

Luke 9:51-62
July 28, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Today's text in Luke's Gospel marks a very important juncture, for from here on, we find Jesus setting His sights on accomplishing the mission for which He was sent, to die on the Cross and provide redemption from the penalty of sins for all who would believe on Him. As Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem to face the cross, He will run into those who oppose Him. He will also run into those who want to follow Him, but when they learn the cost, they fade away. Let's read the first account in Luke 9:51-56.

BOOK:

Samaritan Opposition

⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶ and they went to another village.

Set Context/Background:

V.51: X-REF [Isa 50:7](#) Explore the setting of Christ's face and what it depicts: His unshakable, unwavering, unhesitating resolve to fulfill the Father's will for His life and to endure the shame of the Cross even as recorded in Hebrews 12:2-note where the writer says of Jesus "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

V.52: The identity of these messengers is uncertain - it could have been some of the 12 disciples, but the text simply does not say.

Q: Why were the Samaritans were unwelcoming to Jesus?

- The Samaritans and Jews had been enemies for centuries (2 Kings 17:24–41)
- After Assyria invaded Israel, the northern kingdom, and resettled it with its own people ([2 Kings 17:24-41](#)), the mixed race that developed became known as the Samaritans. "Purebred" Jews hated these "half-breeds," and the Samaritans in turn hated the Jews. So many tensions arose between the two peoples that Jewish travelers between Galilee and southern Judea often would walk around rather than through Samaritan territory, even though this would lengthen their trip considerably.

Q: Why do you think James and John asked Jesus if they should "call fire down from heaven to destroy the Samaritans? That sounds so drastic! [James and John had seen the Prophet Elijah on the mount, so they thought they might imitate him and call down fire from heaven! (2 Kings 1)]

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you?

Luke 9:51 is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 50:7 where the Messiah declares "For the Lord GOD helps Me, therefore, I am not disgraced. Therefore, **I have set My face like flint**, And I know that I will not be ashamed." Notice that the phrase "like a flint" indicates stone-like, steely determination in the face of opposition (cf Ezek 3:8, 9) and vile treatment which would tempt any normal man to shrink back from the call. Jesus was determined to follow God's plan and deliberately initiated the precipitating events, showing that he was in control of what was about to happen." Thus, Luke uses the word "resolutely" to describe Jesus's determination.

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: Was there anything in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?

- Although Jesus knew he would face persecution and death in Jerusalem, he was determined to go there.
- Jesus refused to retaliate against His opponents, i.e. Samaritans
- Jesus showed love and patience toward those who opposed Him

LOOK:

Jesus's resolve to do His Father's will should characterize our lives as well. When God gives us a course of action, we must move steadily toward our destination, regardless of the potential hazards that await us there.

When others reject or scorn us, we, too, may feel like retaliating. We must remember that judgment belongs to God, and we must not expect him to use his power to carry out personal vendettas.

We must reflect His love and patience toward those who are opposed to Jesus, praying that God would grant them repentance. If we are mistreated, but respond with humility and love, we will stand out as a light in the darkness. Be ready to let others know that it is only Christ in us that makes the difference.

The Cost of Following Jesus

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." ⁵⁹ He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go

and proclaim the kingdom of God.”⁶¹ Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” [X-REF Matt 8:19-22 Matthew tells us that the first person who said “I will follow you...was a scribe, a teacher of the law]

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

The three potential followers of Christ:

- The first was a scribe. What did Jesus want the scribe to understand by sharing that “foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head?” [Jesus seeks no flippant, frivolous decision to follow him. Following Jesus means becoming a stranger and exile on earth ([Heb 11:13](#))]
- The second man was invited to “follow me,” but why was “burying his father first” a problematic response?

[The reason is not given why he felt he had to bury his father first, but whatever it was, the man wanted to do it "first." Whether his concern was fulfilling a religious duty, having financial security by getting his inheritance, keeping family approval, or something else, he did not want to commit himself to Jesus just yet. He wanted to serve the Lord on "his" time table, not God's. Serving the Lord at the present time was not convenient for him. Does this sound familiar? Christians make the same type of excuse today when they say, "I will serve the Lord later in my life at a more convenient time. I have too much to do right now."]

[“Allow the dead to bury their own dead,” means, “Let those who are spiritually dead tend to such matters.”]

