

**Don't Look Back**  
Luke 9:51-62 (09-08-19)  
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This Wednesday is September 11. Back in 2001 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists, totally committed to their Islamic mission, slammed four airplanes into American soil. Two crashed into the north and south towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. One crashed into the Pentagon in Washington DC. And a fourth, headed perhaps for the White House, was thwarted by several brave Americans and brought down in Shanksville, Pa. These four attacks murdered nearly 3000 Americans and caused over ten billion dollars in property damage.

Islamic terrorism calls for commitment to the ultimate sacrifice and continues to use violence and murder to spread its message. It all began with one man, Mohammed, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Today Islam is the second largest religion in the entire world, making up 24% of the world population. Christianity in all its forms makes up 2.2 billion people in the world, or 31%.

Both Islam and Christianity have the goal of spreading their messages around the world. Islam is based on submission to Allah. Christianity is based on the good news of Jesus Christ, who came into this world to die in the place of sinners and then to rise again and ascend to heaven. This morning we are going to learn from Luke's gospel what it means to be a genuine follower of Christ, a genuine Christian.

### **HEADED FOR JERUSALEM**

We now come to the continental divide in Luke's account of Christ. We are now headed for Jerusalem.

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

This is an epic verse. In a few more months all that God had planned for the redemption of sinful man will be fulfilled. God decreed this plan in eternity past. Throughout the Old Testament He promised the Messiah would come. Now, under the sovereign hand of God His plan is coming to pass as Jesus heads to Jerusalem. The greatest work of all history is shortly to be accomplished. God will bring salvation for sinners through His Son Jesus dying on a Roman cross and resurrecting three days later, leaving an empty tomb. Then Jesus Christ will ascend to heaven and sit at the right hand of God. All this is embedded in verse 51.

Knowing all this, Jesus set His face to go through with the plan, determined not to turn back. He is on a divine time table and will not miss His appointment with God on that cross outside Jerusalem. The word "determined" means "fixed." If you're from South Carolina, you know that "fixin' to do something" means you're getting ready to do it. Jesus is fixin' to go to Jerusalem while knowing He will face scourging, spitting, a crown of thorns, the pain of crucifixion, and the unspeakable agony of enduring the wrath of God in the place of sinners. Why did He not turn back? Hebrews 12:2 says "for the joy set before Him He endured the cross." Listen to this amazing prophecy in Isaiah 50 about His obedience to the Father's will.

*Isaiah 50:5-7, The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient **Nor did I turn back.** 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 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.*

Jesus set His face to accomplish salvation's plan. He didn't turn back. And He is now calling us to follow Him and not turn back. His journey was not a cakewalk and neither is the journey of His followers. But He will go with us through the hard times, suffering, and difficulties. Here's the question. What does it really mean to follow Him in His journey? What tactics does Jesus Christ use to spread His message of salvation? We'll look at four examples in this passage of what following Christ does not mean.

### **Following Christ never means using violence against those who reject Him.**

*Luke 9:52-56, and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 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?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 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.*

Jesus decided to go through Samaria. Samaria was located between Galilee to the north and Judea with Jerusalem to the south. Samaritans were half-breeds from the days of the Assyrian captivity in 722. They had a long history of bad blood with the Jews, even back to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah when the Jews wouldn't let them help rebuild the temple. That really ticked the Samaritans off, so they built their own temple on Mt. Gerazim with their own priesthood. What they didn't know is that Jesus had a plan to remove that ethnic enmity through the gospel. We see it happen in Acts when Philip went up to Samaria and many came to Christ. But now, Jesus decided to go through Samaria on His journey to Jerusalem and He needed a lodging place for Him and His men.

One problem. The first village didn't receive Him and that really torched the sons of thunder, James and John. So they come back to Jesus fired up, really fired up. They remember Elijah in 2 Kings 1 where it talks of the Baal worshipping King Ahaziah who sent 50 men to march Elijah back to the king. Elijah is sitting on top of a hill. The king's men commanded Elijah, "Come down!" Elijah said, "If I'm God's man, let fire come down and consume all of you." And it did! Phwoom! So the king sent another 50 men, and the same thing happened. Phwoom! The king sent another fifty men. But this time the leader bowed down and begged Elijah. Smart guy.

So James and John, full of thunder and lightning zeal, tell Jesus, "If you wish, we'll command fire to come down and consume these reprobates." These two disciples are ready to incinerate the whole village because they didn't receive Christ. Would Jesus do it? He could. In fact, at a future time He will! Jesus will bring a fiery judgment when He returns as the Judge of the whole earth. He'll sit on that Great White Throne Judgment Seat and every human being that did not bow their knee to Him will then be judged and sent into the lake of fire.

But that's then, and this is now. Jesus lets these guys know in no uncertain terms that He is not here to send fire bolts on everybody who refuses to bow their knee to Him. He first coming to this world was not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He didn't come to destroy lives, but to save them. What a merciful Savior we have. This defines our Christian worldwide mission today – good news of salvation to all who receive Christ.

