

No Turning Back

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2026

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] All right, well we are continuing on with the story of Jesus as told by Luke. I know I start that way almost every Sunday. Some of you are probably tired of hearing that. It's a long series, but there's so much in here in the Word of God, and it's worth our attention.

So if you have a Bible with you, you can open it up to Luke chapter 9, is where we are in the story. And we've covered much. We've gone all the way from before the birth of Jesus, all the way up to this moment when Jesus is in the midst of Jesus.

And we've heard all kinds of wonderful things, and we've got a few more things to hear this morning. So we're going to pick up the story here in verse 51.

Just as a reminder, last Sunday we heard about a variety of things. We heard Jesus tell His disciples for the second time that He would soon be handed over.

We heard about how the disciples had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. We heard about how Jesus used a little child as an example of what makes for greatness in the kingdom of God.

[1 : 08] And then we heard about an unnamed guy casting out demons in Jesus' name. Let's pick up the story here in Luke chapter 9, verse 51. As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Now these words might be surprising at first. Is Luke already talking about Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem here in chapter 9? It kind of sounds like that, doesn't it?

And the answer is yes, but maybe not how we would expect it. This is the beginning of a new section in Luke's gospel. It's been called the travel narrative, or the Jerusalem journey, as one commentator put it.

This section is 10 chapters long. And if we read it carefully and we watch for some of those place names, those little mentions of where they're going, and if we compare with John's gospel, we see that this Jerusalem journey is not Jesus' final trip into the city of Jerusalem.

At least, maybe not the way that we usually think of trip. For one, Jesus does not travel in a straight line or take the most direct route. He seems to be visiting towns all over the place.

[2 : 33] It has more of the feel of a meandering ministry tour through the region, which eventually ends up in Jerusalem. Second, if we compare closely with John, we actually see that Jesus enters Jerusalem itself, the city, at least once, if not twice, during this period, leading up to the Passover when he's crucified.

And so it's probably best to understand this moment in Luke as Jesus completing the Galilean phase of his ministry. He has been ministering up in the north in Galilee, and now he's beginning the Judean phase down in the south where Jerusalem is.

The scholars, of course, will point out the Hebrew idiom, he set his face towards Jerusalem. That that means, it's a figure of speech, that means he has a strong determination to go there in order to complete a task.

Jesus has this strong determination, but his goal is not to get there as quickly as possible. It's just really a shift in his focus towards that city and the people of that region, where things are going to culminate in him being taken up to heaven after his crucifixion and resurrection.

One other thing to mention about these next ten chapters is that we will hear from Luke a little bit less about the miracles that Jesus was doing, and we'll hear a little bit more about the teaching of Jesus and the conversations that he had with people.

[4 : 15] And so, we're looking forward to that. By one estimate, about one-third of the content in this next section is only found in Luke's gospel, not even mentioned by the other three.

So, with that all on the table, let's carry on. Jesus sort of closes this chapter on the ministry in the north, in Galilee, and now his attention and focus shift to Jerusalem and the Jews living in the south.

Verse 52, And he sent messengers on ahead who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for them.

So, there's a little map. It's probably hard to see from where you're sitting, but there's Galilee up in the north. There's Judea and Jerusalem down in the south. And this area in here is Samaria. He's got to either go through Samaria or, as often happened in those days, go around Samaria. As we'll read about in a second, there's a massive rift between the Samaritans and the Jews at this time.

[5 : 24] So, he sent messengers on ahead who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him, but the people there did not welcome Jesus because he was heading for Jerusalem.

So, there's this conflict going on between the Samaritans and the Jews. In the words of another guy, a New Testament scholar, the Samaritans were a mixed race of Israelite and non-Israelite blood.

They were despised by many pure-blooded Israelites because they believed that the Samaritans compromised the faith. The Samaritans worshipped at Mount Gerizim rather than at Mount Zion, and they recognized only the first five books of the Old Testament.

Even though it took three days to pass through the region, many Jews preferred to lengthen their journey and go around it. So, if you know the story of the woman at the well in John's Gospel, you can really feel the tension there and the differences between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Things are quite frosty and even hostile between them. And yet, even though the Jews despised the Samaritans, Jesus did not.