- The third man agreed to follow Jesus, but he wanted to go back and say good-bye to his family. According to Jesus, why was that a problematic response? [This man who was ostensibly sincere, nevertheless had a divided heart. In other words, His followers must be totally focused on His purpose. They can’t keep one foot in the world just in case things don’t work out in the Kingdom. Their hearts cannot be divided between living for the old way of life and living for Jesus Christ.]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand?

- The first saying shows that Jesus seeks no flippant, frivolous decision to follow him. Following Jesus means becoming a stranger and exile on earth ([Heb 11:13](#))

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?

- Jesus expects His followers to be all in or go home! It’s an all or nothing proposition.

LOOK:

- Am I following Jesus totally or just casually? As someone has observed, **“There’s a difference between interest and commitment. When you’re interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you’re committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results”** (Art Turock, Reader’s Digest [11/94], p. 212).
- Following Christ is like taking a class on the pass/fail system. There is no curve. You either make it or you don’t. He requires that you devote everything that you are and have to Him or nothing at all. It is important to realize that these verses are not just directed to those who are considering “full-time” Christian service. They are addressed to everyone who would consider being a follower of Christ or disciple (the terms are synonymous). The Lord draws a line in the sand: The only way to follow Jesus is totally.
- Luke adds "go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God" which is added "to help us understand that Jesus’ uncompromising command is uttered in light of the supreme good of proclaiming the good news."

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 209). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Lack of love (vv. 51–56)

The Apostles did not love their enemies (Luke 9:51–56). James and John had seen the Prophet Elijah on the mount, so they thought they might imitate him and call down fire from heaven! (2 Kings 1) The Samaritans and Jews had been enemies for centuries (2 Kings 17:24–41), so it was understandable that this village would reject Jesus as He traveled toward Jerusalem (John 4:9, 20). Jesus rebuked their vengeful spirit and simply went to another village (Matt. 5:37–48). Later, Samaria would be reached with the Gospel (Acts 8).

Lack of discipline (vv. 57–62). Three men could have become disciples, but they would not meet the conditions that Jesus laid down. The first man was a scribe (Matt. 8:19) who volunteered to go until he heard the cost: he had to deny himself. Apparently, he was accustomed to a comfortable home.

The second man was called by Jesus (what an honor!), but he was rejected because he would not take up the cross and die to self. He was worried about somebody else's funeral when he should have been planning his own! Jesus is not suggesting here that we dishonor our parents, but only that we not permit our love for family to weaken our love for the Lord. We should love Christ so much that our love for family would look like hatred in comparison (Luke 14:26).

The third man also volunteered, but he could not follow Christ because he was looking back instead of ahead. There is nothing wrong with a loving farewell (1 Kings 19:19–21), but if it gets in the way of obedience, it becomes sin. Jesus saw that this man's heart was not wholly with Him, but that he would be plowing and looking back (see Gen. 19:17, 26; Phil. 3:13–14).

No wonder the laborers are few! (Luke 10:2)

It would appear that what Jesus taught His disciples and the multitudes had done them little good. They lacked power, love, and discipline, and they grieved His heart. If we today lack these spiritual essentials, we can never truly be His disciples, but they are available to us from the Lord. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Are we a joy to Jesus Christ, or are we breaking His heart?

Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 232-233)

a. Jesus' rejection by a Samaritan city (9:51–56).

9:51–56. After the transfiguration (vv. 9:28–36), in which Moses and Elijah spoke with the Lord concerning His departure *from* Jerusalem, **Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem**. Jesus made several trips to Jerusalem, but Luke telescoped them to make his point that Jesus had to get to Jerusalem to present Himself as the Messiah and then depart. On His way, **He sent messengers on ahead**, but the Samaritans **did not welcome Him, because He was heading for Jerusalem**. Conflict between Jews and Samaritans had been going on for several hundred years. The reaction of **the disciples, James and John** in particular, was **to destroy them by fire ... from heaven**. They were thinking, no doubt, of Elijah (2 Kings 1:9–12), who destroyed by fire those who were opposing God's work. Jesus, on the other hand, called for tolerance. The implication is not that it

was right to oppose Jesus and His followers. The Samaritans who rejected Jesus would be judged for their rejection. However, there were more important things to take care of. Jesus had to move along toward Jerusalem.

b. Jesus' teaching that discipleship takes radical commitment (9:57–62) (Matt. 8:19–22)

Luke introduced three people who wanted to join Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem.

9:57–58. A **man** approached and wanted to **follow** where they were going. Jesus' response was that a person desiring to follow Him must give up what others consider necessities. Jesus had no home of His own nor did His followers. They were on their way to Jerusalem where Jesus would be put to death.

