

### Destined for Jerusalem – Part 1

We are now transitioning from (1) Jesus' shocking revelation that He **must** go to Jerusalem "to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (9:22), and that He, the Son of Man, "is about to be delivered into the hands of (lawless) men" (9:44; Acts 2:22-23), along with (2) the equally disturbing implications for what it will mean for those if they choose to follow Him to Jerusalem that "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (9:23) "for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (9:24), which Jesus basically is calling those who would follow Him to love Him more than life itself **TO** His now setting out, with those who will go with Him, **for Jerusalem**, or more to the point, **for the cross**, which He was sent to bear (9:51).

The section we have been looking at (starting at 9:1), which included the amazing display of Jesus' majesty on top of the mountain **to assure** the reader of the Gospel (along with Peter, James, and John → early church) that Jesus will in fact accomplish what God the Father has sent His Son to do (9:34-35), concluded Sunday by emphasizing that true greatness in the Kingdom of God is not achieved in ourselves in the manner that the world would measure greatness (9:46-48).

Rather, true greatness is a gift of God's grace – God mercifully bestows it upon those whom He chooses – and from what Jesus teaches God grants the status of greatness only upon those who are humbled before Him by the cross of Christ. Further, Jesus taught us that a receiving of Jesus and of God the Father Himself, a fellowship and communion with them takes place only where God Himself has prepared a humble and contrite heart and who appropriately trembles at God's Word (9:48; cf. Isa. 66:2).

Think about what the Gospels are seeking to achieve at this point. Imagine you are living in the middle-to-late, first century in the Year of our Lord and you have the privilege of hearing the Gospel of Luke read for the first time. What is Dr. Luke seeking to do to you through his Gospel? Well, first he certainly wants those who have not believed in Jesus for salvation to come to faith. But let's assume by God's marvelous grace that you have already confessed with your mouth Jesus as LORD and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead so that you have been saved by hearing the Word of Christ (cf. Rom. 10:9, 17). But now you need to be instructed in what even those who haven't yet come to faith in Christ need to hear – what it means to be a follower (a disciple) of Jesus Christ. That is what Luke is going to begin to lay out at this point of the Gospel.

He records these important moments as Jesus “sets His face to go to Jerusalem,” where Jesus will use this time to draw His disciples into His “way of life” (9:51), which is the only true way of life. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Note what Jesus did not say! Jesus did not say He will lead us to the way or He will show us the way, as if “the way” was a path separate from Him. No, Jesus said He is “the Way,” He Himself is the only pathway to God – He is the only way to life. There is no other way – Peter proclaimed for the priestly rulers in Jerusalem:

**Acts 4:11-12** <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

It is because Jesus is “the Way” that the early church were themselves called “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22; cf. [Christians - 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16] & [Nazarenes - Acts 24:5]). Early Christians were called “the Way” because they were in union with Jesus, who is “the Way.” It is the mystical union with Jesus Christ that defines who we are. As Paul said:

**Galatians 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but **Christ who lives in me**. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Or again in Colossians:

**Colossians 3:3-4** <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When **Christ who is your life** appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Now, what does this mean for what we are transitioning to in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 9:51)? Jesus is not simply preparing His disciples for the immediate days ahead leading up to the cross. Rather, the disciples are literally going to take Jesus’ place, after Pentecost, to exponentially expand Jesus’ preaching of the Kingdom of God. Jesus, as the Teacher, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life is therefore bringing the disciples into His sphere of life in order to replicate His life (which, as we will see, will ultimately depend upon the Holy Spirit).

So what should we expect in the following chapters (through 18:31-34)? First of all, be on the lookout for the radical calling of Jesus. If you were deeply disturbed by Jesus’ explanation of what is entailed in following Him in 9:23-27, then you need to prepare yourself before Almighty God for an intensification of what it means to follow Jesus. As we will see, Jesus calls you to nothing less than to give up everything to follow Him and if you are unwilling to let everything in this life go at the moment He calls you, then know for certain that Jesus declares you unfit for the Kingdom of God.

Second, be prepared to have your whole view of life challenged. Jesus has a marvelous way of turning everything you thought was how the world worked, upside down. When Jesus confronts our worldly, sinful, fallen way of thinking we begin to realize that the way to greatness is by becoming a slave to all, even to those little children who have nothing to offer us in return; that the path to glory is through weakness, suffering and ultimately death; that it is the broken and contrite heart which is truly happy; that to have nothing is to have everything; that to give up all is to receive all; and that it is when we are weak that we are strong, when we are poor that we are rich, and when we were crucified in Christ that we are truly victorious.

We are now told, in **v. 51**, that the time that God had ordained for Jesus to be “taken up” has arrived, which most likely refers to Jesus’ ascension into Heaven and His session at the right hand of the Father in glory. But before Jesus can be lifted up to Heaven, there must be another lifting up from the earth, which must come first (**cf. John 12:32-33**). So as Jesus sets out for the cross, He gathers His disciples around Him and the teaching begins (**v. 51**).

