

The Gospel Plow

TEXT: “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk. 9:62)

THESIS: Christians must continually be sowing the seed of Christ by the furrow (channel) they make until their row (life) is done.

INTRODUCTION:

1. The plow of Jesus' day was a very primitive thing.
 - a. It was little more than a crooked stick with three branches.
 - b. It was a crude instrument and at best, it could do little more than scratch the surface of the ground.
2. Therefore, such a plow required careful attention of the plowman.
 - a. It was necessary for him to drive the oxen straight, keeping a firm grip on the plow handle and his eye on the channel he made in the ground.
3. Such a remarkable metaphor is this in which Christ used.
 - a. He chose this particular setting because he knew it would serve its purpose well.
 - b. The figure of a man with his hand to the plow sets forth a particular phase of the work of the kingdom and special qualifications of those who are to do this work acceptably.
4. With this said, this story is of vital importance to each one of us.
 - a. It is evident that this begins a discussion of the conditions of Christian discipleship.
 - b. Furthermore, without an understanding of this metaphor, we cannot perform an all-important work that is expected of us nor can expect to have a place in the kingdom of Christ if we neglect such principles.
5. Therefore, it is right that we revisit the plowman and take notice of:
 - a. The plow work of the kingdom
 - b. Some plowmen of the Gospel
 - c. Characteristics of a good plowman

DISCUSSION:

I. THE PLOW WORK OF THE KINGDOM

- A. There are other necessary works connected with the kingdom, but plow work is basic and fundamental.
 1. Plowing comes first in the preparation of the ground for planting.
 2. It is the heaviest and the most difficult labor done in the field.
 - a. It is more difficult than simply dragging the ground and must precede either of these operations.
 3. Thus, plowing is essential as a preparation for the sowing of the seed.
 - a. It makes the sowing of the seed a lighter task and a much more

pleasant one.

4. Cultivating the ground is less difficult than plowing and there is a greater satisfaction of tending growing plants.
 5. Reaping the harvest is the most joyous work of all for then the fruits are gathered in.
- B. Plowing is concerned with the disturbance of the commonplace, the breaking up of the hard familiar surface, the pulverizing and loosening of the hard ground.
1. Plowing also exposes the hidden depths to the light and air during rains.
- C. What is the spiritual application of this plowing?
1. The plow work of the kingdom consists of driving the keen blade of the Gospel truth into the stubborn soul of human ignorance, superstition, prejudice, and sin, to the end that the better soil of human nature may be turned up and be made ready for the seed of the Gospel of Christ.

II. PLOWMEN OF THE GOSPEL

- A. Let us keep in mind that Jesus, the greatest plowman of all, came to do this fundamental work of the kingdom.
1. He set his hand to the plow and plowed the furrow straight to the end.
 2. He continued to plow until the end of his working day, and when he went his homeward way, the hardened soul of human ignorance and sin had been completely upturned and exposed.
 3. What a furrow and what a plowman!
- B. Jesus plowed into the stubborn soil of the Jewish national life that was as hard as a rock.
1. He plowed the hard soil of Pharisaic doctrine with their holier-than-thou attitude .
 2. And the plow of Christ cut through their hard and fast traditions and upturned their most cherished customs.
 3. He plowed until all their hidden prejudices and sins were fully exposed to the light of eternal truth.
 4. He continued to plow up the materialistic attitudes and doctrines of the Sadducees.
 5. He plowed the narrow patriotism of his own disciples that would have obstructed Him from setting up the kingdom.
 6. By diligent labor and patient persistence, along with deeply plowing, He succeeded in converting them into the good ground of kingdom-minded disciples.
 7. Furthermore, Christ plowed into the Roman heathenism of His day.
- C. However, he was not the only one to plow the Gospel.
1. Teachers of the early church had to endure the labor, toil, and loneliness of the plow work of the kingdom.
 2. This was the kind of work Paul did in all of his missionary labors.
 - a. Wherever he went he used the Gospel plow; he plowed deep and

- his plowing was often a disrupting and disturbing factor.
- b. Paul plowed up the roots of Judaizing teachers who sought to bind the Law of Moses on the church.
 - (1) He plowed up the false religions and turned their immortal practices up to the light of the sun.
 - c. At Ephesus, he plowed up the money-making racket carried on in the name of religion.
 - d. Furthermore, he faced difficulties on every side, but he never took his hands from the plow nor his eye from the row that he sought to plow straight and deep.
3. Amos was a plowman of the Old Testament.
 - a. When we read the book of Amos, we can see the hidden sins of Israel that Amos turned up to the light of truth.
 4. John the Baptist was another plowman as he came to call the Jewish nation to repentance and prepare them for the coming of the Messiah.
 - a. Furthermore, he plowed deep when he rebuked Herod for the sin of adultery and paid for his plowing with his life.
- D. Gospel plowing is essential in the proper training of children and cannot be accomplished without it.
1. We need to train our children to become Christians and instill in them the plowing of the kingdom and the planting of the word of God before the world gets a hold of them and they turn their hands from the plow.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOOD PLOWMAN

- A. The first essential of the good plowman is that he must put the kingdom of God first in his plans and efforts.
 1. No man can expect a place in the kingdom of God who does not consistently do the work of the kingdom.
 - a. On his last journey to Jerusalem, Jesus found some men who thought they wanted to be His disciples.
 - b. Three of these are dealt with on the occasion under consideration.
 2. To the first man Jesus said, "Follow me." The man excused himself by saying, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus replied, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:59, 60)
 - a. He made a selfish excuse that he deemed of higher priority than immediate and total commitment to Christ.
 - (1) Seeing to the burial of dead bodies is of second priority, at least, to the saving of souls and the first duty that man owes is his duty to God.
 - (2) And Jesus read the man's heart and perceived that he was unwilling to accept Christ's invitation to follow Him.
 - (3) The man was not willing to renounce all for the sake of the

kingdom.

