

Jesus Set His Face to Go to Jerusalem

Luke 9:51-56

In our sermon last week we noted how the disciples did not yet understand Jesus' role as the Messiah and the spiritual nature of the kingdom Jesus came to establish. Several times throughout this chapter Jesus tried to teach them and prepare them for what was going to happen in Jerusalem, but the disciples still did not understand. And their lack of understanding came out in their actions.

Last week we saw their pride toward each other and their prejudice toward others who were not a part of their group. We see another example of their lack of understanding about the ministry of Jesus in our text this morning. James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that did not show hospitality to Jesus. Jesus rebuked them sharply for suggesting this.

This is a very important passage and it is very instructive for us in several ways. As we study this text together this morning we will see Christ's destination, Christ's path, and Christ's mission. And over and over again we will see this blessed truth: "Jesus Set His Face to Go to Jerusalem."

I. Christ's Destination (v. 51)

Verse 51 is very important because it marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Up to this point Galilee has been the primary area of His ministry, but now

the focus turns toward Jerusalem and the work Jesus would accomplish there. From Luke 9:51 until Luke 19:44, Luke's gospel gives us an account of Jesus journey to Jerusalem. Along the way, Jesus continued to minister to the multitudes both with His teaching as well as miracles. And Jesus continued to teach His disciples and prepare them for what was to come.

This verse tells us that there was a perfect and ordained time for Christ's work of redemption. Verse 51 says, "When the time was come that He should be received up." These words indicate the fulfillment of prophecy in God's ordained time. This word which is translated as "come" or "drew near" is a word which implies "to fill completely." It was used back in Luke 8:23 to describe the boat Jesus and the disciples were in as "filled with water." The boat was completely filled and about to sink. So it was for the time of our Lord. The time of Christ had been completely filled. The time had come for Him to be received up. Jesus knew that it was His time.

Jesus was under no illusion about what waited for Him in Jerusalem. Remember what Jesus told his disciples back in Luke 9:22, "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain." Jesus knew that in Jerusalem He would suffer, be rejected, and be killed. But notice that the focus in this verse is on the completion of His work as Redeemer: "The time was come that he should be *received up*." The focus here is not on Christ's suffering, or His death, or even His resurrection. The focus is on

His ascension. A different form of this word is used in Mark 16:19 and in Acts 1 to describe Christ's ascension into heaven to be seated on the right hand of God.

Jesus would suffer in Jerusalem. He would be betrayed. He would be put to death. But He would be raised from the dead and ascend into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father. The time had come for Jesus to be "received up."

In a lesser way, but with the same hope all Christians can view their time of death as their time to be "received up." Death is an enemy. People call death "natural," but it's not natural. Death had no place in God's perfect creation. Sin introduced death. Romans 5:12, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Death is our enemy. Death is the wage we have earned with our sin. Death hangs over us all of our life until finally it takes our life away. There is no escaping it. This is why the world sorrows in death as those "which have no hope." (I Thessalonians 4:13)

But for the Christian, there is hope. For the Christian to die is to be received up unto Christ.

Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

II Corinthians 5:8, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

For some, death comes suddenly and unexpectedly, but others can see their time approaching. For you, Christian, take heart: the time is approaching for you to be received up. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I

will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

(Psalm 23:4) What a blessed hope we have in Christ.

Verse 51 also teaches us that there was a particular place appointed for Christ’s work of redemption. Jesus “set his face to go to *Jerusalem*.” Jerusalem was the appointed place for propitiation. Jerusalem was the center of worship God had established. Jerusalem was the pinnacle of the Jewish people and represented them as a whole. Jerusalem was like the vineyard in Jesus parable that was held by dishonest husbandmen who would not give their Master His due. Jerusalem was the city Jesus wept over and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” Jerusalem is where Jesus would die, be buried, and rise again. And from a hilltop outside of Jerusalem Jesus would ascend. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem. This was the particular place appointed for Christ’s work of redemption.

Take note of these words also: Jesus “*steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem*.” These words echo the words of the prophet in Isaiah 50:6-7, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore *have I set my face like a flint*, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

Jesus was steadfast. Jesus was resolved to follow through in the work of redemption. Though He would be buffeted, though He would be shamed, though He would be killed, He would not be turned back. He was resolved to obey the Father. And He did so confidently, assured of His victory over sin and death. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” “He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

From our text this morning we have seen Christ’s destination. He was headed for Jerusalem. Jesus knew the suffering and death that awaited for Him there. But He also knew that this was the will of the Father, that the time had come for Him to be received up. That His victory over sin and death in Jerusalem would be complete. And knowing all this, Jesus steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. We have seen Christ’s destination, now consider Christ’s path.

