

Jesus on the way to the Cross

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[0 : 0 0] Luke's Gospel, chapter 9. As we pick up in Luke's Gospel, we're going to be following Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, following Jesus on the way to the cross. You're probably familiar with the idea of life being a journey. Maybe you've seen it written on t-shirts, life is a journey, so enjoy the rides. Life is a journey, so wear comfortable shoes. We get the idea of the image, don't we? Life comes with ups and downs, those unexpected moments. There is movement. There are experiences along the way, different people, different places come in and out of our lives.

Maybe today, for some of us, we have a really clear sense of the direction that our lives are going in. Everything seems to be set and in order. But maybe for others, we feel like we're drifting.

We're not really sure what our purpose, what's the plan. Perhaps we feel trapped. When we come to Luke's Gospel, and we come to this central section, chapters 9 to 18, and we find this journey theme again and again. We find Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. And as he goes, he is going to be teaching his followers about following his way. And what we discover is that Jesus has real clarity. He knows where his life is heading. He knows the reason for this journey. He knows the route it is going to take him on. And he is resolved and determined that he is going to complete this journey. The Son of God, the Savior of the world, will go to Jerusalem to die, to be raised, to ascend to heaven again. And it's this Jesus who then invites us to follow him on his way. And this morning, as we hear Jesus' words, again, we're going to notice that he's really clear with us. He's going to say to us, yes, there is cost to following me. It does require commitment.

But in Christ, there is purpose and there's wonderful reward also. So let's begin thinking about verses 51 to 56. Let's see Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

Every journey has a reason. Think about the last time you went to your local corner shop. There would have been a reason. Maybe you'd run out of bread or milk.

[2 : 5 2] If you travel to the other side of the country, the other side of the world, there will be a reason. Perhaps you're visiting family. You're going on a holiday. What's the reason that leads Jesus to make his journey? I'm going to find one reason here in verse 51. But before we get there, we're going to go backwards to verse 31 just to remind ourselves. So from chapter 9, verse 27, we find Jesus on a mountain and he's shining with the glory of God. Moses and Elijah come to speak with him.

And we're told in verse 31, they spoke about his departure or his exodus, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Okay, so that theme is picking up. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to fulfill his exodus. And if you know the story of the Bible, the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus reminds us that God sent Moses to be a rescuer for God's people. And so Jesus has come on a rescue mission. He is going to bring his people out of spiritual slavery, and he's going to bring us to enjoy life with God. And he's going to fulfill that mission in Jerusalem. That's one reason for the journey. The other one we have here in verse 51, as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. So here we're reminded of the climax, the end of Jesus' life here on earth. Luke's gospel begins with great promises about the birth of Jesus, the one who's coming is the Son of God, He's the Savior of the world. Then we've been reading about the ministry of Jesus, all those miracles that He does in the power and authority of God, all the grace that He showed, the love that He poured out on people. Now, He's heading directly for His death, for His burial, before three days later, rising from the dead and ascending into glory. Why does Jesus begin this journey to Jerusalem? Because He's on the way to save sinners like us, because He's on the road to the cross, to lay down His life, to give His life as a sacrifice, as a ransom for sinful people, to show the perfect justice of God, that God cannot simply sweep sin under the rug, as Jesus bears sin and its punishment, to show the wonderful love of God as Jesus is a willing substitute. So He goes to die, but He goes on the way to receiving glory, to be welcomed in heaven as the victorious King.

That's the reason for Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Every journey also has a route. So let's think about the route that we find here. Thankfully, for those of us who like to move around the city, the festival is now finished, because when you're trying to journey, plan in Edinburgh, it can be an nightmare. What about the journey of Jesus? What route does He take on the way to the cross? Well, we find Him, verses 52 to 56, going through Samaria. Verse 52, He 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. So like many other pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus wants to pass through Samaria, but He is not welcomed. In fact, hatred is going to be shown.

And you can look in history books and find that this was not uncommon for Jewish pilgrims to be attacked and abused as they tried to pass through Samaria. And so you've got these two disciples then, James and John. These are pastors in training. They've been walking with Jesus for three years. They've heard Jesus say, love your enemies. But the first time there's offense, they want to call down fire and destroy them. How does Jesus respond? Jesus turned and rebuked them. Remember, Jesus is on a journey to the cross. And what is the cross going to display? It's going to display God's love for enemies.

