

"CROOKED PLOUGHING"

Luke 9:62

Jesus said some very remarkable things here, and especially in v. 62.

"No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." Jesus did not use a figure that was heedless. But he used one which was among the hundreds of figures that he used which had a purpose. It was carefully chosen. And it emphasized the immediate need. His hand to the plow.

The plow work of the kingdom - plowing is heavy work in the toil of the fields. Sowing the seed is comparatively easy. As a ministry, by the side of plowing, it is a time of recreation. And reaping is associated with want and triumph and light heartedness. But plowing is heavy. Laborous work. It is concerned with the disturbance of the common place. The breaking up of the hard and familiar surface. Loosing the soil and exposing the hidden depths. Bringing it up to the light and the air. The dew, the rain, and the sunshine.

It is very hard work. I read about a boy once in his composition on the mule. That the mule is "awfully backward about going forward."

Now that is a mighty good description of some people that I've met. Working a mule is quite a challenge.

A traveling preacher in a Southern mountain community made use of the mule to get about his parish. Does that mule ever kick you asked one of the mountaineers. No sir, replied the pastor. But sometimes he kicks where I recently was.

To put the plow shear into the conventional, and to over turn the traditional, and to take care of custom, and to break up, and to expose the sub-soil is quite a job

in plow work.

Now you may drop seed on the wayside, it will do no harm. But unless it touches the common ground that has been plowed, there will be no help. But if it hits the ground that has been plowed, it will grow and multiply.

Sometimes we have plowed in the same old field with joy. I think about tonight some of those old fields, the old-fashioned homes, the old hymnbook. The old church. Many of these places, we've found joy.

But plowing in the field may be hard work. It may be the (disturbance) - the up heavial of something. It is very hard to pioneer, to work in a field that has never been touched before.

When Jesus talked to these people about plowing, he was talking to them, warning them about crooked plowing.

Let us consider two or three ideas here tonight about this subject that will help us to get the message that he had. First of all, the hard crusty fields that must be plowed.

Second, the three plots of ground represented.

Third, the crooked furrows that we make.

Fourth, the faithful plowman.

## I. THE CRUSTY FIELDS THAT NEED PLOWING

Now none of these men that Jesus talked too really had thought much about what he was saying, but the early Apostles and others had to put their hands to the plow. And to go into some hard packed fields.

First, Jewish (traditionalism). This plot of ground was like plowing a field of brass. It was unreceptive to the plow point. For scores of generations, there have been the traditional formalism, of these people. And the Pharisees had become as stone. There was no harder field that had to be plowed in the kingdom of God.

No plow man ever faced a harder field. And yet the field, was one that he had to put his plow in. He must turn up the sub soil of its former legalized life. He must over turn the prejudices. And he must expose the inner most corruption that was in the depths of their hearts. And then he must come and plant and fertilize with the redeeming grace of God. What a work that was. The plow man who attempted it, were to be beaten, abused, mistreated, and put to death. But they plowed on.

The second plot was (aestheticism). We have only to visit Athens to see that this was the place where the Christian plow man had to try to make some kind of accomplishments in the face of luxury and ease. At that time, Athens was like a polished stone and the field that the plow man had to come in - he had to go deep because there was a deep hunger and a deep thirst. And when the plow man came in, here were people in this distant obscure province where life was really astonishing.

*Mystic Religion*

It was very much like Amos who came from the hamlet of Tekoa and put his plow shear of prophesy and warned the people of their luxury. And it astonished them. But here was a man who was coming with such a voice in plain clothes. To talk to them about their sins.

Thirdly, the field of materialism - and what a piece of land for the plow. This land was hardened and powerful. This was the place of wealth, of poverty, of pomp, and of victory.

And Paul came to plow that field. He came along the Appian way. And there to make manifest as a free man, and as the guards watched him, he plowed the land. He was alert to plow his furrow right on to Rome. And to turn over these places of wealth and materialism. And win them for Jesus Christ.

I would submit to you that these three fields still need to be plowed today. And I doubt that many of us are plowing a very straight furrow. With tradition, mystic religions, and materialism.

## II. THREE PLOTS OF GROUND REPRESENTED

Here we have in this passage of Scripture, three pieces of ground that need to be plowed. And Christ speaks very plainly here - it is just as white as white, and black as black. And he describes it as he talked about men who want to begin plowing for him in the kingdom of God. And becoming disciples. And they intended to become disciples of Jesus. They expressed their desire. And Christ expresses his descent to the propositions of each of these men with a text. No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.