II. Christ’s Path (v. 52-54)

These verses tell us about an interaction between the disciples of Jesus and a village of the Samaritans. Why did such an interaction take place? Because Jesus went directly south from Galilee to Jerusalem. If you are familiar with the geography of Israel at the time of Christ you know that Galilee was north of Jerusalem, on the west side of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. Jerusalem

was about 90 miles south, also on the west side of the Jordan River. Between Galilee and Jerusalem was the region of Samaria. The shortest route from Galilee to Jerusalem was directly south through Samaria.

When possible, Jews traveling between Galilee and Samaria would take this direct route. We have many accounts in Scripture, as well as many Jewish sources that talk about Jews traveling through Samaria.¹ The historian Josephus was a Jew born in Jerusalem just a couple years after the time of Jesus. He is a reliable source for events that occurred during his lifetime. He wrote: “It was the custom of the Galileans, when they came to the holy city [Jerusalem] at the time of the festivals, to take their journeys through the country of the Samaritans.”² This was the normal route taken when it was available.

There was another route that went around Samaria on the east side of the Jordan River and then crossed back over to Jerusalem. This was a longer and more difficult route, but the Jews would sometimes go this way to avoid Samaria. Why? What was wrong with Samaria?

The Samaritans and the Jews did not get along. The word “samaritan” carries a positive connotation in our minds because of the parable about the “good

¹ Good article that cites Jewish sources: <https://thechls.org/en/Resources/Israel/Did-Jews-Travel-Through-Samaria-in-the-Time-of-Jesus#:~:text=To%20avoid%20Samaria%2C%20whose%20inhabitants,47>).

² *Antiquities* 20:118

samaritan.” But during the time of Christ there was deep animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews.

The Samaritans were a mixed people. When the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians 721 B.C. the ten northern tribes were dispersed throughout the Assyrian empire. Only the poor, illiterate, and unskilled were allowed to remain. Other people groups conquered by the Assyrians were brought in to settle where the Israelites had been carried away. Over time the people mixed and the result was the Samaritans. The Samaritans saw themselves as God’s people, but the Jews rejected them because they had mixed with Gentiles. The Samaritans eventually built their own temple on Mount Gerizim which they claimed was God’s true appointed place for worship as opposed to Jerusalem. About 130 years before Jesus was born, zealous Jews destroyed this temple but the Samaritans continued to worship on Mount Gerizim. There was political, ethnic, and religious tension between the Samaritans and the Jews and there were times when this broke out into open violence. Samaria was not always a safe place for the Jews to travel through, but Jesus took this route, the most direct route, as He “set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Now look at the interaction between the followers of Jesus and this village of the Samaritans. Jesus sent messengers out before Him. Jesus was traveling with a fairly large group, at least 13 men, but probably many more than that. Jesus sent these messengers ahead to announce His coming and to make preparations.

But this village of the Samaritans did not receive Jesus. They wanted nothing to do with Him. They did not want Him in their village. These messengers from Jesus were turned away. These Samaritans wanted nothing to do with their Master.

Consider what this village turned away, when they turned away Jesus. Jesus would have done much temporal good among them as He did everywhere he went, healing the sick and delivering people from spiritual oppression. Jesus would have preached the gospel to them. We know Jesus would have done this because He did the same in other Samaritan towns and villages in John's gospel. If this village had welcomed Jesus they would have welcomed the greatest blessing that had ever come to their village. But they did not welcome Jesus. They turned Him away.

Let us be reminded from this passage that as the world treated our Lord, so they treat His followers. We should not be surprised when the world does not receive us for the gospel's sake. They did not receive our Lord. Jesus said in John 15:18, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." In I Corinthians we are told that the gospel is foolishness to the lost. We should not expect a warm reception in this world. Jesus was not warmly received.

Yet Jesus did not waver. His face was set to accomplish the work the Father had ordained for him to accomplish. May we likewise not be deterred by rejection, but rather press on in the gospel work God has called us to.

Consider why this Samaritan village rejected Jesus. Verse 53 says, “Because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.”

They may have thought, “Why is Jesus going to Jerusalem?” Remember, in the Samaritan mind Jerusalem was not the legitimate center for the worship of God. They believed that God should be worshipped at Mount Gerizim. Jesus had a reputation as a great teacher. It may have bothered these Samaritans that Jesus did not recognize their worship center on Mount Gerizim as legitimate. It’s not as if the priests and scribes at the temple in Jerusalem liked Jesus. Yet that is where Jesus was headed to worship. Because Jesus had His face set to go to Jerusalem, this Samaritan village rejected him.

James and John wanted to respond to this rejection. They wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy this village. Again, this response from James and John demonstrated that the disciples did not yet understand the true nature of the Messiah and His work.