9:59–60. Jesus called the next **man** with the same words with which He had called His disciples (5:27). The man's reply that he **first** wanted to **go and bury his father** has been variously interpreted. Some maintain that the man's father was dead already. It would seem strange if that was the case for he would certainly have been engaged in the burial procedure already. It is more likely that the man's father was ready to die. His request was to let him wait just a little while before following Jesus. Perhaps the man also wanted to receive the inheritance from his father's estate. Jesus' response, **Let the dead bury their own dead**, implies that the spiritually dead can bury the physically dead. The point was that proclaiming **the kingdom of God** was so important that it could not wait. Of course if the man had left and followed Jesus, it would have caused a scandal in the community. But that was less important than proclaiming the kingdom and following the Messiah. A disciple must make a radical commitment.

9:61–62. The third man simply wanted to **go home and say good-bye to his family**. Elijah had allowed Elisha to do this very thing when Elisha was plowing (1 Kings 19:19–20). Jesus' words underscore the fact that His message of the kingdom of God was more important than anything else—even family members. The message and the Messiah cannot wait. Jesus' message was more important than Elijah's message and demanded total allegiance. Jesus' servants should not have divided interests, like a farmer who begins plowing **and looks back**. Since Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, the man had to make up his mind right then as to what he was going to do. Interestingly Luke did not record the outcome of any of Jesus' conversations with the three men.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1532-1533). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

9:51 The section from 9:51–19:44 is often referred to as the “travel narrative,” since it roughly outlines the final journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. The portions in 10:38–42 and 17:11 seem to indicate that the narrative was only broadly chronological, and this may account for some of the variations with the settings in Mt, though it is also possible Jesus repeated these teachings on multiple occasions.

9:52 Though many of the residents of Sychar believed in Jesus (Jn 4:39), He was not universally accepted by the Samaritans.

9:57–62 Matthew 8:18–22 sets this episode in the Galilean ministry of Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke were ambiguous about the exact location where the event occurred, and both may have chosen the respective locations in the flow of the narrative for thematic reasons.

Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 297-302). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

In the opening account of this section Jesus is rejected by Samaritans, just as in the opening account of the last section (4:16–30) he was rejected by citizens of Nazareth. In this passage, which is unique to Luke, Jesus purposes to go to Jerusalem to fulfill the “departure” spoken of in 9:31. The divine “must” of 9:22, 44 is about to take place. As he and his followers proceed south from Galilee to Jerusalem, they enter into Samaria.

Comments

9:51 As the time approached. This term (*symplērousthai*) is also found in Acts 2:1, and a related term lies behind varied English expressions in Luke 1:23; 2:6, 21–22; 21:22. It refers here to God’s purpose soon to be realized.

For him to be taken up to heaven. In Acts 1:2, 11, 22 the verbal form of this noun (*analēmpseōs*), here translated as a verb, refers to the ascension. The NIV makes the meaning clear by adding “to heaven.” The ascension marks the culmination of the Christ event, which embraces Jesus’ conception, birth, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus resolutely set out. Knowing the divine plan, Jesus (literally) “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (cf. Isa 50:7) in order to fulfill God’s purpose for his life. He was determined to follow God’s plan and deliberately initiated the precipitating events, showing that he was in control of what was about to happen.

Jerusalem. This is the city of Jesus’ destiny (Luke 9:22). It is central to Luke’s view of God’s plan in that his Gospel also begins (1:9) and ends there (24:53). Furthermore, Acts also begins in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4), and it soon becomes the center of the church (8:1, 14; 15:1–2) with Paul returning to Jerusalem after every missionary journey.

9:52 And he sent messengers on ahead. It has been suggested that this is an allusion to Mal 3:1, and this is supported by Luke’s use of *angelous*, or “messengers,” and by “on ahead” (literally *before his face*). Both are found in Luke 7:27 and Mal 3:1.

Into a Samaritan village. For the Jewish attitude toward Samaritans see comments on 10:33. Only Luke, of the Synoptic writers, referred to Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritans. A journey through Samaria would normally take about three days.

To get things ready for him. That is, to arrange for lodging.

9:53 But the people there did not welcome him. Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.6.1 [20.118–24]) gave an example of the animosity of Samaritans toward Galilean pilgrims proceeding to Jerusalem to celebrate the various religious festivals. The term “receive” is the same one used in Luke 9:48, making this experience an illustration of that verse. The rejection of the messengers was, in fact, a rejection of Jesus.