That's the heart of Jesus. He's going to die to make enemies into friends. This is not the time for judgment. In fact, you get to the book of Luke and then the book of Acts. You discover the mission to the world for Jesus includes the Samaritan. Our Savior is patient. And in that patience, there is a chance to repent. Judgment is future. Think about this root of Jesus. Think about who Jesus is. This is the Son of God. This is the Son of God with eternal glory as He's become one of us. Now He finds Himself walking a road of rejection, walking a path marked by suffering on the way to the cross to be the Savior of the world. There is so much grace and mercy in Jesus, our wonderful Savior. And let's think about the resolve of Jesus. Because again, every time we start a journey, if we want to get to journey's end, there needs to be resolution to keep on going. That's perhaps particularly true if the road is tough, if you're on a tough hill climb, or if you're walking with a friend through suffering and loss.

[8 : 41] There needs to be resolve. Look at Jesus in verse 51. He resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He set His face to Jerusalem. He is determined to go there. Why? He's determined to go to the cross, to carry out God's plan of salvation. He knows His Bible. He knows it was the Lord's will to crush Him, to make His life a sin offering. He knows that He is the fulfillment of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. It's by the spilling of Jesus' blood that our sins could be forgiven.

So, Jesus resolves to go to set events in motion. Recognize that Jesus isn't overtaken by these events.

Jesus is in authority. He sets the path. His destiny is calling, and Jesus won't go off track. It's the journey of Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. Stop for a moment and ask ourselves, how should I respond to this journey? How should I respond as I see Jesus setting His face towards Jerusalem to suffer before receiving glory? I think one response is that of wonder, isn't it?

Amazing love. How can it be that you, my God and King, should die for me? How can it be that the perfect sinless Son of God would leave the glory of heaven to suffer and die for sinful people like us? It's grace. It's incredible, isn't it? It's incredible to think that the Son of God walked in our shoes. It's incredible to think that the eternal Son of God can sympathize with us in our weakness. It's still more incredible to recognize the eternal Son of God is the one who walked up Calvary hill to suffer and die for us. There is wonder as we think about the journey of Jesus. We can respond with worship also as we recognize this amazing grace that saves people like us, that the God of perfect justice would be pleased to transfer my sin and guilt and place it on His sinless Son, Jesus, in order to demonstrate such love. It is fitting that as the people of God will share the Lord's Supper together, that we will remember, we will give thanks, and we will worship. But as we think about responding to the journey of Jesus, we also need to recognize that He invites us to walk. Because here is the setting for the cost of discipleship. So in this section of Luke's gospel, we're going to hear a lot about the cost of discipleship, but here's the setting. Jesus is the one who has walked the road of suffering for us first in order to save us. Jesus is the one who walks with us on the journey of faith at each point, and Jesus is the one who will welcome us into glory at journey's end. So as we think about, as we will shortly, the cost of discipleship, we need to place it in that context and to see the significance of this journey. So that's Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. Now let's think about following in the way of Jesus from verse 57 to 62. And one thing that we remember as Luke records it for us is that as Jesus walks, He's not just walking by Himself. So we're going to be reminded along the way that His disciples are also following, because they have been living with Him for three years or so. They've been watching, they've been listening, they've been learning. And today we're introduced to three would-be followers who appear on the road. What message do they receive? How are they met?

And it may surprise us. It may surprise us to think about the message of Jesus. It may surprise us that He doesn't sugarcoat what following Him will be like. He doesn't say to them, oh, it's going to be amazing. It's going to be a bed of roses. He's walking to the cross. Now, He doesn't want to sell a lie.

[13 : 37] It might surprise us that Jesus isn't interested in gathering a crowd for the sake of having a crowd. In churches, in ministries, sometimes that's a trap that we can fall into.

Well, so long as we've got a crowd, so long as there's a... But that's not what Jesus is about. Rather, He wants to show from the beginning that the road He is walking is a road that His followers must walk to. There's real cost involved. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we've said it before, said this, when Jesus bids a person follow Me, He bids him come and die. There is that call to self-denial.

There is the call to cross-carrying if Jesus is our King. But at the same time, we need to understand that that call to die is also a call to come and truly live. Because in following Jesus, we're following the one who is God. We're invited to know and enjoy our God. We're invited to find real purpose. Here is the purpose for our lives, to follow our wonderful Savior with the promise of eternal glory. That glory that came to Jesus is the glory that is for His church also.

