

Scriptures: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Luke 9:51-62

We've been talking about living life in the Spirit, and today we're going to wrap that up by looking at the gold standard, so to speak, of Jesus Christ. Of all the people we encounter on the pages of Holy Scripture, He's the One who's the most spirit-filled – He's Emmanuel – God-with-us – after all! The Scripture we're going to look at today, found in Luke's gospel is split into two broad themes. In my New International Version Bible, the text actually has two subheadings: "Samaritan Opposition," and "The Cost of Following Jesus." We'll cover both these topics today, and discuss how they apply to us now. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Luke 9:51-62.

**Read Luke 9:51-62.**

### **Samaritan Opposition**

Our passage opens today under that "Samaritan Opposition" subheading. "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem," (Lk. 9:51) we're told. That's significant. See prior to all this, Jesus has been running around, doing all His miracles in the Galilean region, in the northern part of what's modern-day Israel.

Luke records that "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem," in other words, He's determined to get there. It's His primary focus – getting to Jerusalem. What happens in Jerusalem to Jesus, Church? We know this – He preaches and teaches, He's welcomed by the masses, only to have them turn on Him less than a week later, and He went to the cross. Jesus knows it, too. Earlier Luke records Jesus tell the apostles, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life," (Lk. 9:21).

So He already has a good idea of what's going to happen to Him when He gets there. For Jesus to get to Jerusalem, though, He first has to pass through the region of Samaria, where the Samaritans live. We've previously talked some about the prejudice that Jewish people showed towards Samaritans, right? They didn't like them. As with modern-day prejudices, it's usually a two-way street. The Samaritans don't much care for Jews, either.

### **Prejudice a Two-Way Street**

Luke indicates that Jesus "sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for Him; but the people there did not welcome Him, because He was heading for Jerusalem," (verses 52-53). In other words, Jesus, a Jew, wants to make an overnight stop in Samaria, because He's on His way to Jerusalem. How many of you have stayed in a hotel before? Most of us have. When you're checking in at a hotel, and you're getting situated, usually the person there at the front desk, they make small talk, right? They'll ask things like, "How're you doing?"

“Where are you going?” “Are you with \_\_\_\_\_ (some local event currently taking place)?”

And so, the people in the village find pretty quickly that Jesus has no intention of hanging around, He’s just passing through on His way to Jerusalem. Here again, like last week, we see Jesus being told – in not as many words – to “get out of town.” He’s not welcomed. The lack of hospitality towards Jesus is as outrageous in those days as the lack of hospitality towards others is in ours.

A couple of the apostles are literally fired up! “When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do You want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” (verse 54). We also see Jesus’ reaction – “He rebuked them, and they went to another village,” (verses 55-56). Does Jesus get shook up regarding His mistreatment by people? No. He just moves on.

### **All Shook Up**

We often get shook up when we think we’ve been slighted, or disrespected in some fashion. I’ve seen people – well-meaning Christians – ready to “call fire down from heaven,” over issues which in the long-term are trivial. Let me give an example so you understand what I mean. I knew a guy once who was a member of another branch of the Methodist church. He decided that he was going to provide funds for his local church to replace the carpet in the sanctuary.

So, he gave the church the funds, with the stipulation that the money be used to buy carpet – and not just any carpet, but something like a red, green, or darker carpet to not show so much dirt. Well, the church ended up carpeting their sanctuary in white carpet, because it was the color the pastor wanted. Have you ever seen white carpet? It’s pretty, but it shows every little piece of dirt. Every spill of grape juice on Sundays when celebrating Holy Communion, becomes a long-term stain!

Needless to say, my friend who donated the money was mad. He went to the next Church Council meeting, and complained bitterly that his wishes hadn’t been followed. As a result, the pastor excommunicated him from the local church. My friend stopped attending worship services for approximately six months, until he realized that just because one local church has a particular view, it doesn’t mean that all churches hold to the same view of things. In quibbling over the trivial things – and most things in this life are trivial, in regards to personal preferences – we may be distracted away from the long view, which must always be our primary focus. Friends, that long view is Jesus Christ, and making Him known! The world is in desperate need of His redemption and healing!

## **The Cost of Discipleship**

Jesus doesn't fuss with the Samaritans in this particular village. He just moves on to the next one, which brings us to the other subheading in my Bible, "The Cost of Following Jesus," which is what we'll spend the rest of the time today focusing on. Don't let the short, catchy slogans of evangelicalism lead you to believe that it's all a one-size-fits-all, or a one-and-done sort of thing. "Just believe," I hear so many pastors say, but that's not what Jesus says – it's not what Holy Scripture says when you look at the whole of it!

The whole idea of the "Just believe" crowd seems to go right along with the first man Jesus encounters on the road. "As they were walking along the road, a man said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go,'" (verse 57). In other words, I'll follow You, Jesus, as long as it fits my agenda and meets my needs. See, it's not an unconditional, "I've surrendered myself to You," thought process which is being conveyed here. It's more along the lines of, "I'll follow You, Jesus, if You give me what I want."

Now that fits real nice with our American culture and society today. A Jesus who gives us what we want, if we just say we believe in Him, right? It sounds great, doesn't it? Except there's a downside – He's not the Jesus found in the Bible.

## **Life with Jesus Changes Us**

When we develop a relationship with Jesus Christ, He doesn't leave us where He finds us. Look, He didn't leave the man afflicted with demons in the cemetery last week did He? Nope – He brought Him, and He brings us into a relationship with Himself by having us sit at His feet. Today we do that through daily prayer and Scripture study, and through gathering on a weekly basis – and sometimes we need that more frequently – with like-minded folks to worship Him corporately. That's us letting His indwelling Spirit – the Holy Spirit – teach and nurture us. In that process, He changes us. He makes us a new person.

