

Transcript of Sermon By  
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 First Baptist Church  
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## **The Hand on the Plow**

### **Luke 9:57-62**

#### Meditation Text:

Jesus is heading for Jerusalem, after all. He is going to die in Jerusalem. He knows that. So he's looking for someone to take with him, someone to join the inner circle, someone to whom he can give the keys to his office after he checks out. They could have been heroes. They could have been followers. But they chose instead to be mere admirers.

—Mark R. Feldmeir in *Testimony to the Exiles*

I am sure you have seen the commercials on TV for Ally Bank. Years and years ago, the main actor played a character in a commercial named Joe Isuzu. The character in the Ally Bank commercials always seems to have vulnerable children whom he tricks by not telling them the full story about what their opportunities are.

In one commercial, there is a cute little red-haired girl whom he asks, “Do you want to ride your bicycle?” Of course, he has the rectangle taped off. She gets on, moves about an inch, and he stops her and says, “Whoa, that’s as far as you can go. You can’t go outside the rectangle.”

The little girl says, “I can’t ride like that.”

The man says, “Well, you can’t ride very far.”

In another Ally Bank commercial, there are two little girls and he asks one of them, “Would you like a pony?”

She says, “Yes.”

He gives her something like My Little Pony, if they still make those.

Then he asks the other little girl, “Would you like a pony?” And he brings out the real deal. Of course, the look from the first little girl is priceless and she says, “You didn’t say we could have a real pony.”

And the man says, “Well, you didn’t ask.”

The point is a great illustration of the fine art of fine print. Everybody knows you are not supposed to sign a lease, a subscription or any kind of document until you have read the fine print. We all know those offers that look too good to be true. If it is a commercial on television, the print is so small, you just about have to run up to the screen and read very fast to try to find out what the limitations are.

We had an insert in the newspaper a few weeks ago for satellite TV. The subscription was for one-half off. I was trying to determine what the real price was going to be, and there was so much small print that I had the newspaper almost right up in front of my nose. I finally had a headache, and I could not read it. Nobody wants you to really know what the catch is. Beware of the fine print. Don’t sign anything until you know the real cost and the real expectations.

One of the great things about Jesus is there is no fine print. You don’t need a Ph.D. in Bible to find out what the demands of discipleship are. There is not an obscure passage in a book that no one has told you about. It is all laid out there for us. Jesus hides nothing. He tells everybody up front boldly and loudly, “Here is the large print of discipleship. Here is what is expected. Here is what it costs.”

There is a major transition in the story of Jesus as Luke tells it. In chapters 1-8 in the Book of Luke, the disciples of Jesus have had a pretty good idea of who he is. His teachings are amazing. He has been performing miracles. The crowds are gathering around him. In chapter 9, the disciples identify Jesus as the Messiah. “You are the Christ. You are the Savior God has sent into the world.” Immediately, Jesus begins to explain to them what this means. It means he is going to the cross. It means he is going to have to suffer and die. It means he is on the way to Jerusalem in order for all of this to take place.

Luke 9:51 says, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Luke 9:57 says, “And as they were going along the road . . .” This new chapter in Jesus’ ministry has begun. He has been identified; he has told them who he is; and he is now moving on. It is a major transition. He has told everybody what the cost is, not in fine print, not in small print, not in something you have to go look up. This is the large print of the Gospel. The cost is the cross. We are on the way. It is out in the open. There is no hiding, and Jesus wants to make sure that everybody knows.

In Luke 9:57-62, the parade has begun. The people are moving and there are a lot of people who are intrigued about all of this. It is sort of like the latest big thing and they all want to be a part of it.

There are three different encounters. The first one is a volunteer who, apparently, has no idea what is about to happen. Everybody says, “Jesus is going to Jerusalem. Perhaps he is going to mount a coup, take over, and throw the Romans out.” This person wants to be in the entourage. So he volunteers and says, “I’ll follow you.” Jesus is quick to let him know, “We don’t have reservations at the Jerusalem Ritz. There is not a place for everybody to stay. We travel light because we are always ready to respond to whatever it is that God might ask us to do. Foxes have dens, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

Jesus says to the second person he calls, “Come and follow me.” These were very common words for Jesus to issue to a believer. This person said, “I really want to, but first let me go bury my father.” Sometimes people want to debate whether this is literal or is there something else going on. Is it literal because his father has just died and he wants to go home and conduct the funeral? Many people think it is really a way of saying, “I need to go home and take care of my father through old age. When I am done with my obligations at home, then I will come and follow you.” Either way, the point is the same. Either way, Jesus is saying to this particular person, “All the other demands of the earth fall away. Every other obligation, every other thing that you think you are supposed to do falls away compared to the call to come and follow me.” When Jesus calls, it is, “Drop this. Come now.” When Jesus calls, it is, “Quit doing that. Start doing this that I want you to do.” When Jesus calls, there is nothing else.

