

No Turning Back

Intro. The opening verse of the gospel comes after the Lord's transfiguration on the mountain and his conversation with Moses and Elijah about his "exodus," his death to take place in Jerusalem. This was the moment the Lord turned his eyes to the conclusion of his ministry. There was now an urgency to his journey.

I. James and John were two of the three who witnessed the Lord's glory on the mountain. For some reason, Peter wasn't part of the other disciples' eagerness to punish the Samaritans for their lack of hospitality. It wasn't a rebuke of the Lord so much as it was the tribal antagonism between Jews and Samaritans who judged each not following the religious traditions. The Lord had no time to indulge James and John in their inflated sense of power.

They still had much to learn. As they were on the way, people asked about joining them. One was very idealistic and naïve, "I will follow you *wherever* you go." He had no idea what it would cost him. After the Lord told him he what he would have to give up, there was silence. The next potential disciple was invited by the Lord to follow. He had what seems like a good excuse: he had to bury his father. The custom was burial the same day, but the man might have wanted to stay longer. The Lord's response sounds harsh. It showed the urgency he felt to proclaim the kingdom of God before all else. The third would-be follower seemed caught between joining the Lord on the way to Jerusalem and not wanting to leave his family. It was a consideration, but Peter, Andrew, James and John were willing to walk away from a good fishing

business and their families to follow the Lord. Elisha burned his plow to sever that life. The point is, there will always be reasons to distract from committing to the Lord, some of which will sound reasonable. Three times someone was invited to follow the Lord. Three times there were excuses. We are left hanging as to the decision of the three. Each had to decide what took precedence: the circumstances of their lives or following the Lord. His eye was on getting to Jerusalem and the final acts of his mission. If they couldn't decide, they were left behind.

Concl. These are questions we must answer. We must decide whether following the Lord is *our* top priority. After that come family, friends and anything else. We tend to think, especially when we are younger, we have plenty of time to decide about

following the Lord. We don't have a sense of urgency. Until something like an accident or illness gets our attention. Years ago, friends invited me to watch a friendly competition with horse-drawn plows. I was told looking back to see if the row was straight was a sure way to make the one ahead crooked. The horse starts to wander off-line unless the one plowing is keeping eyes ahead. What is behind can't be undone. That is the image the Lord made about starting to follow him and becoming distracted by constantly looking back over our shoulder. As his were fixed on Jerusalem, our eyes must be fixed on him. What excuses hold us back from making a commitment to follow the Lord today?

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