

104 - Don't look behind when God is redetermining your life ahead

It is foolish, if not perilous, to look behind when God is redetermining your life ahead.

On His way to Jerusalem to fulfill the scriptures written about The Messiah, Jesus had a brief exchange with three men:

Luke 9:57-62

57 And at their going in the road, someone said to Him, "I will be following Thee wheresoever Thou mayest be coming away, Lord!"

58 And Jesus said to him, "The jackals have burrows and the flying creatures of heaven roosts, yet the Son of Mankind has no where that He may be reclining His head."

59 Now He said to a different one, "Follow Me!" Yet he said, "Lord, permit me first to come away to entomb my father."

60 Yet He said to him, "Let the dead entomb their own dead. Yet you, coming away, publish the kingdom of God."

61 Now a different one also said, "I shall be following Thee, Lord! Yet first permit me to take leave of those in my home."

62 Yet Jesus said to him, "No one, putting forth his hand on a plow and looking behind, is fit in the kingdom of God."

1. Don't think this is some cushy, "God-will-do-everything-for-me-and-I-have-it-made" kind of life. That's actually true, but our human expectations may meet with stark disappointment, because following after the Lord is full of uncertainty when our certainty has been rooted in ourself. We are on a need to know, know as we go, basis. It's uncomfortable – maybe even harsh – and not necessarily restful. Look at the pattern Son here, Who has nowhere to lay His head. Look at all who followed Him: everyone of them was martyred! It was no different in the OT. Even Solomon, who was ridiculously wealthy cried, "Vanity, Vanity, all is vanity."
2. Consider everyone who was ever in your life, when you committed to the Lord, as dead. Jesus considered the people in the life of the man He called to be dead who could entomb their own dead. As far as the Lord is concerned, people not following after Him are dead. Literally, all human beings are dying from the moment of conception; figuratively, all human beings are dead spiritually if He is isn't their source of life, despite what some may think who are busy meditating or worshiping some other god.
3. Once you are committed to following after him, your fitness to do so, day in and day out, is based on whether you are focused ahead on Him Who has gone before, or

looking behind, over your shoulder, to see what you're missing or whether anyone else is coming along.

Three more points about these first three:

1. You can't afford to care about your own comfort. When we give Him Lordship over our lives, He will take care of our every need so long as we are putting **Him** first.

Matthew 6:19-34

19 "Do not hoard for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and corrosion are causing them to disappear, and where thieves are tunneling and stealing.

20 Yet hoard for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion are causing them to disappear, and where thieves are not tunneling nor stealing;

21 for wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22 "The lamp of the body is your eye. If, then, your eye should be single, your whole body will be luminous.

23 Yet if your eye should be wicked, your whole body will be dark. If, then, the light that is in you is darkness, how dense is the darkness!

24 "Now no one can be slaving for two lords, for either he will be hating the one and loving the other, or will be upholding one and despising the other. You can not be slaving for God and mammon.

25 "Therefore I am saying to you, Do not worry about your soul, what you may be eating, or what you may be drinking, nor yet about your body, what you should be putting on. Is not the soul more than nourishment, and the body than apparel?

26 "Look at the flying creatures of heaven, that they are not sowing, neither are they reaping, nor are they gathering into barns, and your heavenly Father is nourishing them. Are not you of more consequence than they?

27 "Now who of you by worrying is able to add on to his stature one cubit?

28 And why are you worrying about apparel? Study the anemones of the field, how they are growing. Not toiling are they, nor yet are they spinning.

29 Yet I am saying to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of these.

30 Now if the grass of the field, which is today, and tomorrow is cast into the stove, God thus is garbing; not much rather you, scant of faith?

31 "You, then, should not be worrying, saying, 'What may we be eating?' or 'What may we be drinking?' or 'With what may we be clothed?'

32 For for all these the nations are seeking. For aware is your heavenly Father that you need all of these.

33 Yet seek first the kingdom and its righteousness, and these all shall be added to you.

34 You should not, then, be worrying about the morrow, for the morrow will be worrying of itself. Sufficient for the day is its own evil.