The two foremost obligations at the time when Jesus lived as a human in Nazareth were hospitality and caring for your parents. When Jesus said, “Don’t even worry about burying your father,” he is saying, “Nothing else compares. Come on.” Large print. It is very clear. “Come follow me.”

The third person just wants to go home and say goodbye. It sounds so cruel of Jesus. Again, it stands for something much bigger, much larger. It is one of those procrastination things. Did you ever know anybody who decided they wanted to take a semester off from college? Most of the people I know who took that little bit of time off never went back.

Think about the last time you thought, “I really need to write a letter to . . .” Have you written that letter yet? If you put it off one time, you just put it off again. Psychologists tell us that when an impulse comes to do something good or noble, if we ignore it, the odds are we will ignore it the next time and the next time. The time to respond to those compulsions within us to do something that we are divinely being called to do is the first time.

When this person says, “Let me go home and say goodbye to everybody,” Jesus says, “Don’t look back. This is the hand on the plow.” Most of us have never plowed anything. If it were not for two sticks with a string tied between them where you can drop the seeds along the string, which of us could ever plant a straight line? Which of us could ever plant a straight line if we walked backwards planting as we walked away? That is where you look back over what you have done and it weaves all over the place. We can’t move forward in the kingdom to follow Jesus Christ if we are constantly looking back at what could have been or should have been.

These three individuals are a part of the whole of the way that Jesus says to us up front and in big print on a billboard that no one can miss, “There are no half way followers in the

kingdom.” If you have read the meditation text, it says there are no admirers. There is a big difference between being an admirer of Christ and being a follower.

I have a pastor friend, Walter, in Florida who pastors a very unique church. Walter typically does not use the language of describing somebody as a Christian. He says the term Christian has become watered down and misunderstood. Walter specifically calls people, *Christ followers*. He says, “That person is a Christ follower. That person wants to be a Christ follower. This person is on the verge of making a decision to become a Christ follower. Basically, he reverts back to the language of the New Testament which reminds us that it is not simply, “Isn’t Jesus nice?” but it is actually getting up, going, and following him. Admirers need not apply for work in the kingdom. Followers only.

Somewhere along the way, and I am not sure where it happened, there grew to be a distinction, and I think it still exists in American Christianity, when people will say, “I have accepted Jesus as Savior but not as Lord.” Have you ever heard anybody say that? The idea is that we have the benefits. *If I die today, I know I am going to heaven and I am going to be with Jesus. But I really don’t live my life according to what Jesus calls me to do. I have accepted him as Savior but not as Lord. He doesn’t control the direction of my life.* Find that for me in the Bible. Find me the chapter and verse where it says you can choose to accept the benefits of salvation and it comes without any obligation to make Jesus Christ Lord.

When we baptize, we ask individuals, “Who is your Lord?” because the primary and basic confession of Christians since Jesus walked the earth in the flesh has been *Jesus Christ is Lord*. That means Jesus is over my life. Jesus tells me what to do. I follow Jesus. If my will and Jesus’ will collide, if I am really honest about it in following Jesus, then Jesus’ will takes over, not mine.

This all probably sounds very harsh, but think of this: Remember where Jesus is headed. Jesus is headed to Jerusalem. Jesus is headed to the cross. Jesus is headed to dying for our sins. There is no half way to the cross. There is no half way to dying. There is no half way to Jesus dying for the forgiveness of our sins. There is a very simple reason for this. All of this is based on his love for us. He does all of these things because he loves us and there is no half-way love. Jesus does not love you, me or the world just half way, but all the way—all the way to Jerusalem, all the way to the cross, all the way to the death that satisfies the forgiveness of our sins.

Could you really say that you love somebody half way? That does not work, does it? There is no half way for Jesus. The large print, the full Gospel, the word that he wants to make clear and plain to us so that we don’t have to get out a magnifying glass to read, is that we love him in return. There is no half way love. How do you love Jesus a little? None of us do.

The word of the Gospel, the word of Jesus is that he gives us his all. He has given us every ounce of his life and being to the point of dying for us. It is free. It is not anything you can buy, but there is only one response that really puts us in the relationship with him where we receive. It is the same way with best friends. It is the same way with husband and wife. When one loves, the only full response is to love completely in return. No admirers, no half-way

followers. There are only disciples of Jesus Christ, people who have said, “Jesus Christ is Lord. I follow him.”

So which are you? Today is a good day in this Lenten season to take stock and ask the question, “Have I seen the large print, and do I know what it means?”

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