

THE PLOUGHMAN . . . who had eyes in the back of his head
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(Luke 9:62)

"And Jesus said . . . No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." It is not without significance that this statement was made at the end of three interviews with the Saviour. Young men had been confronted by the challenge of discipleship, and apparently all three had missed the opportunity of following the Lord Jesus. This suggested to the Lord the picture of the half-hearted ploughman.

Discipleship Demands Resolution

"And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests. but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." The silence that followed the announcement seemed ominous. Amid the prevailing excitement of a revival service, an impressionable soul spontaneously moved to respond to the call of Christ. It should be carefully noted that he came on his own initiative. Stirred to the depths of his heart, he hastened to pledge allegiance to the cause of the new Teacher. Christ's sombre warning was as the chilly blast of a mid-winter's wind. The fervour of the meetings had thrilled the young man, and he could not understand how the future could be any different from the present. The Lord Jesus knew that such a disciple would be useless unless he was prepared to endure hardness. The ploughman who sets out to plough a field must be prepared for difficult places. Stones, roots, and rough ground may soon be encountered, and any half-hearted attempt at such an enterprise will only damage the plough and spoil the job.

Discipleship Demands Readiness

"And Jesus said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Not all men are alike. Some impulsively rush to offer service; others retire into seclusion, fearing that their talents are unequal to the demands of the new life. The former needs to be retarded; the latter must always be encouraged. This man's excuse only revealed his unfitness of soul. Had his father been dead, he himself would have been attending to the funeral arrangements. It was considered the duty of the firstborn to lay the father's body to rest. The call to follow Christ was secondary to that of waiting to bury his -perhaps-still healthy father. Thus, in one request, he demonstrated that as a ploughman or as a disciple, he would be useless. A farmer cannot plough a field at any time. The state of the soil, and the weather, dictate the time for ploughing; and the wise farmer hurries to the task when the time is opportune. These things are also true in regard to discipleship. There are occasions when the cares of this world bog the spirit; there are days when our hearts are hard. God is best able to decide when His Spirit can work successfully, and every wise man will be ready to answer His call immediately it is heard. In farming or discipleship it is never safe to put off until tomorrow what should be done today.

Discipleship Demands Resignation

Probably greatly stirred by the refusal of the second man,

THE PLOUGHMAN . . . who had eyes in the back of his head another hastened to say, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." And Jesus, realizing the dangers of such a procedure, replied, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." And if any casual reader should consider this attitude to be severe, let it be remembered that Jesus Himself loved to visit the homes of His followers. Such an answer is a sure guarantee that, had the man returned home, his family would have argued him out of his proposals. How can any man take up his cross and follow Christ if, all the while, the eyes in the back of his head are hungrily searching for the alluring pleasures left behind in a home, a business, or in some other place? Following Christ demands resignation - deliberate, sacrificial resignation. The successful disciple is the one who says, "I must be a Christian, or die." Every ploughman worthy of the name will recognize conditions suited to his enterprise, and will stay at his plough until his task is completed. And in like manner, should a soul be moved to exclaim, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," then nothing should ever be permitted to prevent the fulfilment of that vow.

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