- b. Christ expects his followers to be loyal to their families and to discharge every sacred duty to them, but He means to say that no tie, however tender, should be permitted to keep one from following Him and obediently seeking first the kingdom of God. (Matt. 6:33)
 - c. Jesus said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me," (Matt. 10:37, 38).
 - (1) How many do we know that are using the sacred ties of family relationships to cover up their higher duty of following Christ?
 - (2) The most important duties of all are those which we owe God.
- B. Then, A second qualification of a good plowman is that he must have courage and be persistent in the face of hardship.
1. A man said to Christ, "I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest." (Lk. 9:57)
 - a. These sound like noble words and seem to be a profession of loyalty and devotion.
 - b. They express exactly what each disciple is expected to do, that is, to follow Jesus wherever He leads.
 - c. And, Rev. 14:4 describes the faithful and victorious, as those that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.
 2. But, this man was audacious, rash, hasty, over-confident and ignorant of the personal cost involved in discipleship to Jesus.
 3. His profession was born merely of shallow emotionalism and impulsive feelings by which he had the wrong conceptions of the nature of the kingdom of God.
 4. He had not counted the cost of discipleship and was not prepared to meet the trials and the difficulties that were to arise.
 5. He lacked proper motivation in following Christ.
 - a. Jesus said, "The foxes have holes, the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." (Lk. 9:58)
 - b. Jesus was recently refused lodging by the Samaritans; his own hometown, much earlier, had rejected him; the Jews were seeking to destroy him and there was no place where he could go for rest or safety, and now before him, loomed the cross.
 6. Where was Jesus going?
 - a. He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die; He was going the way of the cross, the way that all who follow Him must take. (Mk. 8:34)

- b. The way of the plowman is not the way of convenience.
 - c. And this man was not prepared to leave his comfortable home to follow one who had no place to lay His head or safety as the world so falsely perceives.
 - 7. Emotionalism is not sufficient to build a life of discipleship upon.
 - a. Jesus always checked expressions of shallow emotionalism whenever He heard them.
 - (1) A woman from the multitude once pronounced a blessing upon the mother of Christ.
 - (a) But Christ replied, “Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” (Lk. 11:28)
 - (2) When Peter boasted saying, “Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death.” (Lk. 22:33)
 - (a) Jesus answered, “I tell thee Peter, the cock shall not crow this day until thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.” (Lk. 22:34)
 - b. In the parable of the unfinished tower in the king’s warfare, the central teaching is that we must count the cost of discipleship and be willing to face difficulties and trials.
- C. A third qualification of a good plowman is that he must go forward with singleness of purpose and a constant aim in his service in the kingdom.
 - 1. A third man said to Jesus, “I will follow Thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house.” (Lk. 9:61)
 - 2. Jesus answered, “No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk. 9:62)
 - 3. This is a man of indecision and divided loyalties.
 - a. Nothing and no one is to come before obedience to clear, implicit commands from the word of Christ.
 - b. Therefore, clinging to human ties or earthly associations or looking back and longing for them until they become more important than immediate obedience to Jesus makes a man unfit for discipleship.
 - 4. Jesus makes it crystal clear that oneness of purpose is necessary on the part of those who would follow Him.
 - 5. The peril of looking back is a principle deeply rooted and widely spread in the history of humanity.
 - a. Let Lot’s wife warn us against the peril of looking back. (Gen. 19:26)
 - (1) Even though warned by an angel, Lot’s wife looked back and became a pillar of salt.
 - (2) The importance of the lesson of this event is suggested when Jesus said, “Remember Lot’s wife.” (Lk. 17:32)
 - b. The Israelites looked back to the flesh pots of Egypt and perished in the wilderness for their unbelief as a warning to us. (Ex. 16:2, 3)

- c. Demas deserted Paul because he looked back to the world. (2 Tim. 4:10)
- d. Orpah, who turned back from following Naomi that she might return to her people and to her heathen god, ought to be a warning to us. (Ruth 1:14, 15)
- e. However, Ruth should be the example to us of the importance of never turning back in spite of all difficulties. (Ruth 1:16-18)

CONCLUSION:

1. The world sorely needs plowmen of Ruth's type today.
 - a. This kind of plowman is needed in every generation but there is a special need for them today.
 - b. Divided loyalties saves no man's soul.
 - c. Therefore, temperaments must be under the control of the will of God or the devil will deceitfully seduce man into perverting them to his own self-destruction.
 - d. The followers of Christ must follow unconditionally.
2. Now as never before, men and women of vision, purpose, and constancy are needed to carry on the strenuous work of Gospel plowing.
3. Let us see that we use the Gospel as the plow, that we make the furrows deep enough to turn up all kinds of sin and let us plow to the end of the row.