

The Demands Of Discipleship

Luke 9:51-62

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Our text will be Luke 9:51-62, but I want to look just at verse 51 to start. Luke said, "Now it came to pass..." one of his favorite time statements "...when the time had come for Him to be received up..." a pivotal, important statement "...that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

We come today in our text in Luke's Gospel to a major turning point. Jesus had been in the area of Galilee for several years doing ministry, but now He is setting His face toward Jerusalem. Everything from this point on in the book of Luke, is in the shadow of the Cross. Everything Jesus says and does is basically pointing toward Jerusalem. From verse 51 on, for 10 chapters, up to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem in chapter 19, verse 45, Jesus is on the road journeying toward Jerusalem. For the next 10 chapters in Luke, we're going to be on a road trip with Jesus.

Luke doesn't describe this journey day by day or geographically, but what the focus is going to be for this period of time is the teaching of Jesus. This time frame covers about a three-to four-month period. So we now shift from the miracles of Jesus to the teaching and instructions of Jesus. We will be getting some of the most marvelous parables that Christ ever spoke during this period in our study of the Gospel of Luke.

Why did Jesus travel from Galilee down to Jerusalem, verse 51? The answer is to suffer and die upon the Cross for the sins of mankind. Where it says in verse 51, "When the time had come for him to be received up..." is speaking of the entire work and ministry of Christ from the Incarnation, when God became man through the womb of the Virgin Mary; to the Crucifixion, where God substituted Himself on the Cross for man, the creature's sin; to the Resurrection, when Jesus rose victoriously from the grave; to the Ascension, where Jesus is now in heaven; and to His exaltation. Jesus is now at the right hand of His Father.

We've recently seen Donald Trump elected and is soon to be the President of the United States. He has talked about his election being "the greatest comeback in history." No. The greatest comeback in history is yet to take place. That will happen when Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, comes back at the Second Coming and establishes His kingdom on earth. You talk about blowing people's minds when Christ comes back! He's going to blow the doors off.

So Jesus' Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and exaltation are all rolled up in this phrase "received up." So Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem, and everything from here to chapter 19 of Luke is His journey to Jerusalem, which culminates in the triumphal entry, then the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and exaltation and you might say, the great commission of Jesus Christ.

Luke now focuses in this section on the teaching of Jesus. As we journey with Jesus on His way to the Cross, He wants to prepare His followers for the hardships that would lie ahead or they would encounter.

In our text today, Jesus teaches us some of the demands of discipleship. This is not exhaustive, but our text shows us two demands. The first demand is that He demands mercy. The second demand is that He demands wholehearted commitment.

The first demand of mercy is in verses 51-56. "Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him..." that is, this Samaritan village rejected and did not receive Christ and His entourage "...because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And 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, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village."

This first lesson in discipleship came out of an experience of rejection. To understand this, you need to understand the geography and culture of the land. Jesus is in the north of Israel in the region of Galilee, near the lake of Galilee. This is where He had been doing His Galilean ministry up to this point. Now He wanted to travel south two or three day's journey from Galilee to Judea where Jerusalem was. But between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south was Samaria.

No good Jew wanted to go through Samaria, but that is the shortest route from Galilee to Judea. Many Jews would actually go east of the Jordan River and travel down the eastern side, trans-Jordan, to avoid traveling through Samaria. They would enter Jericho, at the north end of the Dead Sea, and then go up the steep road into Jerusalem.

Not Jesus; He just went right through Samaria. This was an issue because the Jews hated the Samaritans, and the Samaritans hated the Jews. The Samaritans were half Jew and half Gentile, so they weren't pure-blooded Jews. They came into existence after the Babylonian captivity. Israel had been taken captive to Babylon, but there were some Jews left in the land. Then the king of Babylon planted other Gentiles he conquered in the land, and there was intermarriage between the Jews and Gentiles.

