

Destined for Jerusalem – Part 2

Jesus is once again on the move. And as He has done in the past, He uses this time of transition/of movement to teach His disciples about what it means to follow Him. We have already seen Jesus, at a crucial moment in His instruction of the disciples, draw them to Himself to clarify for them both (1) what He has come to earth to do and (2) what it will mean for anyone who chooses to follow Him. In 9:22, Jesus revealed to the disciples what He was sent by His Father to do – what was both confirmed at His baptism (3:21-22) and what has been assured at His transfiguration (9:31, 35). And then He adds, “If anyone would come after me . . .” (9:23-25). Jesus summarizes what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There is nothing too difficult about what Jesus means in these verses. We can easily summarize the calling of Jesus: *if you wish to follow Jesus you must love Him more than your very own life!* In fact, Matthew records Jesus saying:

Matthew 10:37-39 ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

As we will see today, he who chooses to start well in following Jesus, but then like Lot’s wife or Israel in the wilderness, looks back, he is not fit for the Kingdom of God (cf. 9:62).

Jesus is clear in His radical call to those who wish to follow Him. The call is costly! And what would you expect the call of the LORD of the universe to sound like? Did you expect Him to call you with the same half-hearted callings of the world who merely ask you to give up what you are willing to give up? Jesus calls you to nothing less than everything – both body and soul, in both life and death!

Throughout the centuries, many have heard this costly call and have turned away, as we will see in our text this morning (9:57-62; cf. John 6:66). And if this call sounds strange to you – far too stringent for you -- it is probably because the church in America, especially in our modern era, would rather have their ears tickled and have accumulated for themselves teachers in accordance with their own (sinful) desires rather than endure sound doctrine (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4). Very few have ever been willing to answer Jesus call as He Himself testifies:

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Those who have answered the call of Jesus have done so for one reason and one reason only:

John 10:14-15 ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

John 10:27-30 ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ "I and the Father are one.

But the disciples didn't learn everything they need to know all at once. In fact Jesus promised them that once He returned to Heaven:

John 14:26 ²⁶ ". . . the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

Even when God graciously made you a disciple of Jesus, you didn't learn everything Jesus wanted you to know all at the beginning – it takes a whole life to grow as a follower of Jesus Christ. One of the areas that certainly takes the longest, and probably will take our whole lives to see any real transformation, is for the LORD to remove our pride and grow us in the gracious and merciful character of Jesus.

We can see an example of our prideful heart runs amuck in our passage this morning (**Luke 9:51-56**). Why do I say the example of these disciples is an example of our unsubdued prideful hearts? Let's look at the story more closely.

In v. 51, we are told that the time for Jesus to ascend to His Father is fast approaching and so Jesus now sets His face like flint toward Jerusalem. To make preparations for His journey, He sent a few messengers head of Him and they entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him (v. 52). In a similar way, these messengers remind us of what was promised concerning Elijah (*cf. Mal. 3:1*) and what was fulfilled by John the Baptist who was sent to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ (*cf. Luke 3:3-6*). And the response of the Samaritans reminds us of what is coming shortly after Jesus will enter Jerusalem (9:53) – Jesus is not welcome in this Samaritan village.

Now at this point, the disciples experience what many of us have seen when we have tried to present the good news of Jesus Christ to others. In fact, Jesus even warned us that when we share the Gospel with others that many will not be ready or may never come to faith in Jesus Christ. While we can be assured that the Word of God never returns void and that it will always accomplish what God has sent it forth to do (*cf. Isa. 55:11*) we must also remember that we are not the Sovereign Spirit of God, who like the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound

but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going (**cf. John 3:8**). For some it may take more time to plow the ground and water the seed. For others they simply may not be the sheep whom the Father has given to the Good Shepherd. In other word, you are not the Holy Spirit in the lives of others and God has not given you the authority or power to determine what the proper response to God's Word should be. You are only an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer and He not only chooses how everyone will respond to His Word but He has already determined how He will use you in the process of accomplishing His Sovereign will. Always remember this: it is His sovereign will, not yours.

But these disciples choose another approach (**Luke 9:54**). Your approach to others who do not readily welcome Jesus into their lives may not be as severe as James and John's approach here, but there are probably times when you have at least felt similar to their anger, or perhaps frustration, at your loved ones' rejection of Jesus. After all, what is there to reject? Who wouldn't want to have their sins forgiven and be declared holy and blameless so that they could be ushered into the presence of perfect love by God? Why can't they see it? What's wrong with them? I saw it, what are they missing?

Once again, James and John remind us of the new Calvinist who has learned just enough theology to be really dangerous in hurting others! Jesus reminds them what they are missing (vv. 55-56). Jesus must remind His disciples what the mission is. Jesus did not come into the world to judge the world, as John 3:17 reminds us:

John 3:17 ¹⁷ "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

To be sure there is a day of wrath coming when Jesus returns:

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed.

But that day is not today. Rather Paul reminds the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain-- ² for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"--

What are these disciples' missing? What are you missing when you get angry with those who slam the door on Jesus' gracious offer of salvation?

