

The End is in Sight

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: 11 January 2009

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Well, it would be great if you took out your Bibles and opened them to page 67. I don't know if this helps or not, but you should know that from the pulpit I can see what you've got in your hands.

It's a confession, and when people read the notice bulletin during the sermon, it's discouraging. So, I tell you that for your own knowledge, and I'm not going to say any more about it.

So, here we are, page 67, Luke 9. We enter into a great pilgrimage now, and you know that pilgrimage, the whole idea of pilgrimage has become very popular these days.

We've decided that we're all spiritual now, of course, and so we each have our own pilgrimage. And you don't have to be a Christian or a Buddhist or a Muslim or even an old-fashioned communist to have a pilgrimage and be on a pilgrimage.

It used to be that pilgrimages started somewhere, tracked along a path and ended somewhere, but that's changing. There's a whole market now of DVDs and seminars and books that say the journey is more important than the destination.

[1 : 17] In fact, the destination is the journey, one of the books now says. And the person who wrote that book has clearly not flown the airlines that I've flown the last couple of years.

Because the Bible says that both are important journey, destination, and that we cannot understand who we are or what we're doing here, unless we understand where we've come from and where we're heading. And in one way, the most all-encompassing picture of the Christian life is of a pilgrimage.

We have come from a garden paradise that God created. We now live in a wilderness of thorns and thistles, and we are heading to a new creation that's better than the garden paradise.

And the physical world in which we live is caught up in that pilgrimage as well. It's somehow been subject to futility and frustration, longing for the freedom that we will have when Christ comes again. Now, the reason I say that is because Luke 9.51 is a turning point in the gospel. In fact, the gospel breaks in two halves at 9.51.

[2 : 27] If you haven't been with us for the last couple of months, the first nine chapters, they take place in Galilee, and it's all fire and light and actions. Jesus does these astounding miracles, erasing the dead and healing the sick and preaching forgiveness of sins and calming storms and calling people to follow him.

9.51, we move, something changes, and now we begin a pilgrimage. Just look at the words of 9.51 with me. When the days drew near, literally when the days were fulfilled, for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Set his face. We read it again in the next verse. So from now on, Jesus goes on a pilgrimage. His face is set towards Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, the ancient city where God had made his presence dwell. The city of the kings of Israel, the kings of David, the city of the prophets. And when Jesus comes to the city, the city ought to rise up as one and bow down before their Messiah.

But we know, don't we, from chapter 9, that Jesus is going to be tortured and executed. In fact, as we come through this pilgrimage in chapter 13, Jesus says it's impossible for a prophet to be anything but killed in Jerusalem.

[3 : 47] But here is the thing. Jerusalem is not the goal of his pilgrimage. Just look back at 51. The end point is not the goal.

Sorry, the end point is not Jerusalem. It is heaven. He is going to be received up. So he sets his face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus' journey, Jesus' pilgrimage is to heaven via Jerusalem.

Is that how you say it? I say via Jerusalem. Whatever. So the rest of the gospel is about Jesus moving from Galilee to heaven through the cross.

The first part of the gospel, the Son of God comes from heaven to Galilee. The second part of the gospel, he now sets on a journey to heaven through Jerusalem. He is going to go to the highest place.

He's going to be seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high and he's going to be tortured and executed to get there. It's going to be glory through suffering and shame.

[4 : 57] And that is, of course, exactly what happens. So that we go through the sufferings and then at the end of the gospel, he rises from the dead and he ascends. He ascends and at the beginning of the book of Acts, he goes up to the Father's right hand and is seated at his right hand in glory.

Now, why is this important? This is absolutely critical if you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The point of this passage today, which we're about to get to, and the point of all the rest of Luke's gospel, is that Jesus' pilgrimage is our pilgrimage.

If you want to be a follower and a disciple of Jesus, Jesus is not just doing this journey for the heck of it, he's carving out a path for us to follow in his footsteps. And you can see this from what happens with the disciples.

