

Hindrances To Discipleship

William MacDonald:

Anyone who sets out to follow Christ can be sure that many escape routes will loom up before him. He will be given numerous opportunities to turn back. Other voices will call to him, offering to cut inches off the cross. Twelve legions of angels stand ready to deliver him from the path of self-renunciation and sacrifice.

This is remarkably illustrated in the account of three would-be disciples who allowed other voices to take precedence over the voice of Christ.

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 birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." And he said unto another, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus said unto him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." And Jesus said unto him, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:57-62).

Three unnamed men came face to face with Jesus Christ. They felt an inner compulsion to follow Him. But they permitted something else to come between their souls and complete dedication to Him.

Mr. Too Quick

The first man has been called Mr. Too Quick. He enthusiastically volunteered to follow the Lord anywhere. "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." No cost would be too great. No cross would be too heavy. No path would be too rough.

The Savior's reply at first seems to have no connection with the willing-hearted offer of Mr. Too Quick. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Actually the Lord's answer was most appropriate. It was as if He said, "You claim to be willing to follow me anywhere, but are you willing to do without the material comforts of life? Foxes have more of this world's comforts than I have. The birds have a nest they can call their own. But I am a homeless Wanderer in the world my hands have made. Are you willing to sacrifice the security of a home to follow me? Are you willing to forego the legitimate comforts of life in order to serve me devotedly?"

Apparently the man was not willing, because we hear no more of him in the Sacred Scriptures. His love for earthly conveniences was greater than his dedication to Christ!

Mr. Too Slow

The second man has been called Mr. Too Slow. He did not volunteer, like the first man; rather the Savior called him to be a follower. His reply was not an outright refusal. It was not that he was completely disinterested in the Lord. Rather there was something he wanted to do first. This was his great sin. He put his own claims above the claims of Christ. Notice his reply, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father."

Now it is perfectly legitimate for a son to show common respect to his parent. And if a father has died, it is certainly within the bounds of the Christian faith that he should be given a decent burial.

But the legitimate courtesies of life become positively sinful when they take priority over the interests of the Lord Jesus. The real ambition of this man's life is exposed by his naked request, "Lord, ...me first..." The other words he spoke were mere camouflage to hide his underlying desire to put self first.

Apparently he did not realize that the words "Lord...me first" are a moral absurdity and impossibility. If Christ is Lord, then He must come first. If the personal pronoun "I" is on the throne, then Christ is no longer in control.

Mr. Too Slow had a job to accomplish, and he let this job have first place. It was therefore fitting that Jesus should say to him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." We might paraphrase His words as follows: "There are certain things which the spiritually dead can do just as well as believers. But there are other things in life which only a believer can do. See that you do not spend your life doing what an unconverted man could have done just as well. Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. But as for you—be indispensable. Let the main thrust of your life be to advance my cause on earth."

It seems that the price was too great for Mr. Too Slow to pay. He passes off the stage of time into a nameless silence.

If the first man illustrated material comforts as a hindrance to discipleship, the second might speak of a job or an occupation taking precedence over the main reason for a Christian's existence. It is not that there is anything wrong in secular employment; God's will is that man should work in order to provide for his needs and those of his family. But the life of true discipleship demands that the kingdom of God and His righteousness be sought first; that a believer should not spend his life doing what the unregenerate could do as well, if not better; and that the function of a job is merely to provide for current necessities while the main vocation of the Christian is to preach the kingdom of God.

Mr. Too Easy

The third man has been called Mr. Too Easy. He resembled the first in that he volunteered to follow the Lord. But he resembled the second in that he used those contradictory words, "Lord, ... me first..." He said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first bid them farewell, which are at home at my house."

Once again we must admit that, taken by itself, there was nothing basically wrong with his request. It is not contrary to God's law to show a loving interest in one's relatives or to observe the rules of etiquette when leaving them. What then was the point on which this man failed the test? It was this—he allowed the tender ties of nature to supersede the place of Christ.

And so with penetrating insight, the Lord Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In other words, "My disciples are not made of such self-centered, flabby stuff as you have exhibited. I want those who are willing to renounce home ties, who will not be distracted by sentimental relatives, who will put me above everyone else in their lives."

We are forced to conclude that Mr. Too Easy left Jesus and walked sadly down the road. His over-confident aspirations to be a disciple had dashed themselves to pieces on the rocks of congenial family bonds. Perhaps it was a weeping mother who sobbed, "You'll break your mother's heart if you leave me to go to the mission field." We do not know. All we know is that the Bible graciously refrains from giving the name of this faint-hearted fellow who, by turning back, missed the greatest opportunity of his life and earned the epitaph, "Not fit for the kingdom of God."

Summary

These then are three of the primary hindrances to true discipleship, illustrated by three men who were not willing to go all the way with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mr. Too Quick—the love of earthly comforts.

Mr. Too Slow—the precedence of a job or occupation.

Mr. Too Easy—the priority of tender family ties.

The Lord Jesus still calls, as He has ever called, for men and women to follow Him heroically and sacrificially.

The escape routes still present themselves saying with solicitous words, "Spare thyself! Be it far from thee!"

Few are willing to respond.

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee,
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shalt be,
Perish ev'ry fond ambition,
All I've sought, or hoped, or known,
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heav'n are still my own.

Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Saviour, too;
Human hearts and looks deceive me—

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**Thou art not, like them, untrue;
Oh! while Thou dost smile upon me,
God of wisdom, love, and might,
Foes may hate, and friends disown me,
Show Thy face, and all is bright.**

Â—H. F. Lyte