Because he was heading for Jerusalem. The NIV unfortunately loses the play on words found in the original. In 9:51 Luke spoke of Jesus’ setting his face toward Jerusalem. Here the same expression is used: “because his face” was set for Jerusalem. This play on words is clearer in the RSV. In Jesus’ day the reason behind the Samaritan’s lack of welcome was simply the general Samaritan hostility toward Jewish pilgrims heading toward Jerusalem. In Luke’s retelling, the explanation became more pointed. The Samaritans rejected Jesus because they too lacked an understanding of the coming passion and its necessity.

9:54 When the disciples James and John. Although Luke did not refer to them as “Boanerges ... Sons of Thunder” (cf. 6:14 and Mark 3:17), their attitude here merits such a description. Their request went far beyond what Jesus taught in Luke 9:5.

Fire down from heaven to destroy them. The idea of fire coming down from heaven is an allusion to 2 Kgs 1:10, 12. It is unlikely that Luke intended to combat the equation of the Messiah with Elijah, for that was not the lesson drawn from the incident. Ethics, not Christology, was the object of Luke’s reciting this account. It is unclear whether the disciples were praying an imprecation (“Should we ask that God would send down fire to destroy them?”) or whether they thought that they themselves had such power. See comments on 9:1, 40 (cf. also 10:17).

9:55 Jesus turned and rebuked them. The disciples had not only failed to understand Jesus’ teaching concerning his passion (9:45) but also much of his ethical teaching as well (cf. 6:27–31). Jesus once again had to censure the disciples’ misconception about authority and power (9:46–50). Although what Jesus said was not recorded, scribes later inserted various comments into several Greek manuscripts (see NIV footnote).

9:56 And they went to another village. Luke did not give the name of either village. Such information, although interesting to us, was irrelevant for his purpose.

The Lukan Message

We see once again that Jesus’ fate in Jerusalem was completely under control. It was divine necessity that caused Jesus to head resolutely for the holy city. The time had come to accomplish his mission and to fulfill the divine plan (9:31). Along with the emphasis on God’s providential control of Jesus’ fate, and thus of history (see Introduction 8 [1]), Jerusalem’s importance is also underlined. Here and here alone Jesus was to complete his departure. Along the way Luke told of the Samaritans’ negative response, but later they would respond positively to the gospel message. He gave a glimpse of this in 17:11–19, and the present account foreshadows the future mission to the Samaritans, which would come to fruition after Jesus’ departure. When Jesus next visited the Samaritans, through the apostles’ preaching, the word would bear good fruit (Acts 8:1, 4–25; 9:31; 15:3).

The ethical teaching should also be noted. Jesus firmly rebuked the disciples’ desire to bring judgment and wrath upon the Samaritan village. This was the “year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19). It was a time when the disciples were to love their enemies and bless those who cursed them (6:27–36). James and John went far beyond Jesus’ directions on how to treat the unreceptive (9:5). There will be a “day of vengeance of our God” (Isa 61:2), but that day lies in the future and in any case is God’s prerogative. If a village did not receive Jesus, the disciples were to go elsewhere. For Theophilus and the other readers the message was clear. Their attitude was to be one of “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34; cf. Acts 7:60).

Context

In these verses three sayings of Jesus are addressed to potential followers, and all three center around the term “follow” (9:57, 59, 61). The first two are found together in Matt 8:19–22, but the last is unique to Luke. Luke placed these sayings in the travel narrative by the words “as they were walking along the road” (Luke 9:57). Luke differed from Matthew in not directing the first two sayings to a specific audience (a teacher of the law in Matt 8:19 and a disciple in 8:21). Instead he

referred to “a man, “another man,” and “still another.” By so doing, these sayings become applicable to anyone who might consider being Jesus’ follower.

The three sayings remind Luke’s Christian readers of the stringent nature of discipleship. They are absolute in nature, for Jesus demands unqualified commitment, far beyond what a rabbi might require of his disciples. The first saying shows that Jesus seeks no flippant, frivolous decision to follow him. Following Jesus means becoming a stranger and exile on earth (Heb 11:13). Those who volunteer to be disciples must first count the cost.

The next two sayings concern legitimate requests for temporary delay.

The first man wanted to bury his father and the other to bid his parents farewell. Both requests were denied; for discipleship involves the sacrifice of comfort and security, family ties, and family affection (Luke 9:58, 60, 62).

