

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

Top Priority

By
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Luke 9:57-62

During World War II the government allocated priorities for air travel on the basis of the importance of the purpose of the trip. Because I was a member of a flight crew that delivered aircraft to overseas destinations when returning back to my home base in the United States on military or commercial aircraft I was given a 2 priority. It had nothing to do with rank. It was because our missions were considered important to the war effort that we were assigned such a high priority. If a person was booked on a flight with say a 3 priority and a person came along with a 2 priority he could be put off the plane so that the man with the higher priority could take that seat. Our flight crew was never denied seating because of low priority. A 2 priority was considered high. Very few people had the highest top priority of 1.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is far and away the most important mission going on in this world. The world does not believe that, but that does not make it any the less true. What the Lord Jesus did on that tree on Golgotha is crucial and essential for any person to be saved and enter the Kingdom of God. His death in the place of sinners is the only grounds for God's mercy. He shed his Blood so that you and I might be forgiven and find pardon from the Lord for our sins. Everything else going on in this world is secondary to the Gospel. God assigned the Gospel top priority.

When men were bumped off the plane by our 2 priorities they would object. One man had to attend a high level meeting in Washington, another had important business transactions which he felt were essential to the war effort, but it didn't change their 3 or 4 priority to a 2 so that they could claim equal right to airline space. God declares the Gospel of the Kingdom to be a matter of such supreme importance that nothing else equals it in priority.

The first man in our passage told the Lord **"I will follow You wherever You go."** 58 **And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."**

A soldier in wartime may sleep in a foxhole and be on the move the next day to an uncertain bivouac, but he knew that was the soldier's lot when he signed up. Christ made sure that this enthusiastic volunteer did not get disappointed later on when he looked around and saw the world enjoying comforts and refinements and ease that he had no promise of, though even soldiers at times live in mansions and castles temporarily as they march ahead in pursuit of the enemy.

This ought to be the understanding of every one who enlists in the army of Christ. But the other two men in our scripture hesitated and procrastinated. They weren't quite ready to make a decisive commitment.

One man who heard Christ say, Follow me responded, **"Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."** v. 59. Surely that seemed like a matter at least equal in importance to the Gospel of the Kingdom but Christ did not say so. He replied, **"Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."**

This man probably had deep affection for his father. He didn't want to begin a ministry for Christ until he had done what he felt was the decent thing. namely – go home and attend upon his father for his few remaining years. But Christ didn't accept that as a reasonable or proper request. Why? Because it was putting his father ahead of the Gospel in priority.

Christ taught in another place, ²⁶**"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:26"**

There was third man mentioned in this passage of scripture that simply said, **"I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."** 62 **But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."**

A soldier does not have the freedom to put family or friends before his call to obey orders and do duty in the kingdom of God. Once God entrusts a man with the Gospel it is not a time to circumvent his mission orders in the

Kingdom by going home or attending to any other business. Kingdom business is #1 priority business. Everything else is secondary.

The obvious fact is that the world does not think the Kingdom of God is very attractive or even important. It doesn't promise fame and fortune. It doesn't promise a heaven on earth. It seems to be a bad bargain to most people. Why should I go and follow an invisible Savior who is back in heaven and who tells me that tribulation and persecution will come to me for his name's sake? Why give up a present enjoyable lifestyle for the promise of heaven when I die?

Many men take the attitude: Well, it may be true that there is a heaven by and by to gain, but then there is a world to enjoy here and now. I'll take my chances. If there is a heaven, it can wait. I'll do my living first. I'll seek to fulfill my ambitions and perhaps have some fun along the way. After all, you only live once. I am not ready to put a future blessing before a present enjoyment. That is what Esau did. He sold his birthright for a hot meal and he lost his blessing.

Jesus didn't try to sell anyone a bill of goods. He didn't say, Come and follow me and I will make you a rich man and show you the good and pleasant life. There is a prosperity gospel being preached today. But it is not the gospel of Christ.

Yes, it is true that ²⁹Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, ³⁰but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. Mark 10:29-30 (NASB) But that is not the right motive for following the Lord Jesus Christ.

We follow Christ simply because it is necessary and the right thing to do. When he called the apostles they immediately left whatever they were doing and followed him. We are not induced to follow Christ from material or other considerations.

I mention NECESSARY because you cannot be saved and enter the Kingdom of God unless Christ's salvation is yours through faith in him. The Gospel of the Kingdom is concerned with your soul first. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things shall be added unto you.

It is RIGHT because Christ is God's beloved Son given for our redemption and following him is the only way to please God. God's will is always right and always good, and his will is that men might come to his Son and be saved and serve him.

Back in the 1930s at a certain New York insurance office there was a rumor of a salary cut. One of the employees there was a 22-year-old clerk who possessed a deep melodious voice. He had been offered a radio contract and immediately saw opportunities for fame and possible riches in his regular appearance on a secular program. He had been pondering the matter for several days when he sat down to a piano early one Sunday morning to rehearse a hymn he was to sing in church that morning. As he played and sang his eyes fell on a piece of paper on which was written "***I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather be His than have riches untold!***"

This poem, by Mrs. Rhea Miller, had been placed there where he was sure to see it by his mother, a minister's wife, who knew of the offer her son, was pondering. Above all, she wanted her son, a Christian, to become wholly consecrated in His service.