When Nehemiah came back from Babylonian captivity, and they were going to rebuild the walls and the temple, Sanballat and Tobiah wanted to help him build the wall. They were told "No," because they were Samaritans and had a false religion. They worshipped on Mt. Gerizim, had their own religious system, had rejected the religion of the Jews and only held to the first five books of the Bible.

So one of the greatest racial prejudices in history was the prejudice between Samaritans and Jews. To say the least, they did not like each other or get along. So this hostility surfaces in our text when Jesus was going through Samaria to get to Jerusalem.

Jesus probably traveled with a large group, “and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him,” verse 52. But they would not receive Him in Samaria. It doesn’t say who the messengers were. It probably was James and John, because they play into the story in verse 54. But when the Samaritans heard that Jesus was not coming to them, they got upset and said He couldn’t stay in their village. So the story says they finally went to another village.

When Jesus was speaking to His disciples after His Resurrection and before His Ascension, He said to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Then they would be witnesses to Him “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). So there would be a witness to Samaria. And in Acts 8, Philip the evangelist, went to Samaria, where there was a great revival. We also know that in John 4, Jesus stopped at Jacob’s Well in Sychar, which is Samaria, and talked to a woman who had five husbands, and the man she was presently living with was not her husband. She came to know Jesus as the Messiah and drank of that “living water” (John 4:1-10).

So even though the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, Jesus did. Even though they rejected Jesus, God still loved them, and God would send a messenger to them. Many of them would become believers.

Verse 51, “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” means that Jesus was committed to going to Jerusalem and not being distracted from His mission of dying on the Cross. It also is mentioned in verse 53, in Luke 13:22, in Luke 17:11, Luke 18:31-34 and in Luke 19:11 and 28. So over and over again, it says He’s going to Jerusalem. So everything we read about from this point on is in the shadow of the Cross.

Verse 54, “And when His disciples James and John saw this...” they saw that the Samaritans had rejected Jesus, who they love “...they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’” I’m sure Jesus was thinking, Where did I get you guys?! He rebuked them in verses 55-56: “But he turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.’”

It’s interesting that only a few days earlier, James and John were at the transfiguration. They saw Jesus transfigured and they saw Moses and Elijah. They had Elijah on the brain. The Bible tells us that the king of Assyria sent 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah. The captain said that the king wanted to see Elijah. But Elijah said, “If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men” (2 Kings 1:10). Elijah was a man of God, so fire came down on them. They were fried Samaritans.

So the king sent another group of 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah. And Elijah again said, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men," verse 12. That's what happened. Don't mess with Elijah.

Then a third group of 50 soldiers was sent by the king to arrest Elijah. If I was in this group, I would go awol. "I'm not going to deal with that prophet!" But this time the captain of the group pleaded with Elijah not to harm him or his men. So Elijah sought the Lord, and He said for the captain to go. So this group was spared.

So this probably is the story that James and John had in mind in our text when they wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans who had rejected Jesus. And in Mark 3:17, James and John were nicknamed by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder."

Then in our text, in verses 55-56, Jesus rebuked James and John. He said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. And they went to another village." The term "Son of Man" is used a couple of times in our text. It is the term Jesus used of Himself most often. It is a Messianic term from the book of Daniel.

There are some lessons from this first section I want to give you. Luke tells us Jesus "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus went with steady determination to follow the Father's path for Him where He was being lead. So should we.

God calls us to follow Him. We should follow without stipulation, without terms, without hesitation, without being divided. And if it leads to Jerusalem where there is a cross, you should faithfully follow His leading. Wherever the Lord leads you, follow Him promptly, faithfully and whole heartedly. "Yes, but there's a cross there! I'd rather go somewhere else!" The lesson is that we too should set our face toward the cross and follow Jesus Christ, wherever He leads, sunshine or sorrow.

Second, we should be ready to show mercy, even to our enemies and those who reject Christ. Sometimes we get hatred in our hearts toward unbelievers. "Those wicked, vile, wretched heathen sinners over there! They should be burned right now by the wrath of God!" We sometimes preach hellfire and brimstone with a sense of gratitude. "You're going to hell! Yes, you are! And I'm glad you are!" Instead we need to be merciful, kind and compassionate.

