

This is the Time

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[0 : 0 0] almost smack bang in the middle of Victoria Park in the west end of Glasgow here is a Victorian lamppost. It's easy to walk past it without seeing it, but look a bit closer and inscribed upon it are words taken from 1 Corinthians 5. Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of salvation.

Thousands of people walk past this Victorian lamppost without seeing it or its words and without thinking about what the words the Victorians inscribed there actually mean. Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of salvation. Thousands walk past that lamppost and run past it on a Saturday morning without realizing that today is the day of opportunity. The opportunity to believe in Christ and to experience his grace for themselves. The opportunity to begin a new life of faith and discipleship. This Victorian lamppost calls all those who walk past to enter a new world of love and grace, peace and forgiveness, hope and eternal life. Now is the time. I challenge everyone here after the service or at some point through the week to go down to Victoria Park and see if you can find the lamppost. And when you do, you'll have seen it a thousand times before and you'll have thought to yourself, why did I never see those words? Well, these verses in Luke's gospel record Jesus' appointed time and the day of our salvation. Our passage begins with fateful words of destiny. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus, aware that his death and resurrection were near, set his face like flint to go to Jerusalem. When two boxers square up in the ring, they lock eyes and stare with intensity and determination and commitment at each other.

These were Jesus' eyes now set toward the holy city. Crucifixion, death, resurrection. Nothing's going to get in the way of giving himself as the sacrifice for our sin and winning our salvation on the cross. Nothing's going to get in the way of his suffering and his glory. So he sets his eyes on Jerusalem, determined in his love to complete a new exodus for his people. This verse marks actually a new stage in Luke's gospel. From here on, Luke will record Jesus' journey to the cross. Nothing's going to distract Jesus. Time's too short for that. This is Jesus' time. In these verses, as Jesus begins his journey, we're going to learn that it's not just Jesus' time. It's our time also. A time to join him on his journey to the cross or a time to turn away. An opportunity for discipleship or a time for judgment.

But this verse also marks a new stage in Jesus' ministry. Thus far, his public ministry has been dominated by miracles. But from now on, his ministry will be dominated by teaching in parables.

Jesus has shown himself king over all, the Christ of God, who has dominion over all disease, death, and devilry. On the cross at the end of the gospel, Jesus will show himself as priest, offering himself as priest, offering himself as priest, offering himself as priest, offering himself as a sacrifice for our sin on the cross, and shedding his own blood to make atonement for us.

[4 : 2 6] But in these intervening middle chapters of Luke's gospel, Jesus will show himself to be God's prophet, declaring the glories and excellencies of the kingdom of God, and inviting all kinds of people to experience the love and grace of God for themselves.

Our passage today in Luke 9, 51 through 62, contains two stories which have deep roots in the Old Testament. In the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, Israel's two greatest prophets.

Jesus stands in the line of the great prophets, fulfilling, completing the work they began of turning God's people back to him. Well, now is not just the time of Jesus.

Now is the time for us to listen to God's greatest prophet, his greatest and final word, as he calls us to grasp the opportunity to believe in him as Savior.

And to follow him as Lord. Our passage contains two stories, each with its own emphasis. First, this is the time of opportunity, verses 51 through 56, where Jesus rebukes his disciples for wanting to call fire down from heaven upon the Samaritans. And then secondly, this is the time for discipleship, in verses 57 through 62, where Jesus calls us to put him first above everything else.

[6 : 13] Maybe we'll take a walk around Victoria Park later on and see that lamppost. Read those words and hear the voice of Christ calling to us over the centuries.

Now is the appointed time. Today is the day of salvation. First of all then, from verse 51 to 56, this is the time of opportunity, opportunity.

Our passage begins in Samaritan territory. Now the Samaritans were the enemies of the Jews. The Samaritans were ethnically descended from the northern tribes, which made up the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament. They had been destroyed as a nation by the Assyrian Empire. But even before that, they had degenerated into an unfaithful people. It was among them that Elijah and Elisha had ministered some 800 years before the days of Jesus. The Samaritans had set up their own temple on Mount Gerizim to rival the temple in Jerusalem. Likewise, having been conquered by the Assyrians, the Samaritans were an ethnically diverse people. Jewish blood and Gentile blood ran in their veins.

They weren't purebred Jews. And so Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other. But here we find Jesus in Samaritan territory. And as was his practice, he sends out messengers before him to a village to prepare for his arrival. But when the people of that village heard that Jesus was going to go to Jerusalem, they rejected him. They said, he's not coming here. Jerusalem was everything the Samaritans hated.

So when they heard about Jesus and Jerusalem, they refused to receive him. You can almost hear James and John in the background, spitting on the ground and saying, typical Samaritans, unfaithful then, unfaithful now. Now, James and John have always seemed like such reasonable figures. But it was not without cause that they earned the nickname, sons of thunder. For instantly, they turn around to Jesus and say, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?