So let's keep with that journey theme as we get into these verses and think about the reason for someone to follow Jesus. Why follow in the way of Jesus, especially when it costs?

And we're going to identify two reasons in our text. The first in verse 59, because of the call of Jesus. He said to another man, follow Me.

[15 : 24] If we understand who Jesus is, then we understand that that call should meet with response. Luke in his gospel makes clear, the one who is saying follow Me is the one who is the Son of God, the one who is the promised King, the one who is the chosen Savior, the one who can bring us back to life with God, so that to listen to Him is to hear our God, is to hear our King, the King of love and grace.

To hear this call is a call that restores everything that is broken. To hear this call is to hear the call to the life that we were actually made for.

I wonder, have you heard that call? I wonder today, have you responded to that call? Let me encourage you, if the Spirit of God is working in your heart, if you know that Jesus really is the Son of God and the Savior.

Learn a lesson from these guys on the road. Don't delay. Don't miss the calling of Jesus. So the first reason to follow is because of His call.

The second reason is to do with His kingdom. Look at the emphasis that we find a couple of times in these texts. As Jesus meets that man and says, follow me, he replied, Lord, first let me go and bury my father.

[16 : 54] Jesus said to him, let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and do what? You go and proclaim the kingdom of God. And then another guy that comes along and says, I'll follow you, but first let me go back and say goodbye.

Jesus said, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for what? Is fit for service in the kingdom of God. So we should hear this call in the context of Jesus, the King, who's building a kingdom.

And He says, go and proclaim, go and serve. Again, to look at Jesus is to understand He is the man on a mission. He's on this mission from God to shine a light into spiritual darkness.

He's on a mission to establish the new covenant through His broken body and His shed blood. To give us new hearts, to send the Spirit, to give us total forgiveness.

He's on this mission to bring the nations in to know God. And then again, we're being reminded, same as we were in the book of Acts, that as His followers, it is Jesus' plan and purpose to continue His work through us.

[18 : 03] Through the people of the church. Through the words that we proclaim. Think about that. Jesus builds His kingdom through the words that we proclaim.

As the gospel is taught. As the gospel is spoken about. So whether we're thinking about Sunday worship. Whether we're thinking about Tuesday Bible studies.

Wednesday community groups. Whether we're thinking about our conversations. Jesus is pleased to build His kingdom as His word is proclaimed. And as His followers.

Jesus calls us to works of service. By way of building His kingdom. Those acts of mercy and kindness done in Jesus' name. That allow others to give glory to God in heaven.

Amen. So that's the reason for us to follow. Let's think about this now. What's the route that we must take to be Jesus' followers?

[19 : 10] Again, Jesus liked the journey imagery. He spoke about choosing the straight and the narrow path. And I think here, if we're going to summarize what He's talking about. This path, this journey involves putting Jesus first.

Making sure that He gets first loyalty. Even ahead of good things. On this journey of faith. Jesus is saying to us, there are going to be points where we meet the equivalent of a fork in the road.

And we're going to need to decide which way are we going to go. Are we going to walk by faith? Are we going to put Jesus first? Are we going to walk in His footsteps?

Is Jesus going to come first? Look at the examples here. Will Jesus come before our own comfort? To the man in verse 57 who said, I'll follow you wherever you go.

Jesus replied, foxes have dens and birds have nests. But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Here again we're being reminded of the cost of the incarnation.

[20 : 17] The cost of Jesus of becoming one of us. Leaving the glory of heaven. The Son of Man becomes homeless. And it's this Jesus who says to us, are we willing to lay aside the idol of comfort for the sake of Jesus?

Definitely seems to be one of those major challenges in the modern ways. Will we put following Jesus ahead of bettering myself? Will we put the needs of others ahead of living to meet my own needs?

Am I ready to give sacrificially to the church and to mission for the sake of Jesus? Will Jesus come first, even if it costs personal comfort?

The second example asks the question, will I put Jesus before customs? We need to think about this one.

Verse 59, He said to another man, follow me. And the man replied, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. Jesus said, let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

[21 : 34] Maybe that doesn't mean too much for us, especially for Western folks. But the biggest deal in the religious society that Jesus was speaking to of the day was to make sure that your family members, especially your parents, got a proper burial.

