary. Maybe it's crossing cultural barriers and trying to connect with people you don't understand. It's a willing attitude to work to do anything for the sake of the gospel.

For others, it means keeping your focus on the mission, even when there are important things that need to be taken care of. We can get so caught up with our work or our families that there is little time left for service to advance the kingdom. Yes, work hard in all your vocations,

your roles, as God calls you to do, but keep your role as a follower and sharer of Jesus as your first!

I'm guessing for all of us not looking back means understanding what relationship is most important. For ourselves and for those we share the gospel with there is nothing better than knowing our Savior and sharing him with others. **Don't look back** at earthly things that distract and it will have an eternal impact.

Even for someone like me, who isn't close to fully understanding all that it takes to run a farm, Jesus' farm example is one I won't forget. It's simple. It's easily understood. It helps me see when I lose focus and need to repent. It reminds all of us what our focus is as followers of Jesus: to share the good news that he didn't look back on his mission to save us.

Amen.