

**FROM GALILEE TO JERUSALEM – Luke 9:51-19:44**

***Journey through Samaria***- Luke 9:51-56; John 7:10

**9:51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem;**

**9:52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him.**

**9:53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem.**

**9:54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"**

**9:55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of;**

**9:56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village.**

After more than a year of ministry in Galilee, Jesus departed and made a conscious effort to go to Jerusalem to face the cross. The period between the end of the Galilean ministry and His arrival in Jerusalem was an important time for the disciples; they had come to know who Jesus was and had witnessed His power, but they still had to mature in character and had yet to understand His death. Thus, from 9:51-19:44, they would travel to Jerusalem and Jesus would teach them many of the things they needed to know. Although the walk from Galilee to Jerusalem is only a few days journey, they would take months to get there, arriving at Passover when Jesus will be crucified.

The words, "the days were approaching for His ascension" in verse 51 reveal that everything was on God's timetable. At the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about His "exodus," His departure from this earth (Lk. 9:31). It was probably His ascension that was in view. In John 17:4-5, Jesus was conscious of His return to glory when He prayed, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Hebrews 12:2 states that it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus didn't cherish dying; He cherished completing the work the Father had sent Him to accomplish and being with the Father once again. He longed for the time of His ascension to come, but His mission was a mission of mercy, and mercy required a cross.

Verse 52 shows how the ministry of Jesus was expanding beyond the borders of Israel. Although Jesus was sent to save the Jews (Jn. 1:12; Matt. 15:24), He also came to save the Gentiles. The OT has many allusions to this, but the first indication in Luke was when Simeon saw the baby Jesus and declared, "my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a *light of revelation to the Gentiles*, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32).

Jesus' travel through Samaria demonstrated His compassion toward all people and His uniqueness as a Jew. Typically, the Jews tried to avoid Samaria at all costs. Instead of taking the direct route from Galilee

to Jerusalem through Samaria, they would walk around it, fording the Jordan River twice just to avoid defiling themselves. History tells us that if the Jews did go through Samaria, they would carry all of their own food with them so they wouldn't have to eat anything touched by a Samaritan. The hatred stemmed from the fact that the Samaritans were a mixed race and had abandoned true Judaism; they were the descendants of the Israelites from the northern kingdom who were left behind when the northern kingdom was taken into Assyrian captivity.

In ancient times when a nation conquered another people, they would remove all the people who had influence or power from the land and take them into exile as captives. They would then send their own people to inhabit the conquered land and live alongside of the people who were left behind. With the leaders removed and Assyrians living in Israel, the king of Assyria hoped to lessen the chance of the Jews organizing and rebelling against Him. As a result, many of the Israelites intermarried with the Assyrians who immigrated there. They claimed loyalty to God but set up their own center of worship in Mount Gerizim and only accepted the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) as Scripture, while rejecting the rest of the OT. The Jews in Jesus' day saw them as the descendants of apostates who had abandoned the true God.

In 128<sup>BC</sup> a Jewish leader named John Hyrcanus destroyed the temple at Mt. Gerizim, which inflamed the animosity that already existed.

Though there was a long history of hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, Jesus was not bound by the culture of the world around Him. He had love for all people – women, children, gentiles, and even Samaritans. Thus, He was willing to go where the Jews would not go, to a place where hatred toward Him already existed.

Jesus and the group that traveled with Him needed a place to stay once they entered Samaria, so Jesus sent some of the group ahead of Him to secure lodging. The outcome was what might be expected – they were not received. Verse 53 gives the reason; it says, "they did not receive Him, *because* He was traveling toward Jerusalem." They wanted nothing to do with anyone who saw Jerusalem as the seat of worship.

