

Luke 9:51-62

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[0 : 01] Again, the scripture reading for today is Luke chapter 9, verses 51 through 62. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 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.

To another he said, Follow me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead.

[1 : 03] But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those who are at my home.

Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. Well, with our return in calendar to the classrooms around the country, it would do us well to be reminded of the saying about learning, which goes something like this, More is caught than taught.

The saying is trying to convey the simple truth that many of life's most important lessons are learned simply by traveling alongside rather than by sitting down in front of.

Doing life on life is in some measure understood as a superior method for taking in lessons for life. To put it in the words of my sermon last week, my prayer for the year, that God would give us wisdom for the walk, well, it will be best learned by walking together along the way.

[2 : 48] That said, there is no better traveling partner for us if the goal is wisdom for the walk than to be with Jesus. Particularly this season to be with Jesus on the road.

And that's precisely where we find Him. This fall in our sermon series as we return to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 9, verse 51.

I hope you have it open before you. It's a structural marker for Luke that divides his Gospel into a complete section, wherein again we find Jerusalem at the center of all he writes.

Take a look at it. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, literally, in a sense, to be ascended, when he would then die and rise and go back to heaven, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

It's a turning point for Luke at a literary level. It's a front-end loaded verse that will carry you and me all the way through chapter 19 when he finally arrives at Jerusalem.

[4 : 09] So, welcome to the fall. Welcome to a section in Luke where you are with Jesus on the road where a lot more is caught than taught.

This fall, we'll follow Jesus to Jerusalem. We will absorb, week by week, I hope, wisdom for our own walk. First lesson.

Verses 51 to 56. Lesson along the way. Understanding the times. The second part of our text will give us the second lesson.

Verses 57 to 62. Understanding the priority. The first set of verses there, 51 to 56, Jesus gives his disciples an assignment.

This is not homework done by sitting down. This is field experience by going on ahead. Look at verse 52.

[5 : 21] And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him.

Now, that means we find him moving from Galilee, those travels we've been with him in chapter 4 through 8. Now, moving down through the middle section of the country where the Samaritans dwell until he will arrive in the lower portions of Israel and Jerusalem by chapter 19.

He is now sending messengers down into a village of the Samaritans. It's the land in the middle. It's comprised of people who have been put out and put upon by religious folk following the precepts of Judaism.

For the religious pious Israelite, Jerusalem was always the center. for them, external religious conformity to Torah was the crown jewel.

And now, you enter into a situation where Jesus takes all of this on. It doesn't take much to imagine the animosity between the people in the middle, the Samaritans, and those who looked down upon them from Jerusalem.

[6 : 49] Or, from the Samaritans' perspective, Jerusalem had always been the city that was disdained for centuries because the people there had put us out in the sense of allowing us any rightful share psychologically or emotionally or spiritually as being truly among the people of God.

So here's Jesus heading where He is, Jerusalem. He sends messengers on an errand which He believes, I know, is going to blow up in their face because He has a lesson to teach His disciples who intend to walk with Him in the way.

Take a look at what happens. But the people did not receive Him. No surprise to us now that we know the kind of people there because His face was set toward Jerusalem.

and when His disciples, James and John, saw it, they said, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? I mean, you can almost imagine the messengers, well, we went, you've come in now, it hasn't gone too well for us.

We told them you were coming, the great one who had been doing all these things in Galilee, and we let them know that you're on your way at Jerusalem to be enthroned as king.

[8 : 20] Well, nobody's opening their doors to us. No lecture halls being rented for us. No meals being prepared by those who dwell among us.

No, they have not received you. This word, they did not receive Jesus, is almost all the way through Luke to be thought of in terms of conversion.

to receive Jesus is to believe in Jesus, and to not receive Jesus is to not believe in Him. And the Samaritans have said, the prophet is coming from the north and descending to Jerusalem, well, we disdain the city, and the prophet himself we will not welcome.