Now many of you were brought up in the country and we learned how to plow. It seems a very easy process to a man who has never tried. As he stands looking over the fence and sees the plow glide smoothly through the field. One would think that all you'd have to do would be to take hold of the handles, and point in the sod, and

tell the horses to start. But to send the plow at an equal depth of earth, and without being stopped by a stump, and making a clean straight furrow from one end to the other, requires a good bit of care.

*Never saw mule with angelic eyes - To direct the beast - measure the implement - sweat mules & produce a straight furrow - was a work of art -*

Many people lost their patience, in the process when they first begin to plow. They have been knocked flat by the plow handles. Here is a boy who attempts to plow and instead of keeping his eye upon the beam, or on the horses pulling the plow - he is looking this way and sometimes that, and back to the end of the field in which he has started. Now someone will come and say, my boy, you will never make a plow man in that way. You must keep your eyes upon your work. And look and see what a crooked furrow you have been making. Now that was an illustration that Christ presents in order to show the folly of that man who once having started towards Heaven, is turning this way and that - often looking back to the place in which he started. No man having put his hand to the plow, looking back is fit for the kingdom of Heaven.

*some mud holes - Part - true -*

Here is the account of three persons who offered themselves to plow for Jesus in the kingdom of God. And the answer's that Christ gave to each of them. The former account of this is found in Matt. 19:21.

v. 57

First, romantic. Here is a man who is extremely forward to follow Christ immediately. V. 57 He is very rash, hasty, and inconsiderate. He has not sit down and counted the cost.

He makes Christ a very big, large promise. Now Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he was going to die. He had steadfastly set his face to go there. And I believe that means he had resolution. He fixed his eye and he was firm, knowing where he was going and what he was going to do. He was determined to fulfill God's task that had been set for him. Now here is a man who wants to follow

him. And this is glorious and wonderful that he wanted to be a part of the kingdom.

And in V. 57 - He comes and suddenly on that day, he sees his opportunity. Now he may have heard about Jesus before. He had heard of Christ, no doubt. But he felt like that this was his time. That he ought to follow Christ. Wheresoever thou goest.

Now Christ gives him a necessary bit of caution. Now not to promise himself great things in the world. But he must count upon poverty. Meanness.

V. 58  
He must count upon setting forth himself in a low condition - that our Lord Jesus was in in the world. In Jesus' answer, V. 58, Jesus said - "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head." Now these firm words about the cost of discipleship must have shocked the man. And even more, he must have felt the stern determination in the face of Jesus. Because Jesus had submitted to the depths of poverty. He did not even make a dwelling place for himself nor a house of his own.

So as proposing this for the consideration of those intending to be his disciples, we mean to follow Christ - we must lay aside the thoughts of great things in the world. We must reckon only Heaven for our religion. We must resolve to take up with nothing less.

Let us not go about to compound the profession of Christianity, with secular advantages. Christ has put them asunder. When we join these things together we miss the kingdom. Expect to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, we must deny ourselves, and take up the cross and follow him.

Christian service is not what it sometimes appears to be. The life of a missionary may sound glorious. The idea of working with quaint appreciative people in exotic lands may sound wonderful. But there is more to that life than appears in the color slides of the market places, and the bright costumes of the people. A missionary has to contend with filth, loneliness, limited funds, short supplies, and discouragement. It takes a man who is going to take hold of the end of the rope and cling to determination to fulfill the missionary call.

Now let me be very practical and say that the same kind of Christian service, whether it be vocational or voluntarily rendered is true. The cost to make a contribution as a member of the choir, is very demanding.

The cost to make a contribution as a Sunday School teacher is very demanding. The cost to make a contribution as a Deacon or a leader in the church is very demanding.

Quite frankly, some people never perform the service that God intended them to perform in these posts because they lack the determination to pay the price, that is required.

V. 59  
19  
Second, another man practices (procrastination). He begs a day. V. 59. Here is another man who is resolved to follow Christ. Christ calls him - follow me. Jesus never was careless with words - follow me. The man wanted to follow, but later, not now. The man's father was not dead. He was not even sick. But he used domestic responsibilities as an excuse for postponing service for God.

And he fled when he heard of the difficulties that attended it. He hesitated. And he yielded.

Observe the excuses. Lord, suffer me first to go bury my father. I have an aged father at home who cannot live long and he will need me while he does live. And I'll perform for him until the end."

Now, I want to point out to you, three temptations here. This man not taking hold of the plow and going on with it.

1- The first temptation was a temptation to rest. In his discipleship - and this is true today. There are those who want to rest in their discipleship at large. They get to be a member of a church in which they may be at a loose end and they may not come too close and not give up themselves to be too strict or too constant, in their service for Jesus Christ.