[6 : 45] The good news of God's love and His kingdom was not only for the Jews, but for all people. Even those hated Samaritans. In John's Gospel, we see a wonderful response of faith by the Samaritans in the town of Sychar.

It says, there are many in that town believed in Jesus. But here, as Jesus is coming towards this town, Jesus is not welcomed.

And the reason is because He's headed for Jerusalem. So there was that big difference of where God should be worshipped. And so probably that came right to the forefront as Jesus was on the way through.

Maybe even for one of the annual festivals at this time. I want you to imagine for just a quick moment that you were one of the messengers that Jesus had sent into this Samaritan town.

Go ahead into the town. See if you can find some lodging for us for the night. You're looking for a place for Jesus and for the rest of the 12 disciples to spend the night.

[7 : 58] Imagine explaining to them as they ask you, where are you headed? Well, we're headed to Jerusalem. And all of a sudden the expression on their faces just says it all.

No. You can't stay in our town. If you're headed for Jerusalem, then you're not welcome here. Well, when the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?

But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village. So James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, are really upset by this.

And I'm not really sure here. It's possible that they themselves were the messengers that were sent by Jesus and the ones who were initially rejected. It says when they saw this.

And I'm trying to put myself into their mindset. We don't know all the details of what the day has been like for James and John leading up to this moment. perhaps they're exhausted from an entire day of traveling on foot.

[9 : 16] Maybe this is the nearest town that they can reach before it gets dark. And who knows how hungry they are. Who knows exactly what the Samaritan said to them when they asked.

Did it turn into a verbal fight and insults? All we know is this question that they asked Jesus. and we can tell by the question that they are fuming.

They are mad. Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them? That sounds a little extreme, doesn't it?

Pretty vindictive. And yet, as I said, we don't know what all they experienced leading up to this question being asked. you know, it's kind of ironic.

We've been talking about just recently here in Luke chapter 9, there was that demon-possessed boy and they lacked faith to drive the demon out.

[10:20] They lacked faith about what they could do in Jesus' name. Well, here it almost seems the opposite. It seems like their confidence is restored about the authority that Jesus has given them to do miracles in his name.

They ask, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and destroy them? So they've, in this moment, it seems, got the faith that Elijah had when he prayed and God sent fire down on the altar. They seem to believe that if they call on God, he will do this to this town just like he did long ago in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. So they have faith, it seems, and yet Jesus rebukes them. And I would have loved to have been there to hear what Jesus said to them in this moment. All we have, though, is this word, these words, but Jesus turned and rebuked them.

Now, before we write James and John off as completely crazy or just wicked, let's stop and think about this for a moment. Why would they have suggested this to Jesus in the first place?

[11:39] Was it just their tempers getting the best of them after being humiliated? Was it just deeply wounded pride as they walked away from this town? Or were there things Jesus had said which might have even got them thinking in this direction?

What did Jesus tell them to do the first time that he sent them out when a town did not welcome them? Just back up earlier in the chapter in verse five, Jesus had given them instructions if people do not welcome you leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them. And as we'll hear in the next chapter Jesus is about to send them out again this time with some others and give them very similar instructions and these are some of the instructions that we read in that next chapter chapter 10 verse 10 he'll say when you enter a town and are not welcomed go into its streets and say even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you yet be sure of this the kingdom of God has come near I tell you it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town woe to you Chorazin woe to you Bethsaida for if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago sitting in sackcloth and ashes but it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you and you Capernaum will you be lifted to the heavens no you will go down to Hades so that's what Jesus is about to say before sending them out again and possibly he said similar things to them before and so maybe this is part of what led the disciples to ask such an outrageous question as this do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them but even with these serious warnings for towns that would reject him

Jesus was not being vindictive or vengeful these are statements about justice about about what the people in these towns truly deserve and how one day God will give them what they deserve but this is not that day is what Jesus is saying to James and John he rebuked James and John for asking a question like this I try to imagine how Jesus would have phrased it to them maybe something like this have I not told you love your enemies and do good to those who hate you bless those who curse you pray for those who mistreat you Jesus said that to them just back in chapter 6 yes there will be serious consequences for their actions and their rejection of you is a rejection of me but James John has it been given to you to execute judgment to punish them for their sins again look back at what Jesus said in chapter 6 in his sermon to the crowd verse 35 he said but love your enemies and do good to them then your reward will be great and you will be children of the most high because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked be merciful just as your father is merciful I'm reminded here of what it says right after John 3 16 one of those most famous verses precious verses for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish shall not perish but have eternal life for