And so, James and John, early adopters to the way, say to Jesus, well, maybe this is a job for us because we are your entourage and we've actually been participating in some pretty important stuff up in Galilee.

Maybe we do what needs to be done and bring the hammer down on this Samaritan village. You want fire? fire? We're ready to call God to bring it.

[9 : 49] They held Jesus to be like Elijah of old. Now, why do I mention Elijah? because James and John seem to have him in mind.

Calling fire down upon those who resist a prophet is exactly what happened to Elijah in the Old Testament in 2 Kings.

If you know anything about the Old Testament prophet Elijah, his role was to hammer the people of God, particularly the kings, for their rejection of his word.

And when the king finally brought people to arrest Elijah in a troop of 50, Elijah stood up in the house and on their way, fire was called down from heaven and consumed them once.

And so another group was sent twice until the third platoon leader or captain or whatever he was got smart to the fact that a hundred people who had gone after this prophet had died and he came humbly asking whether or not the great prophet would come.

[11 : 04] In other words, the disciples are saying, this is a day like that day. And we're here for the fire until they learn to start approaching you humbly. James and John, what?

They think they understand the times. As do some followers of Christ today. The surprise in the whole first lesson along the way comes with Jesus' response.

Look at verse 56. But he turned and rebuked them. That is his disciples. And they went on to another village.

What are we to make of this? The surprise lesson is that Jesus indicates that with the coming of his kingdom, it is the hour of salvation, forgiveness, mercy, not the hour of God's judgment and wrath, particularly upon Samaritans who already feel put out and have been put down and shoved around. It's an indication that Jesus says you do not understand the times if you do not know that my mission is to bring those who are out of relationship with me into one through faith.

[12 : 35] The lesson, well, that's a different understanding of the times. It was an hour in which the good news was to be proclaimed to all who had previously been deemed too ungodly to be saved.

And there is a lesson here for you and for me. We live in a time when God's mercy is to be extended. A time when, to put it in the language of the text, Samaritans are to be saved.

I mean, the external manuscript evidence of this text in the early manuscripts over the centuries is a clear indication of this. For some of the manuscripts even add to the end of that verse that Jesus would have said, you do not know the manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man came not to destroy people, but to save them.

And so it's a rebuke, isn't it, to a Christian community today, which would desire to see their role as the executing arm of God's justice, falling with fire, down upon the outsider who is out of relationship with him.

Oh, how easily the church gets the wrong end of the stick. Luke will actually play this out in live time, so that when you arrive at Acts 8, the Samaritans are coming to the gospel, to belief, to the hour of mercy.

[14 : 38] Oh, that there would be heart change within the church, wisdom for the road. Are you following the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you want to walk with Jesus?

Do you want to be with him on the road? Then may your prayer be for the tender heartwarming fires of the Holy Spirit that give new life to your encrusted heart and to all those around rather than the fires from heaven that would have them and you succumb to an eternal place of destination wherein there is no exit.

the heart of the church on the road with Christ is a heart that extends itself mercifully to the world that on the front end says I will not have him here.

Ironically then the judgment of God as an aside ought to rightly be exercised within the church and that those who refrain from following Christ in an open handed hearted way well let justice roll there but not upon the outsider who does not yet know of his grace and glory lesson number one understand the times it's the hour of salvation number two understand the priority verses 57 to 62 there are three personal exchanges here between Jesus and another individual or three individuals hard to really know they are all variations on a theme one theme and they are perfectly placed here lest you get the wrong impression that wow this is going to be great we just announced to everyone that God's grace and mercy is available to them no matter who you are or what you do without any personal cost in their entrance into the walk and these three vignettes indicate that while he has come with salvation for all all must understand the priority he has over their life life change is going to happen personal cost comes with any who take up with

Jesus the first exchange is right there in verse 57 and 58 as they were going along the road literally as they were going on the way you know the Christian community at the very beginning when they began to be known as Christians they were known as people of the way and so here these lessons are as we're walking on the way to Jerusalem he says 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 I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger the indication of the Lord Jesus is for all who take up with him they will be a wanderer in the world the old bluegrass song this world is not my home