So the man used his domestic responsibilities for wanting to rest. Now people to this very day, are using young children or aged parents, or less than well husbands, or excuses of one sort or another for why they cannot attend church. And why they cannot participate in the service. Now God's formula is very clear.

2- The second temptation is to defer. The doing of what he knew was his duty. You do the same thing. You put off your duty. You put it off til some other time and you have a clear cut idea as to what God wants you to do. And you do not think that this is very religious and so you are not attending to it at this time.

3- Third, we are tempted to think that our duty to our relations will excuse us from our duty to Christ. It seems to be an acceptable excuse indeed. Let me go and bury my father. Let me take care of my family. And then, I will think about



serving Christ. Is that putting Christ in first place.

V. 60  
V. 60 - Christ gives the answer to this man. Let the dead bury the dead. It is likely that there were none that were dead. It is not that Christ would have his followers or his ministers to be unnatural.

Our religion teaches us to be kind and good in every relation. To show piety at home. And respect for our parents. But we must not take these offices us to excuse us from our duties to God.

It is the nearest and the dearest relation that we have in the world - if it stands in our way to keep us from Christ, it is necessary that we have a zeal that will make us even forget, father, mother, brother, sister, wife or whatever.

That is why if one member of the family is a believer, and say the wife is a believer - the husband an unbeliever, she should not stay home to please him. She should attend to the duties of her God in her worship. And if there is a man or a husband who is a Christian, and his wife is unsaved, and she puts stumbling blocks in his way. And wants him to stay home on Sunday, then I say that man ought to go on with his church worship and his service to God. That ought to be first.

No excuse must be admitted against your presence obedience to the call of Christ.

In Gal. 1:15-16, Christ calls us and says that we are not to consult with flesh and blood about or obedience unto him.

2 Tim. 2:4 says that we must not entangle ourselves with the affairs of this world.

Deut. 33:9 says that our zeal for God should be first. Above all else.

V. 61  
The third plot of land, the socialite. Here is another fellow that is willing to follow Christ. Here is another fellow that is willing to plow in the field. But he must have a little time with his friends - by farewell. He did not mean that he wanted to go and give a goodbye hug to his family. He merely wanted a party. He wanted one last fling. He felt that he could go into the service for Christ, but he could not let go of the old life of pleasure. He lacked the determination to break away from the life of pleasure. And he too let Christ pass by and did not take a hold of the plow handles and plow the crooked row.

This tells us that the service of Christ is more urgent than anything else in all of the world. Now that man looked upon following Christ as maybe troublesome. He might be going to die.

*Church - go out of town - Drink like a fish!*

He seemed to have his worldly concerns more upon his heart, than he ought to have.

But he was willing to enter into a temptation from his purpose of following Christ. And there are so many people today who duplicate this in their social standing and lives. They must put that first. Jesus said you are plowing a very crooked row.

V. 62 - Now these people that had said they were going to work for Christ, were people like you today. Some are on the horns of the same dilemma. You want your life to count for Christ. But you cannot let go of some of the things in your

life that are precluded. Some of you are torn between two kind of lives. You want to live two different ways. Some of you are actually trying to live both ways.

But it cannot be done anymore than you can plow a straight furrow with a plow looking back over your shoulder. If you are going to be a disciple for Christ, you must make a clean break of the old life.

Here is the hard core truth that emerges, if a person is limping along. Is half-hearted, in his way and the spiritual life, it is not because God has not ordained a better way for him. Because God has.

If a person is more of a failure than a success in his spiritual life, it is probably because he lacks the determination to fulfill the destiny that God has set for him.

V, 62  
Look at V. 62 - Christ rebuked them. No man having put his hand to the plow. No man who says I am going to do a good work for God and then begins looking around while he plows the ground, is going to be fit to be a plow man.

If you look back on your worldly life and you have a desire to get back in it, you are going to be like Lot's wife did in Sodom. You'll not be fit to be king.

You are not fit to receive the good seed of the kingdom.

Those who begin with the work of God, must resolve to go on with it. Or they will make nothing of it. Looking back, inclines to draw back. And draw back will

lead to a crooked life. Sometimes people are always looking back. They want to evaluate this and evaluate the other. Jesus says, put your hands on the plow and plow forward. See what kind of work you can do in the future. If you spend all of your time looking back, you are never going to do much until you look forward.

