



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Road to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-62)

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We have arrived at a point in Luke's narrative that divides Jesus' ministry, he now begins moving in a premeditated manner toward Jerusalem. Up to this point, the text has focused on Jesus' coming and the revealing of his identity as the Christ of God. Now with his face set resolutely to accomplish his purpose in Jerusalem at the cross the text shifts its emphasis upon his departure. This has already been mentioned multiple times by Jesus. It was also confirmed by Moses and Elijah on the mountain when they spoke of his "exodus" which takes place in Jerusalem. Then God emphatically declared in an audible voice the necessity of listening to the Son to gain one's proper bearings in this life. As this journey begins what is presented is the importance of orienting one's life on the basis of Jesus and his purpose, and how pursuing this course will result in hostility. This is the path the Twelve must walk with Jesus as they find the enthusiasm of the crowds wane. They will be confronted with a deeper understanding of the cost of following the Christ of God and the challenges that waits for them in their future ministry responsibilities. Jesus does not shy away from the obstacles that face those who follow him. Instead, he is looking for those whose hearts reflect the good soil, those who would fully commit their lives to him and make him and his purpose their top priority.

As this journey to Jerusalem begins, Jesus does not bypass the region of Samaria by taking the circuitous but preferable route through the Transjordan. His path cuts through the heart of Samaria and he is unable to find lodging among these people. The reason for this rejection appears to be the result of his destination, namely Jerusalem. The refusal of the Samaritan village to receive Jesus and his disciples also highlights the challenges that faced those who sought to follow him. Jesus warned his would-be disciples about the impending nature of rejection that awaited those who commit to following him. This common thread of rejection also runs through the account of his journal to Jerusalem. What is being presented is the single-minded approach that Jesus had, and that all of his followers must come to share, as he begins to go down the road to rejection, suffering, and death. Those found rebuffing Jesus do so because they fail to embrace his divine purpose. The crowds that marveled at Jesus' miracles will become the very ones who reject him because the cross becomes a stumbling block.

Because rejection awaited Jesus, the quality of his followers was of paramount importance. The shallow and thorny soils must be exposed because only the fully committed are fit for service in the kingdom of God. With Jesus face set toward Jerusalem there is much the disciples need to grasp during this journey. This road they walk with their master will be their final preparation before Jesus is taken up and his ministry is entrusted into their hands. At this point they have not grasped the essence of following a king who goes to a cross. Like all men, the ministry of Jesus leaves those who follow him often bewildered. Instead of embracing power, Jesus calls those who follow him to be humble, merciful, and committed to reorder

their lives according to his purpose. They must not seek their own greatness, nor retribution at an offense, but willingly extend mercy in the face of opposition and re-prioritizes all life in terms of Jesus' expectation. As this account closes the resolution is left open ended which forces the reader to determine for themselves whether they will follow Jesus on the road to the cross, or will they become another half-hearted follower who finds their faith exposed by Jesus' call to discipleship.

Luke 9:51-62 - (51) When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (52) And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. (53) But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. (54) And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? (55) But he turned and rebuked them. (56) And they went on to another village.

(57) As they were going along the road, someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. (58) And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. (59) To another he said, Follow me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. (60) And Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. (61) Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home. (62) Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

UNWILLING TO EXTEND MERCY

He set his face to go to Jerusalem - As Jesus begins making his way toward Jerusalem we see intentionality in his action. The journey to Jerusalem which will result in his departure is according to God's plan, and Jesus is seen as walking resolutely to this destination. The idea of a journey will become a repetitive theme for the remainder of Luke's account and will be employed to keep the purpose of Jesus' arrival at the forefront of his audience's thoughts. In this short account of their journey through Samaria we see Jerusalem mentioned twice. The first time, Jerusalem is referenced as the location in which God's purpose through Jesus would be accomplished. This recognizes the role Jerusalem plays as the center of the Jewish world. This world order has been challenged by Jesus and his teachings, but because his ministry centered in the region of Galilee, far from Jerusalem, its radical character had not been felt widely. Now that Jesus and his message is marching toward Jerusalem, his future becomes uncertain. The second

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mention of Jerusalem is the basis of the Samaritans rejection of Jesus. The animosity between the Jews and Samaritans existed for centuries before the time of Christ. With the northern kingdom (Israel) defeated by the Assyrians, the ten northern tribes were carried away into exile. The Gentile foreigners intermarried with the Jews who had not been deported, forming a mixed race known as Samaritans. This arrival brought their idolatrous false religion with them, which became mixed with the worship of the true God (2 Kings 17:27-28, 32-33). The Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim had been destroyed during the intertestamental period by the Jews, after the Samaritans exhumed human remains and scattered bones in the outer court of the Jew's temple, thus defiling it. What is seen by the Samaritans response is a foreshadowing of those who fail to align their purposes with those of Jesus. Our history, experiences, and prejudices are unacceptable barriers that often hinder a willingness to follow Jesus. His purpose calls all who would seek him to set their course down the path that Jesus leads them.

Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? - Jesus sets his expectations high for those who seek to follow him. These expectations often prompt those who choose this path to forget the gracious manner in which Jesus has dealt with each person who journeys with him. What prompts James and John, those who had been on the mountain with Jesus to suggest this course of action? This method of destruction is what Elijah, another on the same mountain, had done in that very region. When King Ahaziah of the northern kingdom had sent multiple companies of fifty men to arrest him Elijah called down fire to consume them. Not until the third commander begged Elijah to spare his life and that of his men did Elijah go to the king, upon whom he pronounced God's judgment (2 Kings 1:9-16). Jesus response to this disciple's request with a rebuke. Here was zeal indeed, and zeal for the honor of Christ! It was a zeal justified and supported by the scriptural example of the great prophet Elijah. But it was zeal not based on knowledge. This journey was not a triumphant march that would sweep away all opposition. It is the progress of the gospel of the kingdom, which Jesus defined in Luke 4; it is a message of mercy, love, and grace so strong, so wide-ranging, and so surprising, that many will find it shocking. One must never forget, that religion which men profess from fear of death, or dread of penalties is worth nothing at all. The message of the gospel offers the only possibility of transforming the human heart, in it is proclaimed both the truth of our sinful condition coupled with an undying, self-sacrificing love exemplified in the Lord Jesus' life and death.

THE OBSTACLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

As they were going along the road, someone said to him - When calling his disciples to follow him, Jesus used a verb that signified he did not seek a momentary

or impulsive decision, but was looking for those who would make a continuous, lifelong commitment. Neither Jesus nor any of his apostles ever advised a person to make an impetuous choice in order to be saved. What he sought was a carefully thought out decision that counts the cost in advance (Luke 14:25-33). As Jesus continues "along the road" he encounters three individuals and challenges them to consider the obstacles in following him. These would-be disciples find their heart exposed by Jesus as he confronts their comfort, security, and relationships in comparison to their commitment to him.

And Jesus said to him...the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head - This could have been quite a coup for Jesus. Here is a man willing to follow him wherever he goes. Clearly he was attracted to Jesus and eager to attach himself to such an unparalleled teacher. However Jesus saw beneath the outer façade of enthusiasm and challenged his willingness to commit when things got uncomfortable. Since the Lord had no place to lay his head, those who view what may be gained from a temporal perspective by following Jesus will find the cost too high a price to pay. But if one is truly desperate for grace, forgiveness, and eternal life, then no conditions are placed on the Lord's expectations - even the rejection that Jesus suffered is welcomed.

And Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead - Since embalming was not practiced by the Jews, the Jewish custom dictated that burial take place immediately upon death. This man aware of the previous encounter is willing to follow Jesus under these circumstances; however, his discipleship was contingent upon the finalizing of his father's estate upon his death, which had not taken place. What he is really saying is that he wanted to delay following Jesus until his father's death and his future is secured, leaving immediately may put this at risk. Jesus challenges those who follow him to leave the temporal, earthly matters to worldly people and not allow them to be an overriding priority in their lives. His followers are charged to proclaim the kingdom of God, no matter the risk to their own security.

Jesus said to him, No one who...looks back is fit for the kingdom of God - This man's words reveal that his family ties were too strong which prompts Jesus to reject his proposal to return home. Jesus' challenges him to examine his level of commitment. Is following Jesus his decision, or does he need the approval of his family first before the matter is settled in his heart. To illustrate this point, Jesus used a popular parable that dates back to the 8th century B.C. to teach that complete dedication to the task at hand is necessary to follow Jesus. Just as one can hardly plow a straight furrow when looking back, it is equally impossible to follow Jesus with a divided heart. Pursuing Jesus like this makes one unfit for the kingdom of God.