2. When the Lord redetermines your life, don't keep breathing your life into someone God has not specifically ordered to go with you. He will not require you to carry anyone. If others in your life today ARE sovereignly called and chosen, they will come on their own and be a blessing to you – not a millstone around your neck. "**You follow me**," Jesus said, "**Let the dead entomb their own dead.**" You cannot play God and think it's up to you who is living and who is dead. You'll meet those who are alive, because God will put them in your path or send you across theirs. Whether someone lives or dies is not up to you, but to Him Who called and chose you. When you direct your life toward all that God has called you to do, you'll quickly learn who has been living off your life and call. They won't make it on their own, and you cannot care. They are dead, Jesus said. You follow Him.

Barbara boils the story of Abraham and Lot down to three sentences:

- a. God told Abraham to go.
 - b. God never told Abraham to take Lot with Him, and Lot was nothing but trouble from start to finish.
 - c. Abraham could never give Lot a passion, a purity or a call; he could only lose His in the process.
3. You may have to simply walk on ahead, no matter what happens behind you – no matter how big a fit someone pitches who hasn't been called or chosen to go. The image of a plow is interesting for a couple of reasons – and probably for others I don't see today: When someone uses a plow, whether by hand or one pulled by a horse or a team of oxen, as was common in ancient times, turning your head to look behind results in your losing the straight line where your plow was pointed. You can go off on a tangent quickly, and coming back into line would mean stopping, turning the plow around, or dragging it backwards to pick up the line where you left off. And there's a whole field to plow, remember; so it is critically important to keep focused straight ahead.

Jesus knew full well that following Him requires maximum focus and effort. Just yesterday, I recalled this scripture to a brother in the Lord:

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the cramped gate, for broad is the gate and spacious is the way which is leading away into destruction, and many are those entering through it.
14 Yet what a cramped gate and narrowed way is the one leading away into life, and few are those who are finding it."

The “**cramped gate and narrowed way**” is by definition uncomfortable. Following after Jesus is not supposed to be easy – it’s supposed to be cramped and narrow, meaning that it will require all our focus, attention and effort to get through this cramped gate and narrowed way – and “**what a cramped gate and narrowed way**” it is, says the Lord! It’s so cramped and narrowed that we will walk it single file. We will not carry anyone along with us and we will have to keep our eyes focused ahead. The best news is that this is the way into THE life. Not just any life – THE life – life in Him and with Him, now and at His coming, Praise the Lord. Also it is THE gate. It is not just any gate. The idea is much like what Jesus declared when He said, “***I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one is coming to the Father except through Me***” (John 14:6).

Jesus was saying, “Hey! I am your one and **only** travel agent to the Father’s throne, Brothers and Sisters. Get it! You can go any other way you want – *for now* – and many will. Shoot, it’s so easy, *anyone* can do it – but you won’t wind up where I am and where My Father is. I am **THE** cramped gate and narrowed way. You bet it’s not easy. Neither was the price I paid for you, but I paid it so all you have to do is find the cramped gate and follow me. There won’t be many who do, by the way. There’s only one cramped gate, and it’s easy to miss. And remember, I walk the narrowed way. so don’t think you can carry anyone along with you. It’s no problem to stay on the narrowed way, so long as you follow my footsteps; but don’t think you can look around to see if anyone else is following, ‘cause it’s just as easy to slip and fall.”

If the Lord is redetermining your life today, you are seeing every relationship you have had up to now pass through the same fire that you yourself are going through. While God is redetermining your life, He is refining your character. Old patterns of thinking, speaking and acting won’t work, and you’ll know it quickly. Old tolerations are no longer there. What there was grace for yesterday is not there today and may never be again! so don’t keep trying to make stuff right that isn’t. God’s moving on and either you’ll follow Him or you won’t but He’s about fulfilling His purpose. The best you can do is fulfill the purpose for which He created you. At the same time relationships may not make it through this fire. Any that do is because the person on the other side of that relationship is committed to God in the same way you are. Either way, you can’t care. Jesus didn’t tell the man, whose father must have just died, “*Oh, I’m so sorry for your loss. Yes, by all means, take some time to care for his remains and mourn.*” Now, Jesus said, “Look, all those people back there are as dead as your dad. Let them bury Him, **IF** you’re serious about following me.”

In Luke’s account we started with, the first and last guy approached Jesus: “I’ll follow you.” Neither one was called nor chosen – just like LOT. The second guy was called and chosen by the Lord. The significance to me is the principle Jesus declared when he

said, “**Many are the called, yet few are the chosen,**” in **Matthew 22:14**. Jesus called to the throngs, but He chose only a handful. Only twelve stayed to the end, and even one of those had been designated to betray the Lord, for that one’s own destruction. Back to Luke’s account: all three men had higher priorities – something more important than Peter, James and John, who dropped their nets immediately and left it all to follow Jesus.