[18 : 35] I'm just a passing through my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue no home there's a great deal of irony here given the amount of time in conservative evangelical circles today on the priority that protestant christians are giving to the importance of place spiritual place hey Jesus is pretty clear take up with him it won't be about place there's also an irony given the way we sometimes even pray oh Lord Jesus I welcome you into my new home I desire your presence at my table you are always welcome here and if you came into my home it's a pretty fine city living looking like home what if the role is reversed as they were last night the lyric singers at millennium park what if it wasn't

Jesus will you come to my table but Jesus said well will you come to my house will you come to my table which by the way I don't have one first time I ever felt displaced in the world was in preparation to moving to Chicago I had strong roots family that had been a part of one community

since late 1940s myself all through growing up years one place I was a town kid who went to college in the same place until I was married but I married a woman from my place and I was always at home here

I still remember walking the streets of my hometown within about a five block radius on a Sunday afternoon when I knew I was going to pick up and move to Chicago for the gospel it had become clear to me even though no one else yet knew I walked by the college that I attended the grade school where I started kindergarten on that same block the house where my mother got ready for her wedding and where my wife grew up two doors down and the same street on which I was raised a block further north I walked by where I went to high school all within a mile impressed by God I was leaving place behind want to take up with

Jesus it will be displacement yet I guarantee you a thousand homes will be open to you now I've been here sixteen and a half years I'm starting to feel at home again probably a dangerous thing great music today to remind me these words of Jesus foxes have holes birds have nests but the son of man does not have a place to lay his head so it's not a word against personal property it's not a word that you shouldn't own a home come on don't don't take his words and run them into some simplistic idiocy he never rebuked

Peter or the mother-in-law when he was in their home the apostles themselves call upon the entire Christian community to be hospitable but if you ever begin to think that this world is your home or your home is this world well then you haven't understood the lesson along the way he can move you at a moment's notice and take you to the skies to wherever he would plant you do not make this world your home for some here I'm sure the time will soon come in which you find yourself moving to another corner of the globe for indeed perhaps he beckons you to walk with him there second exchange 59 and 60 to another he said follow me but he said

[24 : 28] Lord first let me go and bury my father and Jesus said to him leave the dead to bury their own dead but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God getting on with the gospel appears to be a priority of highest order the proclamation of the kingdom of God in this jarring statement places it higher than even our most normal right social right social familial obligations to the dead I believe Jesus intended for this to be jarring we're all for discipleship in moderation very few of us put discipleship to Jesus Christ above any commonly construed relational obligation now don't don't press this beyond his intent

Jesus is in full accord with the wisdom literature that indicates to us it is better to go to a funeral to a house of mourning than to a wedding Jesus is certainly one by his own experience and at the presence his presence in cemeteries and graveyards and his weeping over the place of the dead or Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus by example caring for the dead all of these things are true the point of the teacher though is clear the priority of the kingdom message being going forward through every individual that's following Christ is more important than our obligation to all things that have gone on behind us and that have left us what a response for this one who would walk with Jesus I mean proclaiming you can see it right there in the text he tells him get on with proclaiming the kingdom of

God that is the highest priority the proclamation and the productive work that would expand the kingdom of God that is what you and I are to do every day above all else that much we are to do so what is the kingdom of God it's only been mentioned at this point just a couple of times in Luke's gospel but in chapter 4 verse 43 it was called good news in chapter 6 in verse 20 the kingdom of God was given to the poor but the good news for the poor previously spoken of by Luke was brought together by Jesus in chapter 4 verse 18 where the good news for the poor the proclamation of the kingdom was to set people at liberty literally the Greek word there everywhere else in Luke translated forgiveness the priority of the kingdom is to let everybody know this is a day of forgiveness through