[8 : 41] James and John here were referring to a particular episode in the life and ministry of Elijah the prophet. In 2 Kings chapter 1, King Ahaziah of Israel was very sick. And rather than turn to the Lord God, he turned to a Philistine God called Beelzebub, which literally means the Lord of Flies.

He was the God of a Philistine city called Ekron. Having been rebuked by Elijah, Israel's greatest prophet for his unfaithfulness to the Lord, Ahaziah, the king, the angry king, sent a captain and 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah. When they found Elijah, Elijah said to them, if I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

And we read, fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50 men. And they heard, Ahaziah sent another captain with 50 soldiers to try and arrest Elijah. But the same thing happened again. Fire from heaven consumed them. Ahaziah sent another captain and another 50 soldiers.

But this time, Elijah responded to them and went with them, whereupon he pronounced judgment upon King Ahaziah. And Ahaziah died.

James and John want a repeat episode of Elijah's life and ministry to happen in their day.

[10 : 39] After all, they're in Samaritan territory, the same land where the events of Elijah and 2 Kings took place. They're desperate for judgment, fire to come down from heaven and to consume this village, which had rejected Jesus, just as fire had come down from heaven to consume Ahaziah's soldiers in the days of Elijah. Let's give credit where it's due. Assume good motives from James and John.

They were zealous for the honor of Jesus. But we read in verse 50 to 55, he turned and rebuked them. Like he says, this is not the way I want my disciples to behave. It is right that when we hear the name of the Lord being dragged through the mud, we react with indignance, but it's not right that we call for God's judgment upon the offender in a vengeful spirit. Rather than call down judgment on the Samaritan village, Jesus moves on to another place where he will be received instead.

Well, what's going on here? We can summarize it like this. This is not the time for judgment. This is the time for opportunity. Or more pointedly, this is not the time for judgment.

This is the time for judgment. Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem to demonstrate the love and grace of God for sinners. This is not the time for judgment. This is the time for opportunity.

At this stage, the Samaritan village has rejected Jesus. But God is patient, and who knows what future days will bring for them? We know that from Acts chapter 8, which is Luke's companion volume, that after the resurrection, many Samaritans came to believe in Jesus Christ. So in Acts chapter 8, verse 25, for example, we read these words. Now, when the apostles had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

[13 : 06] Who knows, but perhaps this village might have been one in which the gospel was preached by the apostles, and many Samaritans from this village may have believed. But back in Luke chapter 9, it's not the time for judgment and fire from heaven. It's a time for patience. It's a time for opportunity. We still live in days of grace and opportunity. One commentator writes, God shortens no man's day of grace unduly. God shortens no man's day of grace unduly. God has every right to judge us both as individuals and as a nation right now. But he's patient, and he gives us countless opportunities to respond to the gospel in faith and trust.

A day is coming when that will end, and judgment will come, but that day is not now. Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of salvation. It's been 2,000 years since the events of this story happened, yet still today is a day of grace and opportunity where each and all of us here are invited to trust in Jesus as our Savior and follow Him as our Lord. There are always opportunities for us through the regular preaching of the Word on a Lord's Day, through contact with Christians eager to share the gospel with us. Yes, even by walking through a Glasgow park and seeing a lamppost upon which is written the words, now is the appointed day, now is the time of salvation.

The question is not about the sincerity of the opportunities and invitations to believe and trust in Jesus. The question is whether we'll grasp them for ourselves and become disciples of Jesus.

This is the time of opportunity. Second, from verse 57 through 62. This is the time for discipleship.

Discipleship. Well, Jesus has experienced rejection from the Samaritan village, but now as He makes His way to the next village, someone comes up to Him and says, I will follow you wherever you go.

[15 : 39] Now, to such an expression of willing, we might expect Jesus to rejoice, to eagerly accept Him as a new disciple. Surely, Jesus at this stage needs all the friends He can get.

But to this man, as to all the others, Jesus sets out the demands of genuine discipleship. The key word in this encounter and in this short passage is follow, follow.

And Jesus describes to each of these people the cost of discipleship, the cost of following Him. To the first, He says, foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.

To the second, He says, let the dead bury their own dead. As for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. To the third, He says, no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus said, If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.

[16 : 46] To be a disciple of Jesus is costly. Not the least example of which is this. It's going to mean the rejection of our message by today's equivalent of Samaritan villages.

Well, just like the previous passage had its roots in the life and ministry of the prophet Elijah, so this passage has its roots in the call of Elisha, Elijah's successor.

In 1 Kings 19, verses 19 through 21, we read that Elijah found Elisha ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen, 24 oxen, and Elijah cast his cloak over him, signifying that he was going to be Elijah's disciple and follower.