[15:56] God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him Jesus didn't come the first time to execute judgment to bring everything to its right end he came to save people and so James and John though they may understand the seriousness of rejecting Jesus in this moment with this question they needed to be reminded about mercy what about you ever get angry because of how someone has treated you or because of how someone has treated someone you love do you ever find yourself wishing that God would just give someone else what they deserve already we can be deeply hurt by others and our pride can be deeply wounded but we are to love our enemies and leave the judgment part to

God we should also remember that if we've done anything good in our lives it hasn't been of ourselves it's only been because of God working in us to do those things we'll hear about this soon

from Jesus himself in chapter 13 but all of us deserve the shocking and tragic death that some have suffered we are all guilty we have all sinned every one of us falls short of God's glory! and just like for the disciples Jesus has asked us to show others the mercy that we have been shown well let's carry on a few more verses here we'll just finish up the chapter here Luke 9 verse 57 as they were walking along the road a man said to Jesus I will follow you wherever you go Jesus replied foxes have dens and birds have nests but the son of man has no place to lay his head he said to another man follow me but he replied Lord first let me go and bury my father Jesus said to him let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God 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 so as they're walking along the road this topic of following Jesus comes up of being one of his disciples and this man this first man says to Jesus I will follow you wherever you go and Jesus with his next words seems to challenge that commitment will you really follow me wherever I go are you willing to spend some nights outside sleeping in the cold on the bare ground that's probably one of the realities of Jesus ministry and for his disciples too not that they spend every night outside but they're traveling all over the place and as we just heard not everyone has been welcoming they probably had many nights outside in the cold in the elements they're certainly not going home and sleeping on their comfortable beds at the end of every day and getting a warm home cooked meal following Jesus cost them those things it was physically and tangibly one or the other but as often happens with Jesus there's more in his words than just the physical and the tangible foxes have dens and birds have nests but the son of man has no place to lay his head this is proverbial language it's the language of principle what is

[20 : 52] Jesus saying by this following him requires something of us it requires that we be willing to let go of the comfortable life this is just part of what it means to follow Jesus he does not lead us into the comfortable life where is Jesus headed now he's headed to Jerusalem which is the headquarters of those who oppose him the fiercest he's on his way to suffering to the cross to death foxes have dens and birds have nests but the son of man has no place to lay his head it's as though Jesus is saying to him are you willing to abandon the comforts of this world in order to follow me what would your answer be if

Jesus were asking this to you how have you been answering this question of late well then there's the second man Jesus speaks to this guy first and says follow me and he replies with Lord first let me go and bury my father and Jesus says to him let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God now a surface level reading of this might give us the impression that Jesus lacks compassion and that he's really really strict this guy just wants to bury his dad and so we might assume that his dad just passed away the funeral should be a matter of a week or so and then this man should be free to follow Jesus after right but is Jesus that heartless that he would not allow one of his followers to go to the funeral of his dad well

Jesus has already demonstrated time and time again that he is more compassionate than anyone and so it's likely that he is challenging this man's willingness to follow him we know from other accounts that Jesus knew exactly what was going on in people's hearts even as he spoke to them and for this man this was likely an excuse that he was making some suggest that probably his father had not even died but was older and so it was likely a matter of well Jesus I would like to follow you but my dad is older and we don't know how long we have left with him but once he passes I'll be more in a position to follow you there's kind of an indefinite time period maybe later now certainly the man's father is important in fact it's even one of the ten commandments honor your father and mother but even more important than family is the call of Christ to follow him our relationship with God and our obedience to his son should take the highest priority in our lives think about this this man has an invitation from the very son of God to follow and it seems he's making an excuse and brushing it off trying to say a good excuse something that should be acceptable surely Jesus I'm to honor my father in these last days of his life and see that he has a proper burial and that his wishes are carried out so I'll have to decline I can't follow you Jesus response is very strange to us anyway he says let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God now this is a difficult statement to understand what does this mean there's two different ideas about what it means