Who were James and John? They were brothers, the sons of Zebedee. Before Jesus called them as disciples they had worked with their father as fishermen. In Mark 3:17 they are called the “sons of thunder,” possibly due to their tempers and inclination to boisterous behavior. They were part of the inner-circle of disciples that Jesus separated from the others on a few select occasions.

When James and John saw how this Samaritan village treated Jesus, they went to Jesus with a question. They began, “Lord, wilt thou.” This is a good start.

We would all do well when we talk to the Lord in our prayers to begin the same way, “Lord, what is your will? What would you have me to do?”

But James and John already have an idea. They had grown up going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. They knew the Old Testament stories. They thought to themselves, “What would Elijah do?” And so they came to Jesus and said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

James and John were probably referencing the events found in II Kings 1:9-12. King Ahaziah sent a captain with 50 men to arrest the prophet Elijah. When the captain called upon Elijah to surrender himself Elijah replied, “If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed these men. This happened again. Another 50 men were sent. And another 50 men were consumed by fire from heaven.

James and John must have seen some parallels between those soldiers of Samaria and these Samaritans. Those soldiers had disrespected and intended to harm Elijah, God’s prophet. The Samaritans in our text had rejected Jesus, God’s Messiah. Those soldiers had been consumed by fire from heaven. Maybe Jesus would want these Samaritans to be destroyed in similar fashion. And so they asked Jesus, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

Learn from verse 54 that we can do many things that seem to be good and are done from good intentions with good reasons, and yet still be wrong. In this verse James and John demonstrated great confidence in the power they have received from Jesus: they believed they could call down fire from heaven that would consume an entire village. This power had not been given to the disciples. Jesus had told them how to deal with rejection back in verse 5 of this chapter: “Whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them.” Shake the dust from your feet and move on. But here, James and John seem to believe they they could call down fire from heaven. This suggests great confidence in the power they had received from Jesus.

They were concerned about the honor of Jesus. It was not for a personal slight or offense that they wanted to destroy this village. Their Master had been rejected, and rejected by Samaritans. They did not want to let this disrespect go unanswered. They were zealous for the honor of Jesus.

They sought to know the Lord’s will about this. They had a plan of action, but they went to Jesus to make sure that this is what He wanted.

They believed they had good precedent for such an action from the life of Elijah. This idea of calling down fire from heaven was not original to them. They only thought of this because they had heard of Elijah doing something similar.

To summarize: they had great confidence in the power they had received from Jesus, their concern was the honor of Jesus, they sought to please the Lord in this thing, and they believed they had Biblical precedent for this action. There were many good things present in their question, but they were as wrong as they could have possibly been.

James and John should have already known enough to realize that Jesus would not want them to call down fire from heaven to destroy this village. First, Jesus had never called down fire from heaven nor had He commissioned His disciples to call down fire from Heaven. James and John were confident in a power that they did not possess. A word of caution for us: there are a great many people who confidently claim power to do things in Jesus' name that Jesus never commissioned. May we boldly serve the Lord in those areas where He has given us power. And may we be on guard against the error of claiming any power of ability that has not been given to us by our Lord. We only have one infallible measure of this: the Word of God. May we humbly submit to His Word.

Second, Jesus did not come for the temporal honor of His name. Jesus came to do the will of the Father, and that included subjecting Himself to the reproaches of men. This is another area where we must be very careful. It is very easy to equate temporal honor of Jesus with true, spiritual honor.

All around the world there are massive, beautiful structures that have been built, purportedly, for the honor of Jesus. But inside those structures, Jesus is not

honored. There are many people sitting in churches all over our country right now who outwardly honor Jesus. There may be some sitting here now. You respect Jesus. You would never say anything bad about Him. You try to lead a moral life. You come to church on Sundays. As far as anyone can tell, you honor Jesus. But to truly honor Jesus we must obey Him. Not only in those actions which others see, but in private, and also in our thoughts and attitudes. True zeal for Christ's honor is not manifested in our blasting of others, but in our humility before God, our repentance, and our obedience.

Third, everywhere Jesus went He faced rejection. In His hometown He had to flee from a mob intent on killing him. The Gadarenes asked Jesus to leave their country. The scribes and Pharisees opposed Him at every turn. Jesus never called for any immediate judgment upon any of these people, but patiently suffered their rejection. Why would Jesus begin to call down fire upon His detractors now? Jesus' practice and His pattern for the disciples was patient suffering.

Finally, this Biblical precedent of Elijah did not correspond with their situation. Elijah was an Old Testament prophet. He was specifically commissioned by God to reprove the wickedness and idolatry of King Ahab and those who followed him. More generally, his role as prophet was to point people back to the law of God. The Law makes known to us our sin. (Romans 7:7) This is a terror to the unrepentant. Such a sign as fire falling from heaven was good and appropriate for Elijah's ministry.