James and John wanted to fry them on the spot. And some people want to go street witnessing with a flamethrower. "Turn or burn!" Can you imagine that?! Or there's the preacher who says, "You're goin' to hell, you wretched sinner!" and he's glad they are.

Do you know what spirit you are of?

It's interesting that James and John probably had the right motive—love for Jesus—and they even had Scripture to back it up. But their actions were out of the will of God; it wasn't the spirit or the heart of Christ.

We all know John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” But do you know John 3:17? It says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved.” Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world; He came to save the world. Not to destroy but to deliver.

I grew up in church, and as a young, teenage boy, I thought that I didn’t want to give my life to Jesus, because if I did, He’d mess me all up. I thought He’d make me get a haircut, He’d put weird clothes on me, make me wear a skinny tie, stick me in a pew and I didn’t want to do that. So I resisted coming to Christ, because I thought He certainly would make me a weird Christian. He might even call me to be a missionary to Africa, or worse yet, to Barstow. At least there’s surfing in Africa, but there’s no surfing in Barstow.

I was absolutely convinced that if I gave my life to Jesus Christ, it would ruin my life. But Jesus says, “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25).

So if you’re thinking that He came to destroy my life, that’s not right; He came to save your life. If you seek to save your life selfishly for your own lusts and pursuits, you’ll lose life altogether.

In the second section of our study, in verses 57-62, we see the demand of discipleship is whole-hearted, prompt commitment. “Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ 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.’ Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

These are some very sobering verses in which Jesus encounters three, would-be disciples. They are “would-be” disciples, because the text seems to indicate that of the three none of them faithfully followed Jesus. It doesn’t really tell us the outcome, but we can somewhat assume by the text that they, like the rich, young ruler, went sorrowfully away. They did not “deny [themselves], and take up [their] cross, and follow [Him]” (Matthew 16:24).

Let’s look at these three would-be disciples and learn some lessons about discipleship. The first would-be disciple is found in verses 57-58. “Now it happened as they journeyed on the road...” so they were on their way toward Jerusalem “...that someone...” Matthew 8:19 tells us that this individual was a “certain scribe.” The other two were not mentioned who they were. So this man was a religious Jew and an educated man with a position of authority. And he voluntarily came to Jesus and said, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”

My guess is that this man saw the miracles that Jesus had performed and heard His preaching,

and he thought that the kingdom of God had arrived. He had been caught up in the emotion, the drama, the excitement and hype, but he had not counted the cost; he did not know that to follow Jesus was to be going to Jerusalem where Jesus would suffer and die. So he glibly said, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

Most evangelists would be elated to hear this. "Sign him up! Put him on the church rolls. Let's make him a disciple. Let's have him join the club."

But Jesus knew this man's heart; that he wasn't counting the cost, he wasn't really understanding the price to be paid to be His disciple, he didn't understand where Jesus was going, he was selfishly motivated and it was all just emotion. So Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man..." He used this term again "...has nowhere to lay His head."

Jesus could stay at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, but He didn't own a home. He would sleep under the olive trees and crash under the stars. So basically Jesus said, "Before you say so glibly that you will follow Me wherever I go, I don't have anywhere to lay My head. You want to follow Me? It's going to be hard, difficult and arduous."

So the point is that following Jesus Christ will involve hardships. It's "not a walk in the park." It's not easy to be a Christian. It's blessed and the Lord is with us, but even David describes the Lord as "my shepherd; I shall not want...I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." But when he does, "You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...my cup runs over" (Psalm 23:1,4-5). But you still must pass through "the valley of the shadow of death" or hardships or difficulties.

Have you found being a Christian is not easy? But it's blessed. Did you face hardships, trials and difficulties? That's what Jesus is challenging this would-be disciple with. Following Jesus Christ involves hardship. To be a true follower of Jesus Christ is difficult.

