

The Plowman' Don't Look Back



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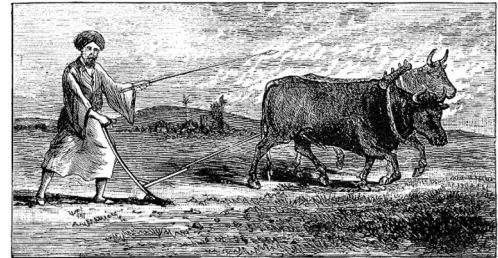
Jesus often taught utilizing parables describing everyday people at their work or occupation. He spoke of their many problems and difficulties as well as their successes. This study looks into a scripture in which Jesus uses one of these occupations to teach a lesson on laboring in the gospel.

Luke 9:62

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

The Plow

Egypt claims the invention of the plow. The early plows were made of wood ([1 Kings 19:21](#)) up until the last couple of centuries. They were fashioned with only one handle and were pulled by oxen and are still used in some areas of the world.



The Plowman

The plowman with one hand on the handle, with his face firm, and his back bent, carries an ox goad in the other hand with which he prods and guides the two oxen that pull the plow.

Plowing is the most difficult work in preparing the field. Sowing is relatively easy labor, even the children were used to sow the seeds, and reaping is a joyful time. The Bible says, “We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves.” ([Psalms 126:6](#))

Plowing is heavy, laborious work. It takes a strong man to plow. On early 20th Century farms in the Midwest young men would watch and learn from their fathers how to control the team and coax them into straining every muscle. The plowman called it disturbing the soil, turning the sod, breaking the hard surface. They were exposing the hidden earth to the rains and the air.

Plowing soil is strenuous necessary labor

Plowing the Kingdom of God is also necessary and difficult work. The plowman is often overturning traditions, pulverizing hard customs, and breaking up popular ideas. The world has always been unfavorable to spiritual religion. The Bible emphasizes the fact that conditions of the soil, as well as the conditions of men’s hearts, must be changed before the seed is sown. Farmers do not sow the seed until

¹ This study is an adaptation of a devotional called “Ploughmen, Don’t Look Back”, by James L. Thornton

the ground is broken up by the plow, turning over the earth along with the weeds and thistles. The same is true with the Gospel seed, our hearts have to be changed to be receptive to the word of God. This is where the plowmen do the job, preaching and praying and testifying to a lost world.

The Fallow Ground

The fallow ground refers to land that has fallen out of cultivation, or that has never been cultivated. This has its counterpart in the broad fields of humanity, in the nations or individuals who are not under the influence of spiritual cultivation. Fallow ground is comparatively useless, even though it may not be utterly fruitless. Good thoughts and good deeds sometimes spring up in heathen nations and irreligious people. But such fruit is poor compared with the fruit of people who are under cultivation by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The highest thought, the purest morality, the noblest effort, the largest charity, are only to be found where spiritual life is cultivated by worship, instruction, and discipline.

Fallow ground bears weeds and thorns. It is not utterly bear ground, it is a wilderness. The same with a neglected soul, it will not merely be devoid of good; it will bear a crop of evil. If the heart is not filled with pure thoughts, it will indulge in unholy imaginations; if it has no worthy love of Godly things; its affections will descend and entwine about some debased object; if it is not active in doing good, it will be diligent in doing harm. And the more fertile the soil the more abundant the crop of weeds.

The fallow ground can be broken up and cultivated. There is hope for the most neglected person, the worst sinner, the oldest enemy of Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will break up the hardest heart if presented in the proper manner.

The fallow ground must be broken up by the plow. Throw bushels of wheat among the thorns, and the thorns will only "choke" it. ([Matthew 13:7](#)) Until the old evil is torn from the heart, the new truth cannot grow and bear fruit there. We must repent of our sins before we can receive the seed of eternal life to grow and produce fruit.

The mere hearing of the truth is not enough. If the heart is hard, it will not receive it ([Acts 7:51](#)). If the heart is preoccupied, the truth will soon be forgotten, or at best be crushed out of all living energy.

Therefore, the heart must not only be cleared of weeds, it must be softened. The plow must break up the fallow ground.

