

People Who Procrastinate Luke 9:51-62

Perhaps you are familiar with that time-honored story about a board meeting that Satan once called in hell. At this meeting Satan put this question to his senior advisors: "We need to develop a new strategy for causing havoc upon earth. Do you have any suggestions for a new means of reaching human beings for our side?"

One advisor suggested, "Tell them there is no heaven."

Another said, "Tell them there is no hell."

But the prize winning suggestion was judged to be much more effective: "Tell them there is no hurry."

I want to emphasize to you today that the most important matters of life, there is indeed a very big hurry? In today's lesson Jesus encounters a man and says to him, "Follow me." But this man replies, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Interesting response. Here's what we don't know about this man. Had his father just died? Certainly, if so, he did need to see to this immediately. Or did his father have a lingering illness that would claim him sometime in the near future? Or was he simply saying that he had responsibility for his father and that some day, some time his father would die, so he had better stay home until that day came?

Whatever the answer, Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said to him, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

Again, it sounds like a sensible response, but remember, Jesus could see into people's hearts. He knew when someone had a legitimate concern or was simply using a delay tactic.

Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

It may trouble you that Jesus treated these men who simply indicated they needed more time so harshly. But Jesus knew that in the truly important things of life there is a need for urgency. Some things simply cannot be put off without the threat of dire consequences.

Consider, for example, the simple act of expressing our love for the people closest to us. Expressing such love simply cannot be put off.

"Dear Abby," the advice columnist, was once asked what letter was requested the most for reprinting by her readers. She replied it was this one:

A great theologian, a man who has inspired millions of Christians, confessed sometime back that he had been an abysmal failure with his own children. "How I wish," he laments, "that when my children were young, I had spent less time with my books and more time with my family."

There is an urgency about love, is there not? Children grow up, oh, so quickly. Time takes its toll in the aging process. There are some persons whose love we treasure today who might not be with us tomorrow or next week or next year. If we are going to take time to show our love for one another, we had better do it now. There is an urgency about the really important things in life. One of those important things is demonstrating our affection for people we love.

There can sometimes be an even greater urgency about altering a lifestyle. There comes a time when a person must change his or her way of living . . . and do it now.

There is a story of a man who waited until it was too late to make a change in his life. His name was Judas. I wonder if Judas ever intended for Christ to die. I wonder if he ever thought it would go that far. Perhaps Jesus had said something that hurt or offended Judas. That happens sometimes in church. Sometimes we might make the most innocent comment to someone and they may misconstrue it, and quite unintentionally we've lost a friend.

Maybe Judas felt rejected by the other disciples. Perhaps it troubled him that he was not part of that small circle of disciples closest to Jesus--Peter, James and John--who were always there on significant occasions in Jesus' life. Could it have been simple jealousy? "I'll show them." Judas may have said to himself. But it may be that he never intended for Jesus to be crucified.

"I have betrayed innocent blood," he cried out to the temple authorities as he tried to return their money. "What is that to us?" they said with a sneer as they turned their backs on him. Suddenly Judas realized that it was too late and he went and hanged himself.

It is an awful thing to wake up and realize it is too late, to make changes in your life. Do you see there is sometimes an urgency about changing the way you are living, the way you are thinking, the way that you view the Scriptures, the way that you view God, or do you view God at all? Stop, turn away for God's sake, stop, an inner voice may be saying to you this morning, before it is too late.

There is built into life an important urgency when it comes to the things that really matter. Such it is most crucially with our relationship with Christ.

I challenge you to find one place in the New Testament where Jesus told anybody to "go home, think it over, and get back to me tomorrow." It simply doesn't happen. We read in Matthew 4 that Jesus came to Simon and Andrew and James and John at their fishing boats beside the Sea of Galilee and said to them, "Follow me" and immediately they left their nets and followed him.

In today's lesson Jesus encounters two men who want to delay making a commitment to him, and Jesus rebukes them. Jesus' invitation is always an invitation to do it now! Procrastination is a major problem in many people's lives. It complicates our lives in so many ways. For some of us it is a major block to success in our work, and even in our personal relationships.

When Jesus calls us, he says do it today. There are three reasons he calls us with such urgency.

The first has to do with our nature. We are creatures of habit. The older we get the harder it is to change. The road to hell really is paved with good intentions. We may have good intentions but if we do not act on them now, chances are we never will. That is our nature. If we put off committing our lives more fully to Christ, chances are we never will. That is our nature.

There is a second reason for urgency in committing ourselves to him. Time is passing by quickly and so much of it is being wasted because we do not have a great purpose for our lives. There is no limit to what we can accomplish once we know what our purpose is and put our hand to the plow. The greatest reason that we do not use time effectively is that our lives have no driving purpose, no grand aspiration.

There is an urgency about making a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ right now because of our nature and because, otherwise, we squander our most valuable resource, our time.

But there is a third reason for this urgency--and that is the world's need. We, the few, have so much while the vast majority of God's children have so little. Does anyone care? Somebody needs to do something and do it now! Every minute that is lost means sorrow and suffering for a little one somewhere. Do you see the urgency?

Human needs go far beyond poverty. There are young people on the wrong path. To them, they are simply having a good time. But the tentacles of addiction are slowly enfolded into its grip. We say and have said "let someone else do it, I have no time, no money, no energy.

It ought to be plain now that the really important things in life cannot be put off--showing our affection for loved ones before it is too late--ridding ourselves of a destructive habit or weakness or sin, before it is too late--or committing our life to Christ, before it is too late. If we put off turning to Christ, it is unlikely that we will ever heed his call. That is our nature. We could be so much more effective in how we use our time if we could but center our lives in him. And there are people's lives that we can touch, that we really can help, if we act before it is too late.

Satan's most effective tool--tell them there is no heaven? No. Tell them there is no hell? No, not that either. Tell them there is no hurry. My friends, there are some things in life about which there really is a hurry. Giving your life in service to Christ really is urgent! Do it today! Now!