“Be Careful How You Walk”

(by David McClister)

One of the most common metaphors in the Bible is the use of the word “walk” to refer to how we live our lives. When the Bible says that Abraham “walked” with God (see **Genesis 17:1**), it refers to the way Abraham lived his life, in fellowship with God. Similarly, when Paul says ***“walk by the Spirit”*** (**Galatians 5:16**), he means that we are to live in accordance with the Spirit’s teaching and direction. It is an easy metaphor to understand.

Behind the metaphor of “walking” is the idea that life is like a journey. This concept was widely used throughout history by many different peoples to think about the nature of life. Like a journey, each life has a starting-point, has moments of both ease and difficulty, requires endurance, and eventually has an endpoint. Some lives, like some journeys, come to sudden and unexpected ends. Some get lost and off -course, others break down and never reach the planned destination, and others are successful. When we think about it, there are many similarities between life and a journey.

Yet not all traveling is the same. In particular, I am thinking about two different kinds of travel, each of which is fairly common. The first kind is when you make a trip with a particular destination as your goal, and where the arrival at the destination is always the main point of your effort. We routinely take trips like this all the time — to the grocery store (to get a loaf of bread), to the homes of our families and friends (for a meal or holiday), to the Post Office, to the church building, etc. In each of these, the important thing is that we get where we are going. There might be several alternate routes, and we often have to choose the one that will get us there most efficiently even if it means taking smaller and rougher roads. That is, which way we go is of far lesser importance than, and is wholly subservient to, getting to the destination and the business we have there.

The other kind of trip is when you go without any particular destination in mind (with possibly the exception of returning home at some undetermined point). When you take this kind of trip, you have no “goal” in the sense of a place that you must reach. In this kind of travel, the trip is not defined by the destination, but by the journey itself. Because there is no “destination” for this kind of trip, the real enjoyment of it comes from what you see and do as you travel. It is the kind of trip where the point is to see new things, to experience something different, and generally to just “enjoy the ride.” If you take this kind of trip, you will likely intentionally take the roads where the scenery is the best, or where you can take in little-known pieces of history. And if you are lucky, this kind of trip has no timetables. You just “go,” and you wander around taking in the enjoyment as it comes. Since you have no destination, you can’t take wrong turns or get lost. You just take in the scenery as it comes. [Yes, I’m thinking here about a motorcycle trip.] Of course, this latter kind of trip tends to be more enjoyable in some ways and less stressful, because concern over reaching the goal simply does not exist. When you don’t have to be at a specific place at a specific time, life seems easier. It is no wonder that many people enjoy this “adventure touring” kind of travel. It is, in a word, relatively easy.

Now the point I wish to make from all of this is a simple one: our life in Christ is the kind of journey that has a destination. Reaching the destination is the goal, and it requires that we sacrifice and endure along the way. Sometimes we have to go through a path that is not as scenic or enjoyable as others, sometimes we get tired of the journey, and sometimes we get distracted or even get confused and make some wrong turns. The important thing is that we never lose sight of the destination, the goal, the finish line. That is what is truly important, and it will be worth whatever hardship or endurance it takes to get there. The goal of our walk with God is to reach heaven and be in the presence of our God and Savior. It is with this outlook that Paul, sensing his days were nearly over, said ***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing”*** (**2 Timothy 4:7–8**). Perhaps even more to the point are these words: ***“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”*** (**Philippians 3:12–14**).

That is a simple truth, and yet I fear that many people have that turned around in their thinking. In particular, I fear that many people in this world view Christianity more as the second kind of trip, as the kind of journey where we just aimlessly wander and do things at our leisure. For such people, they do not engage in Christianity for the sake of it taking them somewhere, and they have no intention of letting it take them somewhere. It is instead something they do because it is sometimes interesting or fun, because it is a pleasant diversion from other things in life; but it is not their goal in life. They lack commitment and endurance because they have no sense of “destination” or “goal.” To them, Christianity is kind of a joy ride, but it is not the central focus of their efforts in life. It is something to do in one’s spare time, or when one takes time off from their “real work” in life. But for them it is not a road with a destination.

Is it possible that this same kind of thinking has crept in among us? Are there some in our group who attend the public worship services simply because it is something to do, something that gets us out of the house for a while, or because it is simply a time to see our friends? Has Christianity become, for some of us, something to toy with, to tinker with, to enjoy when we feel like it, but otherwise to relegate it to a second-place status while we get on with the “more important” things of life? As Paul instructed us, we need to be careful how we walk (**Ephesians 5:15**). You will not reach heaven accidentally, or because you just happened by chance to wander there. You will not get there unless it has been your deliberate goal, and unless you have worked at staying on the course that leads there.