James and John were outraged and may have felt that if they had the power to cast out demons, they surely had the power to call for divine judgment from heaven as well. Perhaps they were thinking of Elijah when he rebuked the king of Israel for turning to other gods for advice. The king at the time of Elijah resided in Samaria. He responded to the rebuke by sending a captain and fifty troops to force Elijah to stand before him. Elijah replied, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." And fire came down from heaven and consumed them (2 Ki. 1:10). This was repeated a second time. When a third group of fifty approached Elijah, they did so with humility and diplomacy. 2 Kings 1:13-15 says, "they begged him and said to him, 'O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. Behold fire came down from heaven and consumed the first two captains of fifty with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight.' The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.' So he

arose and went down with him to the king." If Elijah called judgment upon a godless king in Samaria, the disciples saw this as an option for them as well.

Of course, Jesus often warned of judgment. Earlier, He had told them that if they entered a city and were not received they should shake the dust off their feet as a sign of disdain and abandonment of the people over to their own desires (Lk. 9:5). But warning about judgment and enacting judgment were two different things. A warning left the door open for people to rethink and repent, judgment did not.

These events lead to another lesson for the disciples. Their reaction to "sinners" showed that they had a different spirit than Christ. Jesus was headed to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51) *because* He desired to provide a way for sinners to receive mercy and avoid judgment (Lk. 9:56); the disciples wanted judgment instead of salvation, wrath instead of mercy.

### ***Complete Commitment Required of Followers*** - Luke 9:57-62; Matthew 8:19-22

The subject of the next section is about the high cost of following Jesus and about what hinders people from following Him.

Jesus called people to follow Him many times in the gospels. He called Matthew, Philip, Peter and the others to follow Him at some point in time. Almost always, when He called people to follow Him, He used the same Greek verb in the same grammatical form (*ἀκολουθεῖν* - the present imperative of *ἀκολουθέω*; cf. Matt. 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 19:21; Mk. 2:14; 10:21; Lk. 5:27; 9:49, 59; 18:22; Jn. 1:43; 10:4; 21:19, 22). Both the verb and the verb tense imply that "following" was an ongoing command. The word "follow" in itself implies a future; it implies continuing on, doing something beyond the moment. The Greek present tense verb indicates a continuing action as well. We might even paraphrase it as "follow Me from now on."

When we look at Scripture, we discover that Jesus' demands for being His disciple were often too high for those who initially thought they wanted to follow Him. The standard was just too high. What was required was too demanding. In the text that follows we find three illustrations of Jesus' demands of discipleship being too great for those who heard Him. They illustrate what Jesus meant when He told His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (Lk. 9:23-24).

Jesus forced people to come to grips with how important He was to them. It isn't that He'll necessarily ask these things of all, but it reveals that if Jesus Christ is important enough to you, you will be happy to receive Him under any conditions that He might ask of you.

**9:57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."**

**9:58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."**

Matthew says that the “someone” of verse 57 was a scribe. Scribes were very esteemed people in Jewish life. They were the religious lawyers who interpreted the law. They were highly educated and approved by Jewish authorities.

This scribe had reached the highest level of devotion that he could think of when he said, "I will follow You wherever You go." His very words show a willingness to leave his career as a scribe; they implied a long-term commitment and loyalty to Jesus.

Jesus replied, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

Jesus had no home. His life was characterized by transiency and poverty. A few verses ago, He had been refused lodging in Samaria. The people in Gadara had asked Him to leave (Lk. 8:37). In Nazareth, they not only wanted Him to leave, they wanted Him dead (Lk. 4:29). Capernaum also rejected Him (Matt. 11:23) and Jerusalem would kill Him. Jesus was despised and unwanted.

The scribe had assumed his commitment was sacrificial; however, when he heard what Jesus demanded he decided it was too much. There is no indication of him stepping up to the demand and actually following.

Following Jesus is not easy and should not be attempted without counting the cost.