As his eyes raced over the words, "***I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause and I'd rather have Jesus than world wide fame***" were sentences which struck his very heart.

His fingers unconsciously left the tune he was rehearsing and began to find the melody, which is known today to millions. Several days after, the director who spoke to him in behalf of the radio network was amazed to receive a firm "no" to the offer he had made. "No" was a strange word to the director's ears as thousands of singers would have leaped at such an opportunity as was proposed to the young bass-baritone.

This young man's name is George Beverly Shea. From that time forward the words of the poem became his testimony.

For some years now Mr. Shea has been realizing his ambition to sing the Gospel around the world in association with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Because he was willing to forsake fame and fortune for Jesus he made the right decision, but God has given him all these other things as well in a wonderful way.

What a subtle danger lurks in the seemingly innocent desire to return to the former life and say farewell to old friends and associations. We would think that God would want us to do that, but he instead gives a stern warning against the compromising spirit, which motivates that desire.

The Kingdom of God has an entrance requirement: We must be 'willing to forsake all to follow Christ. There is a total commitment to Him as Savior and Lord. You cannot be a follower of Christ and go back to the world and hold hands with it. Jesus said, **whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.** (Lu. 14:33).

It is not that we have no more contact with the world; rather it is that we forsake that former association with the world and put Jesus Christ first in everything. Looking back was the sin of Lot's wife. She had been warned with her husband not to look back, but she disobeyed. The Word of God warns us, **15Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.** 1 John 2:15-17

The spirit of procrastination is a deadly disposition. Of the three men mentioned in our scripture two exhibited this trifling characteristic. The first man volunteered. Unlike the other two he certainly had no hesitation to follow Christ. After he volunteered the Lord gave him a word suited to his decision. That Word was the life you are embarking on is not the world's idea of success. You may have to endure hardship and sacrifice in your service for me. I am not guaranteeing you those benefits and comforts that the world puts in top priority. No, foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. V 58.

There is a danger when men are called to discipleship without this warning and admonition of Christ. Some will feel misled and feel that the Gospel was misrepresented. They came to Christ thinking that from now on everything will be peaches and cream. No more problems. Now I will prosper and experience a heaven on earth. Such people don't give top priority to the Kingdom of God. Indeed, they have reserved the right to go back to the world and seek its blessing. It's a disposition of mind that says, I want to go to heaven but I don't want to make a break with the old life and the old ways now. I have other axes to grind, other ambitions to fulfill.

You will deceive yourself, my friend, if you think the world will understand or give its blessing to your commitment to Christ. There is no room for compromise with the Devil and the world. Those outside of Christ will neither understand nor appreciate your call to follow Christ. They will do all they can to dissuade you from your course and bring you back to what they consider sane and sound thinking.

In Pilgrim's Progress John Bunyan saw the man who later was to be called Christian trying to urge his wife and children and neighbors to escape from the fire from heaven that he knew was going to destroy the city, but they thought him out of his head and did their best to get him to sleep and rest and put these thoughts out of his mind. Then they tried harsh and surly remonstrations. They chided him and derided him. Finally, to get away he had to run putting his fingers in his ears, crying, "Life! Life! Eternal life!" And not looking behind he ran. The neighbors also came out to see him run, and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return; and, among those that did so, there were two that resolved to fetch him back by force, the names of those men being Obstinate and Pliable. Those two had reserved the right to return to the world even as they went along with him. When the going got tough they forsook the gospel.

What category are you in today, my friend? Are you a volunteer, committed, under discipline, in uniform, serving the Lord; or are you uncommitted, still procrastinating, not yet willing to break with the world and its friendship?

The Church is not a halfway house, beloved. The Church is for those who have counted the cost and have resolved with firm conviction and disposition to follow Christ. It is a fellowship and household of faith for those who love the Lord and want to follow him whithersoever he leads them.

I invite you to come to Christ with the understanding that you have a pilgrimage fraught with difficulty and danger. There is a Devil who will try to defeat you, a world that will draw you back from following Christ and make you a deserter. This poem draws a picture of becoming a disciple of Christ.

You're starting, my son, on life's journey
 Along the grand highway of life;
 You'll meet with a thousand temptations

Each city with evil is rife;

This world is a stage of excitement
There's danger wherever you go;
But if you are tempted in weakness;
Have courage, my son, and say "no"

The bright, ruby wine may be offered --
No matter how tempting it be,
From poison that stings like an adder;
My son, have the courage to flee.

The dark cocktail rooms are inviting
Decked out in their tinsel and show
But if you are tempted to enter,
Have courage, my son, and say "No".

In loyalty alone lies your safety,
When you the long journey begin;
Your trust in the Heavenly Father
Will keep you unspotted from sin.

Temptations will keep on increasing,
As streams from a rivulet flow;
But if you'd be true to your Savior
Have courage, my son, to say "No."

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