Well, when the man tells Jesus he'll follow Him, Jesus has a response. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head," (verse 58). If we're following Him with the intention that by doing so, we're going to gain something of a materialistic possession, we're in for a rude awakening! For the most part, Jesus was itinerant – He traveled the countryside.

As a young man, I always enjoyed listening to my grandmother's stories of life during the Great Depression. She grew up on a farm outside Port Jefferson in the 1920's and 1930's. She often talked about how as she called them "gypsies," would travel the country roads looking for work. These were usually young men, sometimes women, and occasionally even entire families. They'd work in the field for the day, in exchange for food and a space to sleep in the barn. They might stay a week, or two, and then they'd move on, desperately trying to achieve the American Dream.

I'm certain Jesus and the apostles with Him were somewhat like those "gypsies" my grandmother spoke about, at least to the on-lookers of the gospel accounts when they initially happened. Constantly on the move, going wherever they were headed, to do whatever they were called to do. Jesus didn't have a home – He says He doesn't even have a place to lay His head. And He wouldn't – until He was crucified on Good Friday's cross and laid in a borrowed tomb. See, Jesus' primary focus – His purpose – was to restore the relationship between the Creator and His creation, and the only way to do that was for Him to take the nails. His innocent blood had to be shed as compensation for our sin.

### **He Loves Us!**

He loves us, Church! He loves us enough to take the nails, to die a shameful death, and to be laid in another man's tomb. The depth and breadth of His love for us is incomprehensible. We can't mentally grasp it. There are a couple places in the gospel record where Jesus is tempted. He's offered food, by turning a stone to bread; He's offered to reveal who He is by jumping and having angels wait on Him; He's offered the world if He'll bow in worship. In all these cases, Jesus drops the thing which tempts or captivates, and looks beyond to His purpose. He drops the temptation and lifts high the cross!

"He said to another man, 'Follow Me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'" (verse 59). It seems like a reasonable request. But, if the man's dad had just died, he wouldn't have been on the road talking to Jesus, would he? He most likely would have been in the process of burying him. In that part of the world, and in the era when this first happened, people had to be buried the day they died. Decomposition sets in quick in hot, humid climates.

It sounds like the guy wants to follow Jesus, but he's got some unfinished business to attend to. Specifically, the man's father is still living. He wants to follow Jesus, but wants to wait until after his father dies. Maybe he's saying, "Yeah, Jesus, I hear about all the great things You do, but what would my father think about me taking off and following You?"

### **Go and Proclaim the Kingdom**

Of course, today, we could say this in a multitude of ways: We hear what You've done, Jesus, but what would my co-workers, my friends, my significant other, my boss, think about me taking off and following You? Or maybe it's even more materialistic. How would my financial portfolio be impacted by following You? Notice how Jesus responds. "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God," (verse 60). Stop focusing on all the distractions, and focus on the kingdom! Or, we might say, drop the desire to impress, or the financial portfolio, and lift high the cross!

“Still another said, ‘I will follow You, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family,’” (verse 61), we hear next. Again, this sounds like a reasonable request. The man wants to let his family know what he’s doing, what he plans to do. Sometimes family can be the biggest idol of all in the life of a Christian. Here’s what I mean. Generally speaking, when people look at their family, they tend to look at them with “blinders” on, so to speak. Now deep down inside, they may realize that some of their family members can do some pretty nasty things, but all in all, we love them, and care about them, so we look for the good in them. See where I’m going?

We don’t really see our families for what they are – and in many cases, they’re dysfunctional. A lot of that boils down to a lack of faithfulness in some of those practices – those daily habits we develop the more time we spend with Jesus that I mentioned earlier. I’ve made a career from looking at data. Statistical data – looking at student performance over time, making predictions of where the student will be performing a year from now. Fundamentally, that’s my job. I’ve seen many things with regards to children.

### **Don’t Look Back**

We live in a society where the role of the parent has been eroded to the extent that some would have you believe that as a parent – you can’t make educational, spiritual, or even health-related decisions for your child. Instead, many people hold to this idea of moms and dads being just big best friends to their kids. It’s a recipe for disaster. Kids, especially when they’re young, need structure and someone to enforce boundaries for them.

Why should we expect the kids to be faithful, when the parents aren’t? Why should the kids put away their baseball bats and bicycles on Sunday morning and go to church, when Dad’s too busy out fishing to attend with them, or Mom’s too busy knitting an afghan? You see how these couple messed up examples could create spiritual and emotional train-wrecks if they were real-life examples? New Hope, our church family is a home! Look how Jesus responds to the man, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God,” (verse 62).

I’ve said before I’m no farmer, but what Jesus is getting at here is that in those days everything was done by hand. If you farmed, you tilled the soil with an ox, you had to keep your eyes straight ahead to have nice, even rows. If you looked behind you, even for an instant, the ox would shift, and create a curved row that would last the whole season, showing what a lousy farmer you were. If we’re focused mainly on what our family is doing, or looking back and trying to figure out where we went wrong with whatever, we aren’t focused on Jesus. It might be time to drop the fishing poles, bikes, bats, and afghans, and lift high the cross! We’re going to sing that song in just a minute, but first, let’s pray. **Prayer:** Lord, You have shown us what it means to be a servant. We ask now for Your grace and strength to faithfully follow in the footsteps of servanthood. In Your name we ask it. Amen.