It is our duty to break up the fallow ground. We are sometimes too eager to sow the seed. People are called to accept Christ who do not know Christ and would have no room in their hearts to receive him if

they did know him. Much so-called “Gospel Preaching” thus meets with ridicule or indifference. If we were less hasty in seeking great results we would see more, true, fruitful returns for our work.

We note the complacency of so many Americans, the tendency to be more interested in Church-going and less concerned with the theological aspects of religion than their forbearers. Note the drive towards a shallow and implicitly compulsory common creed (everyone believing the same thing). We could call it a religion-in-general, superficial, a ministry of reconciliation, destructive of the more profound elements of faith. A religion of celebration, instead of “true worship.”

These are the very conditions [Jeremiah 4:3](#) was dealing with when he told the Jews to “Break up your fallow ground.” The object of the plowing is clear. The soil that has been left untilled, that has been hardened and packed solid by being repeatedly trodden upon, this ground must be broken up and turned; it must be prepared for the reviving and fructifying rain of the Lord’s grace. The calloused and hardened heart will have to feel the discipline of the plow. Tradition and pride must be overturned. Mankind needs instructing as well as inviting, rebuking and exhorting.

**Jesus wasn’t just calling “come unto me!” or, “follow me!”, he was also saying
Repent!**

John the Baptist was a plowman, calling for deep repentance, and telling the people that they could not enter the Kingdom of God on the strength of their heritage. (Matthew 3:7-9)

Jesus was a plowman and he demanded repentance from everyone (Luke 13:3).

Peter was a plowman, and he, also called for repentance for those Jews who were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:38).

Paul was a plowman, demanding repentance (Acts 26:20).

As the earth resists the plow, so does the world resist the Gospel. The plowshare² means a change from the ordinary. Plow-work is heavy work, pioneer work, lonely work, exacting work.

Luke 9:62. And Jesus said unto him, no man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. This is not said about the sower or the laborers in the vineyard. Jesus is relating that the man’s heart was not yet thoroughly engaged in Christ’s service. Those who look back, like Lot’s wife, want to go back. Jesus will not share his throne with anyone, not even our relatives.

² In agriculture, a plowshare is a component of a plow. It is the cutting or leading edge of a moldboard which closely follows the coulter when plowing.

Jesus is calling for Plowmen

Jesus is calling us into his service, those with strong hand-grip, those with fixed and unshakable opinions, with firm commitments to holiness, devoted to God, Church, and family.

He is asking for tough, tenacious plowmen, capable of sustaining great tension or strain without breaking or letting go. Jesus called it, “looking back.” Men and women who will do the hardest work, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the face of all the opposition in the world. Preaching against the evils of the world and standing for the truth of God’s Word.

The Field is the World

Mark 16:15

¹⁵ **He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**

The fallow ground has a lot of rocks, stumps, and much hard soil. But there is nothing like the smell of freshly turned earth. There is no greater joy in one’s life than to win a soul to Christ.

We gather on the first day of the week to sing and testify after the plowman has done their job. Singing on Sunday morning is much easier after the hard hearts have been broken up by the plow and the Spirit of God comes to soften the soil to receive the seed of the word of God.

Listen to the Apostle Peter as he plows on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2) Or Paul at Thessalonica, and Athens. (Acts 17) and Ephesus (Acts 19), what a field! What plowmen!

What would the world be like, what would our nation be like, what would our own life be like, if it were not for the plowmen? Those who came and told us the truth about ourselves, and what we should do to be saved. Those who have plowed and changed the world, those who have hazarded their lives to change conditions of those with hardened hearts.

Don’t Look Back

Even if you see no sign of results, keep your hand on the handle of the plow, guide it to end of the furrow. Preachers, Bible teachers, Evangelists, Sunday-School workers, look straight ahead, don’t look back, don’t turn to the right, or to the left, keep plowing until Jesus comes or calls for you.

Wavering is one of the greatest perils, and may soon be fatal. He who wavers, vacillates, or turns to look around to things that are left, loses the direction; who knows how much else may be lost before it can be recovered?