When The Lord redetermines your life, it is because you have **already** said YES to Him. You’ve already left your nets, your families of origin, even your marriages and your children, to enter the cramped gate and walk the narrowed way in His footsteps. Nowhere do the scriptures say that you can’t slip off that path and be left behind, by the way. If we are not watching and listening to Him closely, I see nothing that guarantees our safe passage and everything that urges us to pay attention and be on our guard for every step and at every turn.

Look at Paul. Next to Jesus Christ, Paul is my all-time favorite guy. Talk about redetermining a life! Paul realized what the apostle John only prophesied:

1 John 3:2-3

Beloved, now are we children of God, and it was not as yet manifested what we shall be. We are aware that, if He should be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him according as He is.

3 And everyone who has this expectation in Him is purifying himself, according as He is pure.

Paul saw the Lord “as He is.” He was blinded by the sight and knocked to His feet by the presence of the glorified Lord of Hosts, Who also spoke to Paul directly. Paul was the only apostle who was sovereignly called, hand-picked, and personally trained by the Risen Lord. People have sometimes criticized me for being so adamant about what Paul said and wrote. Yes, I am and unashamedly so, for the reasons I just gave. In some ways, Paul’s example is more real to me than Jesus’ example because Jesus was sinless. Paul wasn’t, and he was transparent about the horrific extent of it. The point here is that Paul was on his way to fulfill his purpose when the Lord stopped him in his tracks, literally.

Read long with me Paul’s own account of his life’s redetermination, as he testifies before King Agrippa:

Acts 26:

9 "I, indeed, then, suppose myself bound to commit much contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene, which I do also in Jerusalem.

10 And besides, many of the saints I lock up in jails, obtaining authority from the

chief priests. Besides, I deposit a ballot to despatch them.

11 And at all the synagogues, often punishing them, I compelled them to blaspheme. Besides, being exceedingly maddened against them, I persecuted them as far as the outside cities also.

12 Among which persecutions, going to Damascus with the authority and permission of the chief priests,

13 at midday, on the road, I perceived, O king, a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining about me and those going together with me.

Stop right here: this is Paul seeing Jesus Christ “**as He is**,” as the apostle John wrote. Now, Paul is yet human, so he can’t “*make Him out*,” so to speak, but there is no other account in the entire NT in which the glorified Jesus Christ appears to anyone. John’s Revelation was given in a vision. The encounter Paul had was wide awake at midday, when the sun shines its brightest, but the Lord’s presence is even brighter – so much so, it is impossible to stand up in it, let alone look into it without being blinded. Let’s go on with Paul’s retelling of the encounter:

14 Besides, at all of us falling down to the earth, I hear a voice saying to me in the Hebrew vernacular, 'Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me? Hard is it for you to be kicking against the goads!'

15 Now I say, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' Now the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.

16 But rise and stand on your feet, for **I was seen** by you for this, to **fix upon** you before for a **deputy** [**a servant – one who aids another in any work**] and a **witness** [**“Martus” in Greek, from which we get Martyr – meaning “one who testifies to facts he has perceived”**] both of what you have perceived and that in which **I will be seen by you**,

Here’s the beginning of the redetermination of Paul’s life. Up to now, Paul’s on a mission to discredit the gospel and destroy its followers – who were his brother and sister Jews, by the way, so Paul was seriously committed to Judaism – really, to Pharisaism and to religion. Christ Himself says He was seen by Paul, and He will yet be seen, alluding to the revelation He would give Paul. Then, the Lord tells Paul why He has singled him out:

To fix upon you – wait till you hear this: “*to put into the hand, to deliver into the hands; to take into one’s hands; to set before one’s self, to prostrate, to **determine**; to choose, to appoint for one’s use*”. ([Thayer](#))

17 extricating (**wrenching out**) you from the people [**that is the nation of Israel**] and from the nations [**that is the Gentiles**], to whom I am commissioning you,
18 to open their eyes,

Other versions really miss the intent of these words, in my opinion. They render “extricate” as “rescue” or “deliver,” as if Paul needed delivered or rescued from Israel or the Gentiles. He wasn’t in trouble yet! The Lord didn’t need to rescue or deliver him yet. Also, I can’t find any support for this, I believe that the Lord’s first commission was to both Israel AND the Gentiles. It looks to me like Israel and the nations are both included in the extrication AND the commission. Clearly, both groups needed their eyes opened, and Paul went to the Jews and Gentiles alike with His message – His evangel. It was only after He and Barnabas had been thrown, and Paul had had enough of his stiff-necked brethren in **Acts 18:6**, when he said, “I shall go to the nations.”