Until now, they've been pretty useless, really. I mean, they've been on the edge. Whenever they make an appearance, they're doing something wrong, which is somewhat comforting. From now on, the disciples are brought into the pilgrimage.

And the point is, that's true for us as well. And so for the next ten chapters particularly, Jesus lays on a kind of a private master's seminar for those who want to follow him.

[6 : 13] It's very interesting. Most of the next ten chapters are teaching. It's mostly Jesus' parables, searing parables. And you can't understand the parables unless you see that Jesus is going to heaven through the cross.

You think of the parables, you know, the prodigal son and the rich fool and the great banquet and the rich man and Lazarus and the mustard seed. They don't make any sense on the horizon of this world, but they do if this world is followed by eternity.

So here we are, sitting here today, and we want to know what does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to follow Christ on this pilgrimage? And in the passage today, 952 to the 1024, Jesus tells us that there are two essential foundations of our discipleship.

There are two tracks, if you will, that make the one track for discipleship. And the first is this. Our pilgrimage is pilgrimage with a person.

I know this is very simple, but in verses 57 to 62, if you just look down at them, you'll see that the core and the essence of the Christian life is not following a philosophy or so much a teaching, is that it's following a person.

[7 : 33] And that our highest, our most important, and our absolute priority is to the person of Jesus Christ. Three times the word follow comes in those little verses.

Let me just deal with two of the episodes. So look at verse 57. Someone comes up to Jesus as Jesus is going to Jerusalem. And he says, I'll follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus says, Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Here is the Son of God who has come from heaven to earth and he slept in other people's beds.

He slept in other people's homes, in wayside inns, he slept outside. And the point that he's saying to this guy who's so eager to follow him, I am homeless on this earth, he says, and if you're going to follow me, you will be too.

He says, if you're going to follow me, you have to resist the temptation to just settle down. There's a different dynamic at work because you follow me.

[8 : 44] It means seeing your life as a pilgrimage in the profoundest sense. Of course you use beds and homes and rooms and own them even. But he's saying, you don't settle down this side of eternity.

Now let me just say, the biblical view is that this world is not just a dreary wilderness full of thorns and thistles. So, you know, we become detached and unengaged and generally no fun at all.

At the end of our passage in verse 21, Jesus says, Jesus calls God Lord of heaven and earth. So that God is not just the Lord of the future, heaven, but he is the Lord of the wilderness as well.

Which means that he is with us, present with us as we walk through this life. It's not just that the next life is important, but it does mean that if we follow him, our real home is there, not here. And then another guy comes to Jesus and Jesus says, come follow me. And what the second man does is he takes a very respectable family commitment and places it between himself and Jesus. [9 : 58] He says, first let me go and bury my father. And in verse 60, Jesus says, leave the dead to bury their own dead, but for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Now, if I was speaking to the youth group, I would say, Jesus has very, very strong things to say about commitment to parents, which he does.

And he says that Jesus is very strong about those who use religious arguments to avoid their commitment to parents. But what Jesus is teaching here is that he himself takes absolute priority over every other commitment, including family commitments.

Or better, our commitment to Jesus shapes our commitment to our family. There's no evidence that the father had died yet.

There's no evidence that he was even sick. What the man is trying to do is he's just, he's trying to put Jesus off until it's more convenient to follow him. I'll be really committed when the children leave home, when the children go to college, when I have children, when I've got more money, when I move into an apartment, when I've got more time.

You know how it works. In my own experience, the thing that blocks me from growing as a Christian and prevents me from following Jesus is not some great sin or some great cowardice.

[11 : 29] It's all the good things that I want to put between me and Christ. I see this at life, at work, in the lives of people who have come into St. John's and have now left the Christian faith.

They begin to follow and then they wander because they say I'll only follow him under my terms, in my schedule, with my priorities and Jesus says and he's right, he will either be our first priority or we can't follow him.

Jesus has not come to destroy normal family custom. Our domestic arrangements and our daily life, what we do when we leave church is the place of our pilgrimage, that's the place in which we are following him.