**9:59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."**

**9:60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."**

A second would-be follower is introduced. This time, it's Jesus who calls him to follow. Unlike Levi (Luke 5:28), who when called immediately left all, the first thing that this man does is come up with a reason *not* to follow: he wants to first bury his father. The request seems reasonable, as this was one of the most important responsibilities a family member could perform. Proper burial was a major concern in ancient culture. In the Old Testament becoming ceremonially unclean (through touching a corpse) was regarded as less important than burying the dead. In refusing this request, Jesus demonstrates that He and His purposes are greater than the most important family responsibility, even one that is seemingly rooted in the commandment to honor one's parents (Bock, 979, 980). Luke 14:25–27 supports this.

Some commentators assume that the man's father was not yet dead and this man was saying that he wanted to wait until he could fulfill his family responsibilities sometime in the future. They reason that if the man's father had already died, he wouldn't be talking to Jesus in the first place. However, no substantial evidence is offered to show that this was the case and this takes a lot of reading in between the lines to conclude this. It's hard to imagine that the simple words, “permit me first to go and bury my father” means, “I have future responsibilities to my family and cannot follow you until these responsibilities are completed.”

Jesus' reply, "let the dead bury the dead," is a pun that is designed to show the extent of commitment that discipleship requires. Instead of allowing the disciple to postpone following Jesus until he has fulfilled a sacred family duty, Jesus tells him to let the dead bury the dead. This is obviously not intended to be literal because the dead cannot do anything. The point is that those who are spiritually dead should be left behind if one chooses to follow Jesus.

In essence, a "best" excuse – in fact a reasonable one - has been submitted for postponing discipleship. Nevertheless, Jesus rejects the excuse. As Tannehill (1975:163) says, the words of the saying "show the kind of demand that Jesus makes and so indirectly illumine many other situations in which duties and desires may conflict with the demands of discipleship." Nothing is to block the pursuit of discipleship and nothing is to postpone its start. The kingdom's coming requires such priorities (Egelkraut 1976:140). Old ways of doing things have passed and new priorities are required. As Danker (1988:210) notes, "Many a would-be follower of Jesus has pleaded the requirements of social obligation or prior business demands as an excuse for not meeting the imperative of obedience." Jesus rejects such excuses (Bock, 981-982).

**9:61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."**

**9:62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."**

The third would-be disciple also has a reasonable request: he wants to say goodbye to his family before leaving with Jesus. In the Old Testament, Elisha asked Elijah if he could say goodbye to his parents and was granted permission. By looking at Jesus' response in verse 62 it appears that Jesus understood the man's request as a desire to follow after two things at once. He was hesitant to leave all behind.

Jesus' reply is really a warning. The metaphor is proverbial. It refers to plowing with the eyes ahead so that one plows a straight furrow. This is especially necessary in Palestine, where a backward look might easily knock one off course in the rocky soil (Bock, 983). To follow Jesus means not to look back to the way life was before.

To criticize these would-be disciples robs the story of its focus. Jesus' demands are new and radical, and these men could hardly have known that their requests would be countered so directly and emphatically. The point is not so much to rebuke the would-be disciple for having deficient desire as to warn about what association with Jesus involves, and to point out with rhetorical clarity the newness of the times that Jesus brings. (Bock, 983)

Jesus is a realist. So in 9:57-62, when people express the desire to follow Him, He wants to make it clear what following Him will entail. Whether Jesus calls the person or the person volunteers, one must know that following Him involves following one whom the world does not embrace. Prospective disciples must recognize that even sacred family duties are secondary to one's commitment to God. They must know that to ally oneself to Jesus means a break with one's past

and its old ties. The highest priority is God's kingdom. Everything else pales in comparison. Such a commitment is what Jesus desires. Such commitment is suitable for the kingdom and renders one useful in its service. Though the road is not easy, the way down the road is clear. The disciple is to go forward and travel a straight path. One must look ahead with a singular dedication to the task and not look back. The task's greatness requires that those who follow Jesus have a greater standard of dedication than did the great OT disciples, like Elisha. A great call demands a total response. Luke wants the reader to see this commitment. Following Jesus is a hard walk, but it is worth it, because it is a walk with God (Bock, 984, 985).