### III. SOME CROOKED FURROWS

It is a glorious time when people plow in the kingdom of God. But how tragic it is when we see these crooked furrows that are being plowed. First, the first crooked furrow is that men do not want to give up their friends or their connections. There are still Christians today who want to have a lot of unChristian friends. You do not want to turn your back on them. You condone their behavior. There are a lot of Christians today who are so blinded that they cannot see the truth of the word of God. About some of their old friends.

If you go to the shops and the machine shops and the stores, the places of business today - you'll still find that people will make fun of a real Christian. They want to get into Heaven. And they put their hands to the plow and they witness to men and women. But there are some who turn their backs and still like these of the old world, and they look back, and they want to be like them.

You know it happens every day in the church. Here is somebody who is red hot. Man, he is carrying on for God. And then a little while, a few months, maybe a year or so. Somebody looks around and says where is so and so. We haven't seen them for four or five weeks. Oh, says someone, he doesn't come to religious meetings any more. He is off with his old associates. How common that is in life today and what a shame it is.

Second, the crooked furrow - we take one more look at sin. Sometimes people will surrender and they say, yes, I want to be a Christian. But they will not give up their sin. They are still thirsty for it. Under the influence of the spirit, they resolve that they are going to become a Christian.

And a man will say, well, I don't know whether it is worth while to me to try to work upon my temper. Or work on my bad language. General Jackson swore at the battle of New Orleans. And people swear on T. V. today. If men like that swear, I can. And I am not responsible anyhow. What can I do when I am provoked.

And so we don't quit our profanity, and we continue to plow a crooked furrow.

Some people say well, religion is very well for the church. But it can't be practiced out here in the business world. So a man goes to church and then he goes back, and he forgets the Bible warning.

The third crooked furrow is the want of ease. There are those who want to have their immortal souls saved. And they have been thinking about the day of judgement. And they have troubled themselves about a great many questions in the Bible and in religion.

But, they are just like a man who gets in the heavy seas and he battles the waves for half an hour. And he says, there is no use, I can't swim ashore. And he goes down. There are a lot of Christians who struggle awhile, and they shed tears, and they have some sleepless nights. They may lose their appetite. They found God some years ago but now they are in rebellion. Against God almighty. Those few

tears and those few struggles, they have given in. And they want ease from spirituality - and so they are plowing a crooked furrow.

I don't see how anybody can take a hold of the plow and look back with all the fearful hazzards that might smite him. There are some who look back and stop praying to God. Oh the hollow that you risk.

Why should I bother, you say, about my duty when other people are not doing theirs.

Now tonight I am talking about the old truths that have ringed through the church of Christ for the ages. Indeed these doctrines have been preached. For you remember, if anyone, though he be an angel from Heaven - though he preach any other Gospel. Let him be a curse. And you know that story.

And if you keep your life out here on the margin, and you think you are going to get into a glorious Heaven, there is an awful Hell that many people are marching toward. And they are marching swifter than the lightning. Now you could know it all. You could not blame God, you can't blame the Holy Spirit, and you can't blame Jesus Christ.

What plea and what excuse could you give in that last day for plowing a crooked furrow. Could you say I never had a chance.

Why the open books of judgement would show you the record, of the Sabbath days,

of the sermons, and the 10,000 religious advantages. And you say - well, I have never been warned. And I didn't take advantage of these.

Think about that crooked furrow of (unfaithfulness.) Your (lack of service.) You came to the kingdom of God with joy. And there was a vast opportunity for usefulness. And God gave you that opportunity. It was for your own soul's concern. And it was for your own welfare. And now your life has been a failure. And here are the few remaining years that you have on life, are you going on in the same direction and deliberately look back the rest of your life.

#### IV. GET A FIRM GRIP ON THE PLOW HANDLE

Yes, we need not to think that this message is not for us today. There are heavy fields that need fine plow men. And we are burdened with opportunities and we can work and do.

Many plow men have gone out and wrought great things.

Henry Martin of Cambridge - "I was surprised to find that I had grasp the shadow. The spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. And the coveted glory fades like the withered grass. And Martin's eyes were lifted up above his scholarship. To the prize of the high call of God in Christ Jesus. And having gazed upon the glory of his Lord, he saw some land that needed to be plowed. He turned his consecrated life to India. And what a field to plow.

Amy Carmichael's book, Things As They Are In India. She tells about the cold chilly rain and desolation of it all. The cruelty, the heart-break, the soaking sorrow, the helpless pain. Things were no better in Martin's time than it was to this dark heavy sadden field - but it was that this young man from the university went and put his plow in the ground. With the immortal word of God upon his lips, "now let me burn out for God." He began his lonely work. Now he is worth thinking about. If you want a companion to inspire you - he plowed away at the furrow. And even when illness came and the sentence of death was upon him. His friends beseeched him to come home and rest. "He could not bear the idea of completely abandoning the work." He had given his life, and so he went to Persia. And revised the New Testament. Among the very people for whom it was prepared. No looking back from the plow. We have got a living plow man who we cannot entice home for a Holiday.