But the question these verses present to us is this, what happens at the parting of the ways? What happens when there is a conflict between our commitment to Christ and our other usual commitments?

And in these three stories we have very respectable ways of saying no to Jesus, just putting him off a little, being a little bit more entangled in the cares of this life. But following him is following the person, it's placing him above comfort and custom and convention and it shows as it does show in your calendar and in your checkbook and in your choices because our pilgrimage is with Christ.

[12 : 57] That's the first track, we follow the person, our pilgrimage is with Christ. But the second track which follows very naturally out of it is our pilgrimage is with a purpose.

If you begin to follow Jesus Christ you gradually take on his purpose and his priorities. Now we've seen this haven't we? Remember in chapter 5, following leads to fishing?

Let me put it this way, if Jesus has come to seek and save the lost, if you're following him you will want to do the same thing. And it's interesting that the word follow which came three times is now replaced by the word send four times.

So you look in chapter 10 verse 1, after this the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them ahead of him two by two where he was about to come. So as Jesus journeys up to Jerusalem he he's sending people ahead to towns to prepare people for his visit.

Let me ask two questions about the purpose of Jesus in this. One, what does it mean? What does it look like practically? And secondly, why do we do it? What does it look like practically?

[14 : 12] It means praying. Verse 2, he said to them, the harvest is plentiful, the labourers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers, into the harvest.

Jesus looks at the world and he sees men and women who are not on the path and he longs for them to join the path and the first thing he says to do for us is to pray.

Before we organise, before we strategise, he wants us to feel as he feels, he looks out on the world and it's a harvest which is the picture of judgement. At the close of this age, Jesus will come in power and authority with his angels to judge the living and the dead.

This is the great harvest time. It's ripe for judgement, the world. The only reason the judgement has come, we learn later in the scriptures, is because God wants many people to come to repent. Why

do we pray?

We pray because the harvest is not ours, it's the Lord's. He is the Lord of the harvest. It's his world, every single person rightly belongs to him, every single person should rightly worship him.

[15 : 25] And Jesus' heart breaks for those who have wandered away and are lost and he reveals his compassion to us in this. And the first sign that your heart and my heart has begun to take on the purpose of Jesus Christ is we feel as we feel and the proof that we feel as he feels is that we pray.

I think this is probably the explanation for the Samaritan episode back in 952. If this is the Lord's work, it has to be done in the Lord's way.

And we have this wonderful illustration of James and John, the sons of thunder, kind of taking a WWF approach to the mission of Jesus. That's wrestling for those of you who don't know.

He sends these, the first village is a Samaritan village and they don't want anything to do with Jesus because he's heading to Jerusalem. So James and John want to do some smiting. They say, let's invite some fire to come down from heaven and consume those wretched Samaritans.

Helpful? Not helpful. I think probably they'd seen Elijah on the mountain and their minds were reflecting on those sorts of things. But these were guys who were not to be messed with.

[16 : 44] And what they're saying, really what they're saying is, we don't want any of this cross business, this dying on the cross business. We want to go straight to glory and anyone that gets in our way, bzzz.

It's absolutely the opposite of seeking and saving the lost and Jesus will have nothing to do with it. He says, what you need to do, James and John, is you need to learn how to pray, to plead for people to go out into the harvest because the name of God is so glorious and people are so precious.

And when you've prayed, then you speak. And I just point this out that there's a number of references in this mission to speaking. Verse 5, tell people about the peace of God.

Verse 9, tell people about the kingdom of God. And I know this mission isn't exactly ours because we have to wait until chapter 24.

But all the way through Luke's gospel, Jesus is widening the circle until every disciple is involved in the same purpose that he's involved in. Let me say it this way, you cannot be a disciple of Jesus unless you're willing to speak about the kingdom of God while you journey in the kingdom of God.