I'll just give you both of them because to be honest I'm not really sure first obviously we can't take this literally because it's impossible for dead people to bury dead people and so it's obviously a

figure of speech one idea is that Jesus is saying let those who are spiritually dead bury the dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God in other words let those who don't believe in the gospel of the kingdom or care about following me let them bury him they can look after that but you come and follow me so that's one idea the other idea is that Jesus words are purely rhetorical like let the dead bury themselves but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God in other words that's the sort of thing that can look after itself somebody will bury your father don't let that keep you from doing what you need to do it might be similar to what

[26 : 32] Jesus said in the sermon on the mount when he said don't worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself of course tomorrow can't really worry about itself but it's it's it's a rhetorical statement the dead can't bury themselves but you're making excuses man when will it be time when will you be ready to follow me follow me proclaim the kingdom of God with me now today and then finally there's this third man here he says I will follow you Lord but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family and Jesus replies no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God this is probably really similar to the man who wanted to bury his father you know it's not that Jesus is so heartless that he requires us to leave our family without ever saying goodbye more likely

Jesus sees in this man's heart an excuse and even a deeply divided heart and if you go and say goodbye to your family will you really come back after that and follow me or will you just decide to stay there with them for this man in this time following Jesus I mean Jesus is traveling all over the place it will require that he be away from his family a lot and so this man must choose between being with them and following Jesus Jesus is basically saying here that there is more important kingdom work to do in the service of God right now and if that reality has not overwhelmingly captured your heart then you're not fit for service in the kingdom of God the metaphor here is of a person plowing a field and of course this is well before the days of tractors and GPS so you had to keep your gaze your focus straight ahead of you to plow a straight line and if you're constantly looking back over your shoulder then you're veering all over the place up and down the field the owner of the field would not appreciate that too much he wants his plowman constantly focused making straight lines not looking back over his shoulder at something totally unrelated to the work in the same way Jesus desires his followers to be focused deeply on the work that he has given them to do not distracted and doing a poor job because their hearts are preoccupied with other things God has given us work to do in his kingdom is that your main focus to serve God to do his will putting all these three together we see that many are invited to follow Jesus to be his disciples and many even express an interest or make some sort of commitment but few really count the cost few are willing to put Jesus as number one in their lives and to let everything else look after itself I remember a time in my own life where I came to a sort of crossroads as a young man I remember hearing all the time that I needed to put Jesus first in my life and everything else second but I struggled so deeply with that there were things in my life that I loved more than Jesus there were things that I felt were more important than following Jesus and so I tried for a period of time to give Jesus 51% of my life and my heart while giving 49% to things I loved most that way he was still first in my life and I was a good Christian and everything else was second but it tore me apart I could hardly live that way I felt like I was chasing a mirage like I was trying to live two different lives I was truly like the plow man trying to go straight in the field while looking back over my shoulder constantly zigzagging back and forth able to do neither very well and

[32 : 01] I became miserable and depressed but then finally Jesus call to follow him broke through to the heart of my heart and I saw that Jesus isn't looking only to have 51% of my life he's not interested in just being number one out of ten in my life he's looking to have a hundred percent of my life and to be one out of one the one and the only in my life let the rest fall into place around that or be left behind!

is just getting stronger and yet the joy I have in the service of my King is just getting stronger this world offers so much to us but none of that is worth more than following Jesus like this as Jesus said to the crowd earlier in this very chapter what good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit their very self there is kingdom work to do in the service of God in the service of Christ are you willing to leave everything to follow Jesus and to do this work in service of him as you think over the ways that

Jesus talked with these three people what about you which of these three do you identify with the most do you hear Jesus calling to you saying follow me are you like the man who has said yes I will but first let me are you like the man who said I will follow you wherever you go but then Jesus called him on it what excuses have you been making about why you can't follow Jesus with everything what do you think

Jesus would say to you about your particular excuses let the words of Jesus come and flood into your heart let him speak to you yield to his words let's pray let