I believe the Lord says, in Paul’s retelling of His encounter with the Risen Christ, “Paul, you think you’re blind right now? This is **nothing** compared to the blindness that the people – MY PEOPLE CALLED BY MY NAME – and the Gentiles, are walking in, but I’m wrenching you out from Israel AND the Gentiles. This isn’t a rescue or a deliverance. This is me sovereignly wrenching you out from everyone, like a dentist pulling an impacted wisdom tooth. I am wrenching you out for My purposes to teach you and train you and, when I’m ready and you’re ready, I’m sending you to Israel and the nations, and here’s the purpose:”

to turn them about from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, for them to get a pardon of sins and an allotment among those who have been hallowed by faith that is in Me.’

“**Turn about**” has two important meanings here: one is “to turn to,” and the other is “to cause to return or to bring back.” ([Thayer](#)) Now I find support for my earlier assertion that Paul’s commission included Jews and Gentiles alike: Gentiles had to **turn to** God, not **re-turn**, since they’d never been turned toward Him in the first place. Israel, on the other hand, had to be caused to **re-turn** or to be brought back to their God, from whom they had turned away, especially since they had rejected Jesus Christ, their Messiah. Also, though less importantly, Gentiles didn’t have a concept of sin, since they had no law to illuminate it. Not that they weren’t sinning – they were, clearly, but they had no Godly standard; only whatever standards they erected for themselves. The bigger point is that the term “**to turn them about**” carries the weight of necessity for both Jew and Gentile in the Lord’s commission to Paul.

Now, listen to verses 16-18 again. Just listen to them, but **take** them – breathe them in – for your own life and call. This is the Lord speaking to you right now:

16 But rise and stand on your feet, for I was seen by you for this, to fix upon you before for a deputy and a witness both of what you have perceived and that in which I will be seen by you,

17 extricating you from the people and from the nations, to whom I am commissioning you,
18 to open their eyes, to turn them about from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, for them to get a pardon of sins and an allotment among those who have been hallowed by faith that is in Me.'

Now consider what Paul was in for after his first encounter with the Lord. What were you in for after your first encounter? Paul was blinded, and so sent a man to lay hands on him and deliver a message:

Acts 9:

6 Nevertheless, rise and enter the city, and **it will be spoken to you what you must be doing.**"

7 Now the men who are journeying with him stood dumbfounded, hearing, indeed, the sound **[not the words, notice, only the sound]**, yet beholding no one.

8 Now Saul was raised from the earth, yet, his eyes being open, he observed nothing. Now, leading him by the hand, they led him into Damascus,

9 and he was **three days** not observing aught, and he neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias!" Now he said, "Lo! it is I, Lord!"

11 Now the Lord to him, "Rise! Go to the street called 'Straight,' and seek in the house of Judas for a Tarsian named Saul, for lo! he is praying.

12 **And he perceived in a vision a man named Ananias entering and placing his hands on him so that he should be receiving sight.**"

The Lord told Ananias that he was showing Paul a vision of Ananias coming to lay hands on him – The Lord was already beginning Paul's training, three days after His encounter on the road. "*Here's what's going to happen. Here's his name, and here's what he'll do, and here's what will happen to you.*" Notice, The Lord was redetermining Ananias' life through this as well. He was appalled, but he didn't second guess the vision or the word of Lord he had received through the vision. Revelation was followed by obedience, which, as we'll see, was confirmed and I have no doubt the blessing followed.

13 Yet Ananias answered, "Lord, I hear from many about this man, how much evil he does to Thy saints in Jerusalem.

14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who are invoking Thy name." **[Paul's purpose in coming to Damascus was both known and feared!]**

15 Yet the Lord said to him "Go, for he is **a choice instrument of Mine, [talk about being chosen!]** to bear My name before both the nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel,

16 for I shall be intimating to him how much he must be suffering for My name's sake."