Christians are being persecuted all over the world. American culture is turning increasingly against biblical Christianity. We are grieved, even angered. We may feel like calling fire down, but Jesus rebukes that spirit. All those people out there who hate everything the Bible stands for are not our enemies. Like John MacArthur says, "They are our mission field." Jesus cried out on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That's the spirit of Christianity. Our weapon is the gospel. We're not fighting flesh and blood, but spiritual powers of evil in high places. We try to persuade people by speaking the truth in love, not by blowing up their cities.

### **Following Christ does not mean an easy road.**

*Luke 9:57-58, As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 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 this volunteer is a scribe. He comes waltzing up to Jesus and in his self-confident presumption says "Hey Jesus, I'll go wherever you go. Count me in." Wherever you go! Wow. Sign him up! Problem is, Jesus knows his heart. Jesus knows he has no idea what he's buying in to. This is the guy who is impressed with Christianity until he hits some thorns and obstacles and he realizes following Christ is really going to cost him something. So Jesus warns him, "Don't think we're headed down to the

Sandals Resort here. You like a cushy, comfy, easy life. You want comfort and ease. But here's the reality – following Me means you may not have a place to lay your head tonight. Following Me means you will face hardship and rejection."

Jesus never lowered the bar of reality about following Him in this world. Salvation is the free gift of God, and we're saved by grace alone through faith alone. We can't earn it and don't deserve it. But don't think you can follow Christ without denying yourself, taking up your cross every day by dying to your own desires, and truly following Him. Christ doesn't promise an easy road. There are trials and difficulties in the way.

Are you ready for that? It's not about you and your comfort. It's about God and His glory. It's about loving Christ so much you'll gladly endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ. He gives you a brand new heart and like Paul and Timothy, you will follow Him whatever may come. That's what following Christ means. That's where the joy comes in. You delight in bringing God glory. In Acts, they went on their way rejoicing, counting it a privilege to suffer for Jesus.

**Following Christ means He comes first before even your closest human relationships.**

*Luke 9:59-60, And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 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."*

Uh-oh. Notice that word "first." Remember, Jesus is God Almighty. He deserves our total worship and commitment. Nothing can come before Him. When people turned to Christ in the book of Acts, they immediately began following Christ. Christ takes precedence over every other human relationship, including your own family. Christ doesn't mean we should dishonor our parents, but He does mean we should honor Him above our parents. And when it comes to either following Him or burying dear Dad, He expects us to follow Him.

Had his father already died, or did he want to stay with his dad until he died so he could be sure to tie up ends and receive the nice inheritance his dad was going to leave him? I think the second. But Jesus is not in competition even with our nearest and dearest. Baptist preacher R. G. Lee preached a sermon entitled "Jesus Above All." In it he said when he married his sweet little southern wife he assured her, "You are not first in my life. Jesus is first." That probably made him a better husband. Human relations can become idols of the heart when a spouse or child or someone takes priority over Christ. You know that is the case when they delight in that person more than God. They'd rather please and live under the rule of another person rather than live under the rule of Christ. But if you follow Christ above all, you will be the best father, husband, wife, and friend a person could have. Your loved ones need to see that Christ takes first place in your life. Many of Christ's people have offended parents and others by following Him first. They can't understand why you left their liberal church where all their friends are. Many of you have done that very thing. That can be very hard.

So Jesus tells this guy, ""Let your lost family take care of your dear dad. You have something more important to do – preach the Word." When Adoniram Judson fell for Ann Hasseltine, he was planning on going to Burma as a missionary. He asked Ann's father for her hand in marriage. Here was his request.

*"I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God?"*

Ann's father looked at her and said, "It's your choice."

**Following Christ means you leave the old life behind. Don't look back.**

*Luke 9:61-62, Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 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."*

Here's another volunteer for the journey. But again, there's a problem. "But first." He's Mr. Looking-Both-Ways. I'd like to follow Christ, but not if it will upset my schedule. I might lose my friends or even my parents might not approve. This guy wasn't very serious, and to follow Christ, to trust in Christ is a very serious business. Jesus is God Almighty and calls for single-minded loyalty and worship.

Remember Lot's wife? The Angel of the Lord in no uncertain terms said, "Flee for your lives. Do not look back." (Gen. 19:17) Mrs. Lot's heart was still in Sodom. She looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus goes on to illustrate His point. When you plowed a field in those days, you found a mark across the field, kept your eye on that mark, and went straight for it. You don't go along looking back. You can't be looking all around if you're going to make a straight furrow. If you put your hand to the plow, look straight ahead with your eye on Christ, and don't turn back. Oh, we'll fall sometimes and or get off the path at times. But Christ will faithfully lift us up and get us back on the way of faith.

**SO WHAT?**

Eighteen years ago nineteen misguided human beings followed the teaching of Islam and committed suicide in the name of a god that doesn't exist. It was total commitment, but it was sadly wrong. Jesus is the true and living God, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. He's our loving Savior. He fixed His face to go to Jerusalem for us. And now He calls us to follow Him with uncompromising faithfulness and single-minded devotion. He deserves all of our trust and obedience. And what does He call us to? To love Him above all. And to love and show mercy to other people. If that means suffering, difficulty, or even death, so be it. He deserves our all.