Mark 10:29-31 says, "So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.'" So there will be sacrifice, persecutions and hardships, but God will bless us here now and in eternity.

Often the desire for personal comfort and ease keeps people from following Jesus Christ. They say, "I don't want to be laughed at, I don't want to be weird, I don't want to be put down, I don't want to be ostracized." R. Kent Hughes said, "No one who commits to following Christ, and does so, lives the life of ease. No one. If your Christianity has not brought you discomfort in your life, something is wrong. A committed heart knows the discomfort of loving difficult people, the discomfort of giving until it hurts, the discomfort of putting oneself out for the ministry of Christ and His church, the discomfort of a life out of step with modern culture, the discomfort of

being disliked, the occasional sense of having nowhere to lay your head. But Christ's rewards far out-value anything lost by following Him."

So if you are a believer, it will be hard to follow Jesus Christ; you better count the cost.

The second would-be disciple we find in verses 59-60. "Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.'"

The first man voluntarily said that he would follow Jesus, and Jesus challenged him to count the cost. To the second man, Jesus said, "'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me....'" This is a classic contradiction; it should never be, "Lord, me first" or "Lord, but...", and then we have our stipulations or terms. If it's "Lord," then He's first. To "go and preach the kingdom of God" is the priority.

Jesus gets a bad rap for what He says to this guy. They think what He said was pretty cruel and mean. The guy's dad is dead and he wants to bury him. But Jesus said "No." "Let the dead bury their own dead." People don't understand how they can do that.

What's going on is that the man's dad was not dead or most likely not dead. If his father was dead, he wouldn't be there talking to Jesus; he'd be mourning him and burying him immediately. In the Middle East at that time, they buried their dead within hours. They didn't wait like we do today—weeks and sometimes months—they would bury their dead that same day.

So this is a figure of speech; this man is basically saying, "When my dad dies, then I'll be free to follow You." But Jesus is saying, "No; following Me not only means hardship but also means urgency. And following Me doesn't mean you do it half-heartedly." So we are to follow Him with urgency and whole-heartedly.

This man is basically making excuses. "My dad hasn't died yet, but when he's dead, I'll bury him and he'll be gone, then everything will be cool and I'll be ready to follow You. I'll do that when I'm ready."

Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead." He's really saying that the spiritually dead should bury the physically dead. Then He said to "go and preach the kingdom of God."

The point is that following Christ demands urgency and should be our highest priority.

I've discovered as I've aged that there's not a lot of time left. No one is guaranteed tomorrow. We have no lease on life. We don't know what the day may bring. The Bible says that life is short, death is certain, so "teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

The older I get and the farther down the road I get, I realize there is more behind me than there

is ahead of me. That brings me a sense of urgency and a sense of the highest priority, of living for Jesus, serving Him. We've all heard the saying, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." So we shouldn't give Jesus excuses, and we shouldn't give Him terms. We should have a sense of urgency.

Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). There will come a day for every one of us when we will not be allowed to serve Him anymore on earth. The night will come. It's in His hands; we don't know when that will be. But we should be motivated with a sense of urgency. Now is the time, now is the day; get busy serving the Lord. You never know what the future brings.

This second, would-be disciple said, "Lord, I'm not ready yet. Wait until my father dies. He might leave me a nice inheritance. Then maybe I can buy you a house, since you said you didn't have one. I could take care of the other disciples. Just let me wait until the kids are out of the house. Let me wait until my parents are gone. Let me wait until I finish college. Let me wait until I get out of the military. Let me wait until I retire to do what I'm called to do." That day may never come. It's so dangerous to think that way.

Procrastination is the great enemy of discipleship. A day becomes a week. A week becomes a month. A month becomes a year. A year becomes a lifetime. As I look back, I can't tell you how many days, weeks and months I wish I could get back. One of the most precious things about time is that you have to seize the moment. You can't get it back. Once it's gone, it's gone. And we waste time doing things that are of no eternal value.