But before they take their first step, we discover that John is upset (**v. 49**). It appears that someone is encroaching upon the apostles’ territory, which is certainly complicating the apostles’ race towards greatness (**v. 45**). John’s irritation turned into confrontation with this brother – who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name – because he was not in lock-step with the twelve. So John and the others attempt to put a stop to – to squash -- this brother’s ministry in Jesus’ name (**v. 49**).

Immediately, we sense that John’s irritation with this brother is misplaced. After all, his frustration seems similar to that of the Pharisees who were often equally irritated by what they perceived as Jesus’ encroachment upon their ministry. They believed Jesus was moving in upon their territory and drawing others away from them. John’s frustration was much the same. He didn’t like the fact that someone out there might be drawing others away from John and the other disciples (**v. 49**). After all, John and the others were competing amongst themselves of who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God – the last thing they needed was another rival (**cf. v. 46**). What is going on here?

John, along with the others, was obsessed with being in control. He especially wanted to control others. He liked the idea of having people come to him first and getting his permission before they could act. It most likely gave him a sense of power and fed his pride. Now, while we could certainly draw out, this morning, this pride-driven thirst for control over others to an almost limitless discussion of seeking to control the lives of others around us, we must focus in on John’s exclusive, overly narrow-minded approach to other followers of Jesus Christ who do not necessarily follow in his group.

John reminds us of that new Calvinist who has recently learned just enough theology to beat up everyone around him who does not dot every theological "I" or cross every biblical "T" in the same way he does. John looks at this brother, who is ministering in Jesus' name (v. 49), but because he is not part of John's group, he must not be doing it right and John and the others try to forbid him from serving Jesus any further. Have you ever looked down at a brother or sister in Christ and thought to yourself, "Well, they may call themselves a Christian but they're not really 'Reformed,'" and then add in your heart, "like I am!"?

Jesus' response is absolutely clear and reassuring (v. 50). Jesus reminds us even before the church experienced its many divisions throughout her history that there will be others who are not always part of "our group" but who are still serving the Kingdom of God by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I know that many of us think that OPC stands for the "Only Perfect Church," but Jesus warns us to be careful to not draw the line between those who are inside and those who are outside too narrowly - to not look down upon, or try to restrain those who are serving our LORD Jesus in a manner that may be slightly different from our own.

Of course, you will have to use Biblical discernment in making these distinctions. After all, Jesus drew a distinction between some who ministered in His name but did not belong to Him and those whom the Father truly gave to the Son:

**Matthew 7:21-23** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.<sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy **in Your name**, and **in Your name** cast out demons, and **in Your name** perform many miracles?'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.**'

You will have to search the Scriptures for a much fuller understanding of where to draw the line between a true and false church but Paul gives a strikingly clear and helpful plumb line for the church to use in just a handful of passages. Paul explains to the Philippians:

**Philippians 1:15-18** Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.<sup>16</sup> The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.<sup>17</sup> The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.<sup>18</sup> What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, **Christ is proclaimed**, and in that I rejoice.

To the Galatians he says:

**Galatians 1:6-9** I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;<sup>7</sup> which is *really* not another; only there are some

who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you **a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you**, he is to be accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you **a gospel contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed!

Finally, to the Corinthians, Paul adds:

**2 Corinthians 11:2-3** <sup>2</sup> For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the **simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ**.

It is clear from all three of these passages that Paul draws the line clearly and boldly between a true and false church, between a genuine and imaginary Christian at the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the one true Gospel, which shines all light upon “the simplicity and purity of Christ.” In each of these letters, Paul will go to great lengths to lay out for us what is the true doctrine of Jesus Christ and the Gospel that he preached so that we can all be assured that we are not falling prey to a false Gospel. We can know with certainty that any ministry that seeks to draw our eyes from Jesus Christ and Him alone crucified for our sins and raised from the dead for our justification has ceased to be a true church and has rather become a vehicle of Satan.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ can't be any clearer. The Reformed Church has referred to this doctrine as the “perspicuity of the Scriptures,” which means that the Scriptures are absolutely clear in all the essentials of the Gospel – all that is vital to be a Christian and a true church. Now some will want to choose to divide over non-essentials, or what we call in theology, the “adiaphora,” so as to become sectarian. But the Reformed churches have tended to draw the line where Paul draws it here – the preaching of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, along with the proper administration of the sacraments, which are visible signs and seals of that one Gospel, and the faithful discipline of the church so as to protect the flock of God from any false gospels which could lead God's flock away from Jesus Christ.

So, we can then begin here, so that as Jesus warns us, that we are careful to not so shift the line of demarcation that we exclude other brothers from the body of Christ just because they don't join with us in our particular gathering. More to the point of what Jesus is saying to John, what Jesus must teach all of His disciples, including you this morning, which is found in John's Gospel:

**John 13:34-35** <sup>34</sup> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." **Amen! -SDG-**