Griffith John moved to China and plowed a furrow. And honors were cast upon him and people wanted him to be hired for a job with the Congregational Union, in London. But his reply was - send me out more plow men. Now these are men who preserved the kingdom of God. They were the salt of the earth. How much are you like salt.

James Gilmore, in that far reaching field of Mongolia - which covered some distance of 3000 miles in one direction. And 900 miles in another. Into that mighty field, a single man put his plow point in and began to evangelize. What a field and what a plow man. That first entry in his diary is something worth sharing. "A stir by daybreak. Made pottage and tea. Just a little homely duty, making pottage and tea. Several huts in sight." Do you feel the thrill of that. These few huts, the friends of the field - the beginning of 3000 miles. Several huts are in sight. Oh let me live for Christ, and feel day by day, the blessedness of His will given up to God. And so he plowed away. And the unthinkable loneliness -



"my eyes have filled with tears frequently these last few days inspite of myself. Oh, the intense loneliness of Christ's life. Oh, Jesus let me follow in thy steps."

In later years there was much to cheer - the furrow that he plowed in the shape of converts. I have seen no results. I have not as far as I am aware, seen anyone who even wanted to be a Christian, he writes. Oh if things would only move, how then did he turn back. Oh no, he never looked back. He found this sufficiency of the Saviour. And he died with his hands on the plow on the furrow. In one of his last letters to his brother he wrote - "In Jesus is all fullness." Supply yourself from him. Heaven is ahead brother, horray."

That is a most heartening message from a plow man. Who plowed a straight furrow. It makes us want to get out and put our hands on the plow. It makes you want to whistle while you plow.

And let me tell you that there is plow work near home. There is a lot that needs to be done. We have a lot of hard ground. It may be unpromising. But it needs to be plowed. Yes, there is a lot that needs to be done. The ground may be baked hard as by the noon day sun.

Down in the human heart, crushed by the temptor, feelings lie buried which grace can restore.) Plow work needs to be done. Any man who puts his hand to the plow, just for romantic purposes, social purposes, is going to be very disappointed.

I think there ought to be some questions that are going through some of your

Shall I leave this Sunday School Class and give up my work. I just cut two or three feet of furrow. Shall I go and just take it easy. No man having put his hand to the plow, looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. The peril of looking back.

Can't you get your imagination fixed upon this figure. A man with his hands on the plow. Casting his eyes in every direction. And he is unfit. The plow man who begins looking back.

Is first of all going to spoil his work. He is going to cut a crooked furrow.

Demas was seduced by the prizes of this world. And turned around.

A woman screamed suddenly and she startled a party of surveyors, at dinner in the forest in North Virginia. It was a sunny day, 1750. The men ran in the direction of the scream. One of the first to reach the scene was an 18 year old. "Please sir, please sir, make them release me" - the woman said. The several who held her. My boy is drowning and they will not let me go to save him. One of those holding her yelled, it would be madness. She would jump into the river and drown herself.

The young man threw off his coat and sprang to the edge of the bank, scanned for a moment the rocks and the swirling currents, and catching a glimpse of the boy plunged into the roaring rapids. "Thank God, the mother said, he will save my boy." Everyone watched as a young would be rescuer fought the rocks, and the whirlpools. Twice the rescuer disappeared from sight. Only to come back. They

were nearing a part of the river that was dangerous. The rush of water was dangerous in that spot. No one even approached it with a canoe. Into the middle he went. Grabbed the boy. Lifted him from the water with his strong right arm. But that moment, those standing on the bank cried in horror, both the youth and the child shot over the falls and vanished in the water below.

A few deadly seconds the mother shouted - there they are - see, they are safe. And the boy senseless reached the bank. The friends were there to meet them. God will give you reward, solomly spoke the grateful woman. He will do great things for you in return for this day's work. And the blessings of thousands besides mine shall be yours. Now we call that courage. When he leaped and faced the danger. And that was wonderful and magnificent.

Jesus had that kind of courage. And Jesus inspired others to go straight to the task. Without counting his life - he gave his life. There was a choice. His life and truth on a cross.

Now the woman's prediction about the young man was correct. 39 years later he was installed as the first president of the United States. His name was George Washington. What kind of a furrow are you plowing?