Comments

9:57 As they were walking. Luke reminded his readers that these teachings of Jesus took place on the way to Jerusalem. Thus Jesus’ absolute demands of disciples are accompanied by his own unconditional sacrifice for disciples.

Along the road. “Road” is literally *way (hodos)*. Luke may have been presenting Jesus’ teachings along the “way” to Jerusalem as a metaphor for the ethical demands of the Christian “way.”

9:58 Son of Man. This refers to Jesus as the Son of Man, not to humanity in general. For Son of Man see comments on 5:24.

Has no place to lay his head. The preceding account (9:51–56), which Luke intentionally placed before this one, has just illustrated this point. Jesus’ followers must be prepared for the same conditions (6:40). The main emphasis here is less on the loss of creaturely comfort (a place to sleep) than with the rejection (9:22, 44; 17:25; 20:17).

9:59 First, let me go and bury my father. For a Jew this was a religious duty having precedence over everything else. Only in the case of a temporary Nazirite vow (Num 6:6–7) or if one were the high priest (Lev 21:10–11) could one be absolved from this duty. The seriousness of this responsibility is seen in Tobit’s first two deathbed requests of his son, “My son, when I die, bury me, and do not neglect your mother” (Tob 4:3, RSV), and in one of the son’s greatest fears in dying—that his parents would have no one to bury them (6:14, RSV; cf. Gen 50:5). Jesus demands an allegiance transcending even this greatest of filial obligations. Some interpreters have sought to relieve the hardness of this saying by assuming that the father was not yet dead and that the son was saying, “Wait until my father dies, and then I will follow you.” There is, however, no hint of this in the text.

9:60 Let the dead bury their own dead. This saying contains a play on the word *dead*. “Let the [spiritually] dead bury their own [physical] dead.” In this pun the spiritually dead are those who do not follow Jesus (Luke 15:24, 32; cf. also John 5:24–25; Rom 6:13; Eph 2:1; 5:14). The meaning of 14:26 (cf. 12:53; 18:29–30) becomes acutely real when placed alongside a saying such as this.

Go and proclaim the kingdom of God. That is, become my follower and proclaim my message. Luke added this (cf. Matt 8:22) to help his readers understand that Jesus’ uncompromising command is uttered in light of the supreme good of proclaiming the good news. It also prepares the reader for the next account in which the seventy were sent out to proclaim God’s kingdom (10:11).

9:61 The third man's request was similar to that of Elisha in 1 Kgs 19:19–21. Yet although Elijah granted the young man's request, Jesus did not. God's kingdom has come, and the summons to follow Jesus takes precedence over everything else. The old family relationships are part of what one must leave behind to follow him (Luke 5:11, 28).

9:62 No one who ... looks back. "Looks back" is literally *looks unto the things behind*. The imagery comes from 1 Kgs 19:19. It refers here to gazing back on the things abandoned in order to follow Jesus (cf. Phil 3:13). In this instance the reference is to family relationships (Luke 9:61), but the saying has broader implications as well (cf. 2 Tim 2:4).

The Lukan Message

The extreme harshness of these sayings is the best proof of their authenticity. At the same time, they create a serious problem, for how can Jesus command his followers to love their neighbors (10:25–37) and even their enemies (6:27–35; 14:26) and yet prohibit so fundamental an act of love as burying one's parents? Does not such a command conflict with 1 Tim 5:8? What did Luke intend by this section? Was he suggesting that Jesus' followers are uniquely devoted to the service of God like Nazirites or the high priest (cf. Num 6:6–7; Lev 21:10–11) and thus may not defile themselves by touching the dead? The present account does not exhibit any concern with respect to such ritual defilement. The issue in our text, and other passages such as Luke 12:53; 14:26; 18:29–30, involves priorities. In both the second and third sayings the individual's "first" priority was clearly something other than following Jesus. For Luke allegiance to Jesus required loving one's parents and honoring them in the ways described in 9:59, 61. He did not mean that his readers should refrain from performing such duties. Rather he chose a particularly forceful way to demonstrate that discipleship requires a radical shift in priorities. Jesus must be "first." He will not accept second place to anyone or anything. Even a good thing, such as honoring one's parents by seeing that they receive proper burial, cannot usurp the place of the best thing, which is to love Jesus with all one's heart, strength, and mind. Luke's readers are thus prompted to examine themselves to see if, having begun to follow Jesus, they are now "looking back."

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 9:51-62). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.