You know, there is a really crucial way to honor your parents. Maybe people from an Asian background, you have particular family customs that are really significant.

Jesus' challenge becomes very real in that context. He says to this man here, my call to follow comes first, even ahead of those really important family customs.

Don't delay life in the kingdom of God for good things. Whenever I come to a passage like this, I always remember a Chinese friend in Glasgow who with tears in his eyes said he couldn't follow Jesus as much as he wanted to because his parents wouldn't approve and wouldn't allow it.

Jesus in effect is saying to this man, listen, let the spiritually dead, let the people who are not interested in the kingdom bury the physically dead. This is your moment to come and follow me to enter into the kingdom.

[22 : 56] So we need to hear what Jesus isn't saying. We need to recognize Jesus isn't saying, don't love your family. Jesus would never say, don't honor your parents. Jesus is sinless and he never encouraged sin.

And so he tells us to keep the commandments. But Jesus is saying, there may be a time, maybe for some of us, we've already had this experience where you have to put Jesus above honoring family customs and traditions.

There may be a time where you have to say yes to Jesus and that will mean saying no to family expectations. For some of us, depending on our cultural background, there could be a really high cost to following Jesus because of customs.

The last example, will I put Jesus before companions, before family? Still another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.

Jesus replied, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. The message here is that urgency is great.

[24 : 11] The message here is that Jesus is looking for disciples who are wholehearted. The useful servant is the one who plows ahead, plows a straight furrow rather than looking back. The one who says, I belong to the Lord.

That's where my identity rests. Again, we know this. Jesus won't always call us away from our family and from our friends. And some of us are blessed and we have that privilege of living with friends and family close by.

But what if Jesus does? What if he does? What if he puts it on your heart, maybe even today, to move to a different place, to support the work of the kingdom, to support another church, to start a church?

What if God puts it on your heart to go on mission for him? Then we understand where this cost comes in. What if he calls us to faith and to live out that faith, even as the only Christian in our family, the only Christian in our flat, the only Christian in your group of friends?

Will we put Jesus first? Will we accept him as friend and brother, even if we find ourselves far from family and friends?

[25 : 37] We have our reason, we have our root. Every journey needs resolve and we need resolve as a follower of Jesus to keep going to journey's end.

I was thinking this week about Eric Liddell. Maybe you know his story. If you've seen the movie Chariots of Fire or have you read his book, he was a man, a Christian man, who resolved the peak of his powers not to run on the Lord's Day, not to run on a Sunday at the Olympics, gave up a gold medal for the sake of God's approval.

There's resolve. And then, with a really promising career ahead of him, he resolved to leave that behind to go to China. And then when war and trouble came to stay in China and to die in China, sharing good news, sharing the good news of Jesus with families and with children.

Resolve is needed for the Christian life. When Luke wrote his gospel, maybe 30 or so years after these events, he was writing to a young church, new Christians, a missionary church, taking the good news of Jesus to different places, and a church that was facing persecution.

And by the Spirit, Luke's gospel still speaks to us today, still speaks to us today in a missionary context where perhaps we face trouble and hostility also.

[27 : 11] And so as we close, will you resolve, will I resolve to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, to walk with him, to be ready to walk his way, to be willing to suffer first before glory that comes?

Will you and I today resolve to make him and his kingdom our number one priority? Will we repent of where we haven't done that?

Will we resolve to worship and to enjoy our Savior? Will we take this journey? It is one journey.

It's never wasted. Even as hard as it might be, and there is in store a truly wonderful destination. Let's pray briefly together.

Lord, our God, we thank you for this journey that Jesus willingly and resolutely took, walking a road of suffering and rejection, of shame and humiliation and death in order to be our Savior, in order to rescue us from sin, in order to bring us into fellowship with the living God through faith in him.

[28 : 38] Lord, help us to see that journey that he made for us, that we might walk our journey of faith with him and for him. Help us to resolve today and each day to put him first, to be ready to experience and to embrace cost and suffering if only we might make Jesus more glorious to ourselves and in the eyes of others we pray.

Amen. Now, what we're going to do just now is we're going to sing and as we sing our boys and girls are going to come back in and join us and then we will prepare to share the Lord's Supper.

So we're going to sing the hymn from Heaven you came the servant king. So let's stand as we sing together. From heaven you came, helpless be,