James and John and you are driven by pride thinking that you did something that should be rewarded by God, while those who reject are really the ones who deserve God's "Hell-fire." They and you have forgotten the patience of the LORD that was shown to you in your coming to faith in Jesus Christ. You have forgotten that salvation is by grace, which means that we came only after we were called by Him. We did not choose Him, but He chose us (**cf. John 15:16**).

1 John 4:10 ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the propitiation for our sins.*

How easily it is for us who are now within the fold to forget the violence by which God brought us into the Kingdom of God (**cf. Matt. 11:12; John 6:44**). Jesus describes our coming to Jesus as a "new birth," (**John 3:3**) which having seen several I can't think of too many things in life which are more intense or dramatic. Saying that you were saved by grace does not mean you were saved by something trivial and easy. No! Your salvation was as violent as being nailed to a tree and left there to suffer and die. Further, the Holy Spirit of God had to bring you to conviction of sin and righteousness and judgment (**cf. John 16:8-11**) so that the Father could draw you out of darkness and into Jesus' Kingdom of marvelous light (**cf. John 6:44; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:9**).

As Jesus' disciples we must always remember who the LORD and Master truly is. It is our Triune LORD's sovereign choice who He will use to plow the field, who will water, who will plant the seed, and who will harvest who He has ordained. We don't make those choices nor do we, thank the LORD, decide who will and will not be judge and consumed by the fiery wrath of God. Remember the incredible grace and mercy and love that has been poured out upon you and go forth to proclaim the GOOD News of forgiveness of sins for all who believe on the LORD Jesus Christ. Today is the favorable year of the LORD to all who call on the name of the LORD Jesus and believe in the heart that God has raised Him from the dead (**cf. Rom. 10:9-10**).

We now turn to three examples, like the parable of the soils (**cf. Luke 8:5-8**), of different reactions to Jesus' calling to follow Him (**Luke 9:57-62**).

The first example Jesus gives is of a man who approaches Jesus himself with a desire to follow Him (**v. 57**). Jesus quickly reminds this individual of the high cost of following Him (**v. 58**). What Jesus is basically saying is that this person needs to be sure he or she has counted the cost of following Him because to follow Jesus is no walk through the park – to be Jesus' disciple is no summer holiday at the sea. Rather, it is a cross we are called to bear – His cross, His shame, His death will become our own (**cf. 9:23 f.**). How many times have you heard of folks struggling to come to Jesus because they were afraid that He would take all their toys away and send them to a third-world country to be a missionary? Many have turned away from following Jesus out of fear of the demands He might place upon them. The apostle Paul says that we are called to "fill

up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ" (**Col. 1:24**) and that we are called to "carry around in our bodies the dying of Jesus" (**2 Cor. 4:10**). It is as if Jesus is saying to this man, "Are you sure you are up to the challenge of following Me? Are you ready to give up all what makes you comfortable in this world to go and suffer with Me?" It is shocking at times to note how Jesus doesn't shy away of presenting the high cost of following Him when we are so used to hearing such an anemic evangelistic call to Jesus in our day. We invite people to treat the call to follow Jesus something like a buffet line at our favorite restaurant: come and pick what you are comfortable with and throw out all that offends you. After all, Jesus is in real need of your help and He is willing to take whatever you are willing to give up.

As we move to the second and third examples, we truly see just how weak such a call from the LORD of the universe is! In the second example, Jesus now extends the call (**v. 59**). But this time this individual has other priorities – honorable priorities for sure – but something remains in the way of seeking first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness (**cf. Matt. 6:33; v. 59**). Jesus responds to this individual's pressing concern it what sounds at first an extremely thoughtless reprimand (**v. 60**). This man's request is certainly one that would have been highly respected and honored by anyone in Jewish tradition – to bury not simply one's family member – but in honor of father and mother – to take time to bury one's father. But Jesus sees things much differently than we see them and He is attempting to change the way His followers sees the world. Jesus reminds this individual that the "dead" belong to another realm – "the dead" – and it is their concern to care for the needs of those who have entered into that realm (**v. 60**). But there is a much higher and urgent concern for those who are still alive! They must hear the good news of what Jesus has come into this world to do – to save sinners! It is not that Jesus is saying that this individual's dead father is unimportant and in almost any other scenario there is no question that we should take the time to honor and bury our dead loved ones. The point here is that when Jesus calls, nothing – not even those things we perceive as important – must stand in the way of following Him.

Finally, there are those who might be ready to follow Jesus some day but right now they have other things – other priorities -- they either want to do or are unwilling to give up to follow Jesus (**v. 61**). Jesus reminds this individual of the importance of not delaying the heeding of His call (**v. 62**). Sometimes we just have to wonder, in complete incredulity, do people not understand Who it is that is calling them to follow Him. And that's just the point. We will always be ready to thank the LORD Jesus that when we hesitate to heed the call to follow Jesus fully and completely that unlike us He did set His face to go to Jerusalem to die on the cross for our sins (**cf. vv. 62 → 51**). That is really the good news here! That when we look back (we are faithless), Jesus didn't (He was faithful) (**cf. 2 Tim. 2:13**). **Amen! -SDG-**