Don't get me wrong; it's okay to take your dog for a walk or go swimming, enjoy the beach or whatever it is you want to do. But keep life's priorities straight; the first thing should be kept the first thing. Don't just procrastinate and make excuses and blow through your life, putting off following Jesus Christ, serving Him and living for Him. It's so very important.

The third, would-be disciple is in verse 61. "And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but...' that's the problem '...let me first...' that's also the problem; he hadn't died to self '...go and bid them farewell who are at my house.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'" He said He would follow Jesus, then gave his terms and requirements.

Jesus told one guy, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." He needed to make it a priority, be wholehearted. Then this guy said he would follow Jesus, but he wanted to go back and say goodbye to his family. Jesus detected that the man was allowing his family to keep him from that urgency and wholehearted service and commitment.

Sometimes even your family can get in the way of serving the Lord. You need to be careful. You need to love God supremely—not neglecting your family, marriage or children—but keeping your life in balance, in the priority of loving God supremely and the urgency of serving Him. It's

so very important.

So when Jesus said, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit...” or “useful” “...for the kingdom of God,” it’s interesting that we had just heard about Elijah the prophet calling down fire from heaven and consuming the soldiers. It’s also interesting that in 1 Kings 19:19-21, when Elijah was giving Elisha the mantle of his calling to minister as a prophet, Elisha was plowing with his oxen in his field. Elijah took off his mantle and put it on Elisha. He basically passed the baton to Elisha and told Elisha to follow him. Elisha said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” Elijah told him to go and do so.

The difference between the two stories was the man in our text was making excuses and delaying obedience to Christ. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Elisha was actually going to finalize his commitment; he kissed his father and mother, broke up the oxen’s equipment and made a fire with it, slaughtered the oxen and boiled their flesh and gave the meat to the people. He was burning his bridges behind him. “Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.” So we see the difference.

But this third, would-be disciple wanted to go home and say goodbye, but he was “having put his hand to the plow, and looking back.” Jesus said he was not fit for the kingdom of God. It was a conditional discipleship. The man said, “Let me first...” It should never be “Let me first...” “Let me first get out of college. Let me first get married. Let me first have kids. Let me first get my kids married. Let me first get to retirement. Let me first begin to draw my Social Security. Let me first do this. Let me first do that.” We procrastinate to the point where we never serve Him.

In Luke 14:26-27, it says, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

You might be thinking, I can’t believe that verse is in the Bible! It is. Is Jesus saying we should hate our family?! No. He’s saying that our love for God should be so great that in comparison with our love for our wife, husband, children, parents, brothers, sisters, it would be so far down that it would be like hate. He’s saying that our love for God and our commitment to wholehearted obedience should be so great that in comparison, our love for our family would be likened to hate.

So Jesus wants our undivided loyalty. Jesus said, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). When God rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, He saved Lot and his family. They fled the city, but Lot’s wife looked back. She obviously looked longingly on her life in Sodom. She saw her country club going up in flames. She saw her favorite restaurants going up in flames. She saw the shopping mall she used to frequent going up in flames. So she was turned into “a pillar of salt” (Genesis 19:26).

They had a proverbial saying that no one could plow a straight furrow looking backwards. Too

many Christians spend all their time looking in the rearview mirror remembering the parties, the good times, the popularity, the fun but forgetting the darkness and the emptiness. They should be looking forward and faithfully following Jesus Christ and saying, "Lord, I'll go where You want me to go, I'll do whatever You want me to do, I'll be what You want me to be and I'll say whatever You want me to say."

Are you ready right now to follow Jesus Christ to the Cross—if it means rejection, suffering, sorrow and pain? Are you willing and ready to say, "Lord, I'll follow You" with no stipulations, no "but," no "me first," no criteria? Do you say, "Lord, I'll follow You wherever You want me to go, but, please, please, don't send me to Barstow"? Or do you say, "Lord, I'll faithfully follow You"? Jesus said, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."