Jesus and that's more important than anything else we do so think about it I know that we're going to be confined to our regular rightful social obligations in the midst of those have we made the word of that preeminent in our life Jesus says hey you want to walk with me understand the priority you're a wanderer and you're also an itinerant you're an evangelist you're a proclaimer you're a word worker you tell people that this is the hour of forgiveness and you point them to the person through whom it can come and you tell them and explain to them how they begin to live life under his rule and the Holy Spirit actually generates life in them and on they go joining this little fitful band headed for the promised land you are not here merely to be a good person you do not exist simply to

conform to social norms your end goal is not merely the hope of making this world a better place you are set by

God in this neighborhood to tell the world that his rule has commenced in the person of his son in whom forgiveness is found and through life is given understand the priority third vignette 61 and 62 and yet another said I will follow you Lord but first let me say!

[29 : 27] farewell to those at home Jesus said to him no! one! who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God it's a final exchange he inverts the priority we place upon the dead in the previous exchange for the priority we place upon the living to teach us that he takes precedence over the land of the living and the dead Jesus does a masterful thing here having heard his disciples appeal to Elijah you remember that back in verse 55 he now makes an appeal to Elijah as if he's going to up the ante for them on what it means to take up his mantle oh you're my boys you're my men you're the entourage you want to bring down fire from heaven you want to walk back into that world of Elijah and those who count after him like Elisha you see that as your role well no one who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is fit for the kingdom of heaven falling upon the ears of

James and John and all the disciples in this way take a look very clearly his direct allusion second kings 19 verse 19 where Elisha is called to take up the mantle!

of Elijah so he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him and he was with the twelve Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him and he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said let me kiss my father and my mother then I will follow you boy that's the language of our text if ever there was any and he said to him go back again for what have I done to you and he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled the flesh with the yokes of oxen and gave it to the people in the ape then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him in other words Elijah said to Elisha hey throw a feast meet up with me in a few weeks now

Jesus turns that says hey let's get something straight you ain't Elisha and I'm not Elijah simply in a life form I am the fulfillment of the entire prophetic tradition and the allegiance that is owed to me is strong and more immediate than the allegiance owed to any other prophet because Jesus doesn't say fine go do it he says don't start with that plow I think you can go do this other stuff and stay on with me Jesus is not merely a prophet like the Baptist not merely one like Elijah and he's not merely positioned in Luke 9 to be a revisitation of those figures he is here so the reader would know that the great one has arrived the fulfillment of the entire prophetic tradition which means that in Jesus you have one that demands your immediate attention every parent will understand this won't they a parenting tip don't ask me how I got this it's not in the text do not raise your children like this when you see them going off to do something else do not say to them one two three because they'll know exactly how long you'll hold those syllables and they'll come at the latest moment possible right no what's a parent do with a child he teaches his children to respect their authority and my word is my word mariah i need you home at 10 p.m.

[33 : 58] period that's what Jesus is saying here some of you some of you perhaps have looked at Jesus and go wow this is great here is one that can save me even though I've never been spiritually attuned here is one I'm ready to take up with even if it means I gotta travel and I'm a wayfaring Christian here is one that I can speak about as an itinerant but he wants!

you to know you're going to be a farm hand too it turns around when they're trying to plow a long straight line it's going to be a very uneven field pastor Jay and I we're not a lot of things right pastor Jay but we are plow horses that God has put in one yoke that is walking in one direction which we both understand requires our immediate attention to what he would have us do as it is for the disciples so it is for all of us today is the day for you to start with Jesus no ifs no if you give me a good home no ands and

I will do Jesus and all these other social obligation things because it will be you know I don't want to be fanatical no buts to be nothing that would keep you from following forward with him today as the apostle Paul said one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus wisdom for the walk understand the times it's the hour of salvation for all understand the priority even if it makes you a wanderer god forbid a herald or a farm hand our heavenly father we will need strength for this journey as we come to the lord's table do just that nourish us along the way in christ's name amen