

GOING WITH JESUS

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Luke 9:51-62

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SERIES: ON THE WAY TO THE CROSS

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INTRO.

-- In the coming weeks we're going to prepare for Easter by following Jesus on His final journey to Jerusalem where He would fulfill His mission as Messiah by dying on the cross and being buried and then rising from the dead. As we travel with Jesus on that final journey, we will learn many valuable lessons about what it means to follow Jesus - to be His disciple.

-- That journey to Jerusalem and to the Cross begins in Luke 9:51-62.

I. JESUS DISPLAYS COMMITMENT. (VV. 51-56)

-- Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem by displaying His commitment to fulfill His mission as Messiah, the One who has come to save us from our sins.

A. JESUS SETS OUT FOR JERUSALEM. (V. 51)

-- Literally, Luke says that Jesus "set his face" to go to Jerusalem. Setting your face is an expression used in the OT to indicate determination and firm resolve.

(cf., Isaiah 50:7)

-- When I was in college in the 1970s was when Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical Jesus Christ, Superstar was first being performed. The musical presents Jesus as an ill-fated superstar, whose crucifixion death on the cross resulted from a lack of foresight. According to the musical, Jesus' poor planning led to things getting out-of-hand in Jerusalem and to Jesus' crucifixion.

The truth, of course, is just the opposite: Jesus' death on the cross was the fulfillment of a plan designed by the Triune God before the universe was even created. The Cross was why Jesus was born in Bethlehem, why He came to earth in human form. Jesus clearly states this to the Disciples earlier in this chapter.

Cf., vv. 20-22 (when Jesus asks the Disciples who they believe He is)

vv. 43b-44 (after Jesus has healed a demon-possessed boy)

-- Jesus knows fully what awaits Him in Jerusalem and resolves to go there for that very reason, because of His commitment to fulfill the eternal plan for our salvation.

B. JESUS IMMEDIATELY ENCOUNTERS REJECTION. (VV. 52-56)

1. The Rejection

-- When He starts His journey to Jerusalem, Jesus is in Galilee. Between Galilee and Jerusalem is Samaria. Most Jews would go around Samaria to avoid any contact with the hated Samaritans, but Jesus chooses, instead, to go straight through Samaria.

-- The first village where Jesus intends to stay finds out that He's going to Jerusalem and tells Him to stay away. John and James, showing why Jesus had nicknamed them "sons of thunder," are so offended that they want to call down fire from heaven to destroy the village, much like the way that God had destroyed the city of Sodom. Jesus, however, rebukes them and simply goes on to another town.

2. The Insight

-- We need to be sure not to miss the important insight into the nature of our discipleship that Jesus has just given to us here. As disciples we're called to follow Jesus in His mission not to judge but to save. Listen to Dr. John Piper's penetrating observation about this incident:

"Here is a question put to every believer by this text: does discipleship mean deploying God's

missiles against the enemy in righteous indignation? Or does discipleship mean following him on the Calvary road which leads to suffering and death? The answer of the whole New Testament is this: the surprise about Jesus the Messiah is that he came to live a life of sacrificial, dying service before he comes a second time to reign in glory. And the surprise about discipleship is that it demands a life of sacrificial, dying service before we can reign with Christ in glory." (Piper, "He Set His Face to Go to Jerusalem")

-- This is what people like Pastor Fred Phelps and the members of his Westboro Baptist Church refuse to accept. This past week the United States Supreme Court ruled that Phelps and his followers have the right to continue their practice of showing up at funerals of soldiers who have been killed in action to protest America's acceptance and promotion of homosexuality. They believe that America is under the judgment of God because of its embrace of homosexuality and that part of that judgment is our soldiers being killed in battle. So church members travel across the country to protest at military funerals with signs saying things like "God Hates Fags," "Thank God for Dead Soldiers," and "Thank God for 9-11."

What they are doing is despicable. The Supreme Court ruled (correctly I believe) that they have the right to do and say what they're doing and saying. But Jesus would rebuke them just as He rebuked James and John. They're demanding the right to be judges without first laying down their lives to follow the Savior who gave Himself for sinners.

II. JESUS DEMANDS COMMITMENT. (VV. 57-62)

-- Jesus goes on in verses 57-62 to demand commitment from those who would follow Him. These verses give us critical lessons in what it means to be a disciple. Understand this: every believer is a disciple. Everyone who trusts Christ as Savior must also confess Him as Lord. When we turn to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, we start a journey of following Him as His disciple.

-- Right away, at the beginning of this journey to Jerusalem, we see 3 encounters with would-be disciples that teach us critical lessons about discipleship. These encounters are all about what it means to follow Jesus; the word "follow" is central to all 3 encounters.

A. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER (VV. 57-58)

-- The lesson here is that the commitment necessary to follow Jesus is sacrificial.