In contrast, Jesus came as the suffering servant. Remember, back in Luke 4:18-19, when Jesus announced His ministry in Nazareth He read from Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Jesus stopped reading there, but Isaiah 61 continues: “and the day of vengeance of our God.”

Jesus will return in judgment, but at His first coming He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and He suffered, died, and rose again to accomplish our salvation. Fire falling from the sky to destroy a village was not a sign suitable for the ministry of Jesus.

We need to be very careful to guard against the same error James and John fell into on this occasion. Biblical precedent is not biblical warrant. Just because we find an account in the Bible that seems to approximate a situation we find ourselves in, that doesn't mean we can or should do what the people in the Bible did. We must be very careful that we don't abuse Scripture unto our own destruction. This is one of the reasons why it is so important for us to be in fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ. That fellowship helps us guard against errors like this.

So far from our text we have seen Christ's destination. He was headed for Jerusalem.

We have seen His path. He went directly. He went straight south from Galilee through Samaria, the most direct route to Jerusalem. It was clear that Jesus was headed to Jerusalem. So clear that this village of Samaritans turned Jesus away. They would not receive Him because His face was set to go to Jerusalem. He would not be turned aside. He would not refuse the work of redemption God the Father had ordained for Him to accomplish. Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. We have seen Christ's destination and Christ's path. Now consider Christ's mission.

III. Christ's Mission (v. 55-56)

In verse 55 we see Jesus rebuked James and John: "He turned, and rebuked them." James and John had been walking behind Jesus when they suggested this. Jesus stopped, turned, and rebuked them. James and John were in the wrong and Jesus immediately rebuked and corrected them.

Learn from this that when we follow Jesus we should expect to be rebuked and corrected. There is much in our lives that is not pleasing to God. We are accepted not on our merits, but on Christ's perfect righteousness. But God expects us to grow in Christ-likeness. That will require rebuke and correction. May we all submit ourselves to our Lord's correction as we follow Him.

There were two elements to this rebuke that Jesus gave. Two areas where the disciples needed to be corrected. First, James and John had misjudged their own spirit. They thought that they were zealous for Jesus, but in their question we see self-centered pride and a wicked desire for disproportionate revenge. Was everyone in this village worthy of death? Abraham pled for God to be merciful toward Sodom and Gomorrah. James and John wanted to see God's vengeance fall upon this little village in Samaria.

Take warning for yourself. Much wickedness can be found in the hearts of even the best people. We can so easily deceive ourselves and cover our wicked thoughts, attitudes, and actions with a veneer of religion. We can convince ourselves that what we are doing comes out of zeal for the Lord, even if those things are objectively wrong. History is full of examples that demonstrate this. We must be careful to discern our true motivations and be open to our brothers and sisters in Christ who can help us guard against self-deception in this area. James and John had misjudged their own spirit.

Second, James and John had not understood the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. That was Christ's mission. That is why he had His face set to go to Jerusalem. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news. The Law shows you that you are a sinner, under the just judgment of God. The gospel shows you the way of escape. The gospel is grace, mercy, peace and love. The gospel was introduced with miracles of

mercy, and it is propagated by humility, self-denial, and a reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

The gospel is never spread by Christians taking up arms. Blood and slaughter, fire and destruction: these are not tools to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. James and John wanted to destroy this village. Jesus rebuked them. Such a desire showed that they did not understand the person and work of Jesus Christ.

May we be reminded that we do not rely on any earthly power to advance the kingdom of God. True converts cannot be made through coercion or force. We must guard against the temptation to try to use or rely on earthly power to accomplish spiritual ends. It never works. It can never work. It is God's work, and we must do it God's way.

After Jesus rebuked James and John verse 56 says, "And they went to another village." They continued on their way. Jesus was not turned aside by this Samaritan village. Nothing would turn Him aside from His destination. His face was set to go to Jerusalem.

From our text this morning we have seen Christ's destination. He was headed for Jerusalem. Jesus knew the suffering and death that awaited for Him there. But He also knew that this was the will of the Father, that the time had come for Him to be received up. That His victory over sin and death in Jerusalem would be complete. And knowing all this, Jesus steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

We have seen Christ's path. He went directly. He went straight south from Galilee through Samaria, the most direct route to Jerusalem. It was clear that Jesus was headed to Jerusalem. So clear that this village of Samaritans turned Jesus away. They would not receive Him because His face was set to go to Jerusalem. He would not be turned aside. He would not refuse the work of redemption God the Father had ordained for Him to accomplish. Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem.

And finally, we have seen Christ's mission. Jesus came as a suffering servant. He did not come to establish his kingdom with blood, slaughter, fire, and destruction. He established His kingdom by willingly laying down His own life. He did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And He would not be turned aside from this mission. Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem.

As we leave this assembly today, dwell upon this blessed truth: Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. Praise God for our Messiah, and may we set our face to follow Him where He leads.