[18 : 02] And I know that's a very difficult thing for us West Coast Canadians. I think we wrongly think that perhaps following Jesus is maybe within our capabilities but being a messenger and speaking about Jesus is, it's just, it's spiritually distasteful.

It's emotionally insensitive. It's for those loud mouth people and we always have the caricature of the television evangelist.

Following always leads to fishing. You can't do one without the other. God. And Jesus expects all of us to speak to the Lord about others and to others about the Lord as we have opportunity.

And the expectation is that as we follow the path to the cross and to glory, people will ask us what on earth we are doing. So that's the what.

Then why do we do such this thing? Why do we do this thing of Jesus' mission? Well there are two answers and the first has to do with God. Just turn over to verse 21 for a moment please.

[19 : 19] In that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. That's a weak way of translating that word. He was thrilled with joy. He said, I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babies.

Father, yes, such was thy gracious will. This is after the 70 have come back from their mission, amazed that God would use them. And Jesus says, Father it's just remarkable that you reveal yourself not to people who think they are clever, but but to people who have the humility to come as a little baby.

This is God's gracious will. There's always been and it will always be. It's through the stumbling, stammering, stuttering efforts of his disciples that God reveals himself to other people.

It is his gracious will. It doesn't depend on your abilities and it doesn't depend on the person's abilities either. It's just his goodness. That's why we speak. It's because God chooses to reveal himself that way.

But there is another reason why we speak and it has to do with the destination of the pilgrimage. Jesus is under no illusion that this is going to be fabulously successful or easy.

[20 : 45] God's grace. And so he prepares his disciples. And did you notice in verse 13 how overwhelmed he becomes at the thought of those who reject him?

These are astounding. I think there are some of the most astounding words in the Bible. Just look back at 10, 13. You know we read these words in English, woe to you, but it's a deep and guttural agony.

Ooi, he cries out. Woe, Chorazin. Woe, Bethsaida. He says, if the mighty work's done and you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, thou would have repented long ago sitting in sackcloth and ashes. It will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to hell.

There's an infinite sadness here. As Jesus contemplates the towns where he's done his most powerful works and the preaching of the kingdom, he says there's different degrees of judgment.

[21 : 55] And it pains him. Do you notice that he says there are only two destinations for all of them? One pilgrimage leads through the cross to heaven.

Every other path in Jesus' view leads to hell. And the woe comes out partly, I think, from a sense of the height of glory that people are going to miss, the glory of the Father.

That is why he's come. He's come to take us through death to seek and to save the lost. And do you know what being lost is? Being lost is not being on the path of following Jesus.

It's never having begun. And it breaks Jesus' heart to see people lost. It's very interesting to me in the service today. There's a fair bit of language of being lost in pilgrimage like sheep.

Jesus says, if people are not on the path, if people live as though this life is all there is, they give themselves to the illusion.

[23 : 00] They create idols out of God's good gifts and then become slaves to them. In his mind, rejecting the message, rejecting the messenger and rejecting him is an unmitigated spiritual disaster.

It means missing out, being exalted to heaven but being brought down to hell. I think it must have been a shattering experience for the disciples to hear Jesus say this. Just imagine the power behind you know what it's like when someone, a righteous person, a person of dignity cries out like this.

And of course the question for us this morning is, you know, have we begun to think this way and feel this way about Vancouver or about our neighbours? And I think we need to balance this sadness with the joy that comes next.

The 70 return. They're very excited about the success of their mission. And in verse 18, Jesus says to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

I've given you authority for all over these things. Verse 20, Nevertheless, don't rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

[24 : 18] Jesus sees the pilgrimage that we walk and the witness that we bear to him as part of a great conflict which one day will lead to the fact that Satan is being cast down from heaven.

And that as we walk now and as we witness now, Satan is in the process of being cast down through what we do. And it is a wonderful thing. It is a wonderful thing to see others joining the path of following Christ.

But more wonderful by far is having our names written in heaven. Written means being enrolled as a citizen of the city.

If we're homeless here, we're citizens there, which is a fantastic assurance because it means every step we take, even though it looks like the wrong way and even though it heads through the cross, is the path to our true home.