Having left the oxen behind, Elisha said to Elijah, Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.

To this Elijah replied, Go back again, for what have I done to you? At this search in question, there and then, Elisha immediately left everything behind, and having sacrificed his oxen, these 24 valuable beasts, he followed Elijah.

[18 : 20] Elisha left a stable home and became the assistant of an itinerant prophet with nowhere to call home except the wilderness. He left behind him father and mother to follow Elijah.

And having heard the call to follow Elijah, Elisha did not look back and turn his hand once again to the plough. He left everything behind him to follow Elijah.

This was the cost of discipleship. Elisha put discipleship ahead of home, relationship, and employment. And this is what Jesus is calling these people who wanted to follow him in Luke 9, 57 through 62 to do.

Put your discipleship in me before home, relationship, and employment. It's not as if these things are unimportant. Following Jesus must come first.

Following Jesus must come before the desire for a stable home because to follow Jesus might end up, they might end up living in the wilderness with nowhere to call home.

[19 : 30] It must come before their relationships because to follow Jesus means to let the dead bury their own dead. It must come before their employment because no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

One commentator writes here, The path to following Jesus is not a part-time job.

It's a perpetual assignment. The path to following Jesus is not a part-time job. It's a perpetual assignment. Our Christianity isn't a hobby or a part-time job in which we engage on a Sunday morning and then we live like we want to live for the rest of the week.

It's a whole life occupation and discipleship in Jesus must come first. Now, remember, Luke is writing to first century Christians who lived in societies which were wholly hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For many of them, to become a follower of Jesus meant to be rejected by one's family, to lose one's home, and to lose one's employment. It may also have meant losing one's life at the end of a Roman sword.

[20 : 53] To become a Christian in the first century world was a death sentence for many. There were no such thing as part-time Christians or hobby Christians back then.

The cost was too great for that. And perhaps that's why the church grew so quickly in the early years. Every member was wholly devoted to Jesus.

You know, for many Christians today, it means the same thing. Especially for new believers from an Islamic background, to become a follower of Jesus can mean being rejected by one's family, losing one's home, losing one's employment, and for many of them losing one's life.

That is the cost of discipleship. After all, we can never outgive the Jesus who set his face to go to Jerusalem to lay down his life for us.

He must come first. Now, normally, of course, that's going to mean loving our wives and families in a way that we never did before.

[21 : 59] To work hard to provide a stable and secure home for our loved ones. To be the best employees, to be the best employers we can possibly be.

But the point Jesus is making is this. He must come first. And it's only as he comes first that we set these other things as priorities.

To go back to that lamppost in Victoria Park, in which is written the words, now is the appointed time, now is the day of salvation. We want to say, now is not the time for flaky, uncommitted discipleship.

Now is the time to take your discipleship in Jesus seriously. Now is the time to get our priorities straight and put Jesus first.

Now is the time to realize that our faith in Jesus is costly. It cost us nothing to become Christians. It cost Jesus everything.

[23 : 03] But now that we are Christians, to follow Jesus means a life of cross-bearing and self-denial. This is the way it was for both Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament.

Both men were hated by those in positions of authority because they stood up for truth when everyone and everything was against them. The king who ruled in the days of Elijah and Elisha would gladly have killed them.

And as it was, both prophets lived in poverty. And yet in the history of God's people, Elijah and Elisha stand in the front rank of faith and discipleship.

One of the church fathers famously wrote, Since Christ has put us first, we must put him first.

Since Christ has put us first, we must put him first. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem because there, as he suffers and dies, he's putting us first. He's dying as a substitute for our sin.

[24 : 09] He's bearing the penalty of the judgment, which should have been ours. Even now in heaven, as he stands before the Father's right hand, he puts us first in his purposes and in his prayers.

And here in Luke 9, he calls us to put him first. To prefer him before all the pleasures and distractions of this passing and temporary world. Now is the appointed time.

Now is the day of salvation. We cannot hear those words or walk past that lamppost in Victoria Park without being challenged as to how serious our discipleship in Jesus really is.

We live in a society determined to get rid of Christianity and Christianity's values. Are we playing into his hands by adopting its mindsets and its values of putting everything else first and Jesus last?

Or shall we reckon with the cost of discipleship, of being different, of going against the flow, however much it costs us in terms of reputation, security, and wealth?

[25 : 17] Now is the appointed time. Right now is the time to make our decision both about salvation and discipleship.

It cannot be yes to salvation and to no to discipleship. It must either be no to both or yes to both. But when we think of who Jesus is and what he has done by dying for us upon the cross to take away all our sins and by rising from the dead, when we think of the great need all around us and of the end time judgment of God, how can it be anything other than two resounding yeses?

of the good news?

Yes. So now it goes out.