1. The Man

-- This guy comes up to Jesus and says, "Hey, Jesus, I'll follow you wherever you go."

-- Now, that's just the kind of a person that most churches are looking for - a volunteer, and an eager one at that! He'd be checking every ministry on the back of the worship card. Most churches would say, "Quick, let's sign him up before he comes to his senses."

2. Jesus' Response

a. But Jesus, strangely enough, isn't so thrilled. In fact, Jesus even seems to throw cold water on the man's enthusiasm.

b. Why would Jesus respond like that?

-- Look again at what the man says: "I'll follow you wherever you go." The man doesn't know where Jesus is going, but Jesus, of course, does. Jesus knows that He's going to Jerusalem and to the cross. That's a horrific destination, and the journey to get there won't be easy.

-- What Jesus is saying to this man is this: "Not so fast. Take a minute to think about what you're signing up for - be sure you're ready to make the sacrifices.

-- Following Jesus is rewarding. It's the way to life - to life with purpose and meaning, to a life that makes a difference, to a life of joy that lasts beyond the grave throughout eternity. But following Jesus isn't easy. It never was meant to be. It will cost you. It will cost you personal convenience. It will cost you control over your life. Jesus wants you to know that up front.

B. THE SECOND ENCOUNTER (VV. 59-60)

-- The lesson here is that the commitment necessary to follow Jesus must have proper priorities.

1. Jesus Initiates, and the Man Responds.

-- This time Jesus initiates the encounter and calls the man to follow Him.

-- Look carefully at how the man responds: "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

I used to think, as some commentators suggest, that the father was not actually dead yet but that the son was planning to care for his father until he died, but there's nothing here to indicate that that was the case. I think it's safer and more accurate to assume that the man's father is dead and that the son wants to give the dead father a proper burial and to make sure his estate is settled.

2. Jesus Replies.

a. Jesus' reply to this man is actually rather shocking: "Let the dead [probably meaning those who are spiritually dead and have no interest in the things of God's Kingdom] bury their own dead [that is, those who are physically dead]."

This is shocking to us because it sounds as if Jesus is saying that caring about your parents isn't important. But we have good reasons to believe that Jesus is not saying that. For example, later on, when He is crucified and dying on the cross, one of the last things Jesus does is to instruct His disciple John to take care of His mother, Mary, thus indicating the value that Jesus placed on family responsibilities.

b. The key to understanding this encounter is the word "first." The man responds to Jesus call by saying, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." The word "first" is critical because it indicates the man's priorities. Following Jesus is important to this man and is something he's willing to do, but it isn't the man's first priority. The man has a higher priority than following Jesus - burying his father.

What Jesus is telling us here is that for the disciple nothing can take priority over our commitment to following Christ. Even the most sacred of human relationships and responsibilities - those within our families - are to be secondary to Christ.

c. I had to face this issue when I went to college. My father wanted me to attend the college that he went to, which was in his home town. But I knew that God wanted me to prepare to serve Him in ministry and that He was leading me to go to a different college, where I would receive a much better grounding in my faith. My father opposed this decision so much that he gave me an ultimatum: if I went to the other college he would disown me as a son and would have nothing to do with me any more. I was always trying to win my father's approval - that was something I valued enormously, but I knew that I had to give priority to God's leading. So I chose the other college and risked my relationship with my father. Thankfully, God helped my father to change his mind and accept and even support my decision, but I didn't know that would be the outcome at the time I had to decide.

B. THE THIRD ENCOUNTER (VV. 61-62)

-- The lesson here is that the commitment necessary to follow Jesus must be unconditional.

1. The Volunteer

-- Once again, another man volunteers to follow Jesus, and once again we see the word "first," which indicates that there are at least 2 problems with this man's commitment:

(1) A problem with his priorities - like the last man, there's something that's a higher priority than following Jesus, and

(2) The man's commitment is conditional. Like couples who have pre-nuptial agreements, this man has pre-conditions on his commitment to follow Jesus. The trouble with this man is that he wants to stay in control. He wants to follow Jesus, but he also wants to determine when and how. He wants to get on board with Jesus, but he wants to be the one behind the driver's wheel.

2. Jesus' Reply

-- Jesus' reply to this man is that becoming His follower requires an unconditional commitment - to cast the sails of your life to the wind of the Spirit and never look back.

-- Jesus' words here remind us of the OT story of Elisha when God called him to follow Elijah and take Elijah's place as a prophet to Israel. Elisha was plowing with a team of oxen when Elijah approached him and invited him to become his assistant. Remember what Elisha did? He slaughtered the oxen and offered them as a burnt sacrifice to God, using the wooden plow as fuel for the fire. That's the kind of radical, no-holds-barred, no-looking-back commitment that Jesus is looking for in His disciples.