So here are the two tracks. Here are the two basic things of what it means to follow Jesus. Firstly, it is a pilgrimage with a person. That means that day by day, we're seeking to grow to find our true treasure in him, loving him above all things.

[25 : 31] choosing him in our real life decisions, in the ordinary conflicts that we find ourselves in. And secondly, it's a pilgrimage with a purpose. That if you follow Jesus Christ, you've got a bigger purpose in life than just the course that you're on.

Having him as our first priority means being involved in his mission, praying and speaking about the kingdom as we have opportunity. Two things, not one. following and being sent.

And this is the path of blessing. And this is where we finish. You notice in the last verse, last two verses, Jesus turns to the disciples and he says, you are such a lucky group.

He says, you're so blessed. He said, kings and prophets, they long to see what you're seeing. What God wanted to do at the creation, all his purpose in the promise to Abraham, the redemption in Exodus, the promises to the kings, all the prophets.

It's now being carried on my shoulders and you are seeing it as we walk to Jerusalem. And in a very short time, he will be arrested and he will be tortured and he will be killed.

[26 : 50] And on the third day, the father raises him from the dead and in a very short time after that, he was raised and seated at the right hand of power where he offers repentance and the forgiveness of sins and opens a path for us so that we may walk through this experience to him.

And we meet together week by week and we belong together because we are trying to help one another following Jesus steps. Get on the path. Help each other be on the path.

Because very soon we will walk that way. We will follow him through our own death to the place beside him because our names are written in heaven.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, lift your drooping hands. Strengthen your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but healed.

See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God. And be grateful for we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.

[28 : 06] Amen. Let us pray. Amen. I will leave moments of silence between the intercessions when in the quiet of your hearts you may add your own prayers.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your many gifts to us. We thank you for this brand new calendar year when we again may choose to live wholeheartedly for you.

To listen to your voice. To spend time reading your word. Basking in your great love for us. And discerning your guidance and direction for our lives.

And Father, as we make our pilgrimage through this earthly life, we pray that like those first disciples, we will not count the cost.

But rather go gladly because you love us. We rejoice and take comfort in all that you have given us through your crucified and risen Son.

[29 : 43] Give us your purpose. Shape our wills and make us utterly dependent on you, our loving Father. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Father, we lift up our world to you. There is a war in the Middle East, Canadian soldiers dying trying to keep the peace in Afghanistan, and the country of Zimbabwe in utter chaos and ruin.

we pray for these situations that you might kindle in the hearts of all the true love of peace please raise up leaders with your wisdom who would offer a way through and beyond these particular conflicts protect the peacekeepers and the innocent civilians caught in the middle and dear lord we remember our country Canada we are so thankful for the many blessings we know here we pray for our federal, provincial and municipal leaders that you might cause them to walk before you in all truth and righteousness and especially in our current economic crisis that they might fulfill their office to your glory and the public good

Heavenly Father we pray for the larger Anglican church in the world we thank you that in your great mercy you are renewing us and reforming us we thank you for the Anglican network in Canada and the leadership of Bishops Don Harvey and Michael Harding praying particularly for strength and protection for them and their families and Father we turn now to our own church family we give thanks to you for our clergy and staff sustain them and their families day by day and keep them under the shadow of your wings protected and assured of your love as we move towards our court date in May we ask that you go before our legal team and us as a congregation every step of the way

[32 : 55] Father we pray for a righteous and faithful person to hear our case Heavenly Father we bring to you now those in our community who are in need of your healing touch in their lives we remember Paul Gail Rowena Peter Caroline and Marguerite from your great mercy and loving kindness grant unto each one exactly what they need and Father sustain Moran as he waits and bless the outcome of his immigration board hearing and lastly Father we bring to you our own individual burdens and challenges please take a few moments now to bring before the Lord that which is uppermost in your mind and heart we offer all these prayers in the name of our almighty triune God

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Amen