"Intimating" is "to show by placing before the eyes; to show by words and arguments, i.e. to teach; to show by making known future things." (Thayer)

17 Now Ananias came away and entered the house, and placing his hands on him, he said, "Saul! Brother! The Lord has commissioned me (Jesus, Who was seen by you on the road by which you came), so that you should be receiving sight and be filled with holy spirit."

18 And immediately fall from his eyes as if scales, and he receives sight.

Besides, rising, also, he is baptized,

19 and obtaining nourishment, is strengthened. Now he came to be with the disciples in Damascus some days.

20 And immediately, in the synagogues, he heralded Jesus, that He is the Son of God.

Notice that Paul's first revelation was an unmistakable encounter which redetermined his life, and it blinded him – he had previously been spiritually blind; now he was physically blinded – the encounter itself was a metaphor of the condition of the very people to whom the Lord was commissioning Paul. The second revelation was a further redetermining, as his physical sight was restored and a new spiritual sight was birthed – again, precisely what Paul would begin undertaking among Jews and Gentiles alike. Finally, Paul obeyed the revelation he had been given to date and went immediately into the synagogues to herald Jesus, that He is the Son of God. Yes, of course! What else could he do! He would learn that soon enough.

The lesson here is that The Lord chooses whom He will – however unlikely that person may seem to himself or herself, let alone to anyone else – and the one chosen has no question as to the source or nature of his or her choosing. What Paul soon learned was that the redetermining of his life would send him into a kind of spiritual exile for 14 years, so that the Lord could complete his revelation download and training. Paul could look to no one other than the Lord Himself for validation. He didn't even meet any of the Apostles in Jerusalem for 3 years (Galatians 1), and his radical conversion caused such an uproar that they asked him to leave. It was 14 years later when Barnabas came to fetch him.

When the Lord redetermined Paul's life, he turned it completely upside down, shook out everything that wasn't useful, and filled him up with what the Lord wanted in him. At the same time, he turned everyone else's life upside down who knew Paul or knew about

him. It was an enormously disorienting experience for Paul and everyone in the civilized world, ultimately.

God is very efficient. He's never working on only one person at a time. If you have felt like the Lord has turned you and your life upside down, shaken out everyone and everything that was once familiar to you, you're in good company! Everyone you know is being tested and shaken too. Many are being give an opportunity to honor and respect God's choosing of your life. They may or may not be similarly chosen. It's enough that they recognize you are and treat you accordingly. Those who do may get to enjoy some of their own revelation and action by God in their own lives. Those who choose to be chosen, as you have, will be in your life, or not, according to the commission the Lord gives you.

If you are a "choice instrument of His," you cannot escape the call of God on your life; nor would you want or even think that. If you have felt like you've been on a spiritual "back burner," with seemingly no real, immediate mission or influence, I would suggest that you are in the midst of the Lord's redetermining your life in perhaps every facet of it. And so we come full circle from where we began:

You may feel like you have no place to lay your head – life may be very uncomfortable in many areas, and it may feel like there is little or not rest.

You MUST let the dead bury their own dead. God is shutting doors that no longer serve you and they must not be reopened – at least not by you; and He's opening others that do serve His purpose in your life. Leave your hands off the doorknobs. This extends to spouses, kids, homes, locations, jobs, careers – if we hold anything off from God's hand, we may pay a bigger price than we would ever imagine, let alone want to pay.

Barbara tells this wonderful story of a pastor who said to her, *"I just drive the bus. People get on, people get off. I can't get mad when they get off, and I can't get excited when they get on. I just drive the bus."*

Lastly, once you have put your hand to the plow –acknowledged and accepted the call and the One Who chose you – don't look back. Lot's wife did that, and there is a pillar of salt in the land today as a result. Talk about all forward progress being stopped!

Listen to this, as we close tonight: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful Face. And the things of earth will grow strangely in the light of His glory and grace."

Father, we do turn our eyes toward you, as we shimmy through the cramped gate and walk along the narrowed way, looking fully into your wonderful face by the spirit. The things of Earth do grow strangely – and thankfully – dim, in the bright, warm light of your glory and grace. Thank You, Lord, for showing Yourself to us, in word and in visions. We look for the day – Your day – when we see you as you are. Until then, we say yes and Amen. Take us and use us as you will. We will keep our hands off the doorknobs. Redetermine, reshape, and mould us and our lives however it suits You. And we give you praise and honor and glory in Your holy name. Amen.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you: the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."