

Luke 9:51-62

⁵¹When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²He sent messengers ahead of him. They went and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. ⁵³But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?”

⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. “You don’t know what kind of spirit is influencing you. ⁵⁶For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s souls, but to save them.” Then they went to another village.

⁵⁷As they went on the way, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

⁵⁸Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹He said to another man, “Follow me!”

But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹Another man also said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home.”

⁶²Jesus told him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Determined

I.

They took their cues from Jesus himself. That *always* would seem to be a good course of action, don’t you think? Obviously Jesus is the place to turn for ideas about what to do next, especially when he is right there with you.

Recently there had been enough things to really get the disciples’ attention. There had been this event up on top of a mountain. Two of the most famous prophets in Israel’s history had appeared with Jesus. Not all of them had been up there, of course, but they had all heard about it.

Sprinkled throughout their time with Jesus there had been clear hints of his greatness and his glory. His teaching of Scripture, in and of itself, was impressive enough, but there had also been many healings, and impromptu dinner parties for thousands and many other things that showed that Jesus was great.

This glory, it would seem, would rub off in some way onto those who were close to him. They were there. They were close. They could be proud that he had chosen them. In fact, not long before they had been arguing about which of them would be the greatest. Jesus had explained that greatness in his kingdom came in humility.

“When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51, EHV). Luke is looking back after the fact when he makes this report. The disciples were unaware that Jesus would be taken up into heaven soon. They were also blithely unaware *why* Jesus was so determined to go to Jerusalem. Since that was the location of the temple, perhaps they thought he was determined to go there to celebrate the festival of the Passover; perhaps he was just determined to go there to teach some more or heal more people.

He was determined, so they were, too.

II.

How determined are *you* as a follower of Jesus?

Jesus makes this statement at the end of today's Gospel: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62, EHV). I'm not a farmer, and probably most of you haven't done much farming, either, so I have no plowing experience. Have you ever looked behind you while trying to mow the lawn in a straight line? It doesn't work very well. Don't look back.

"He sent messengers ahead of him. They went and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. ⁵³But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:52-53, EHV). Large groups needed an advance party to make sure the town could accommodate them. Samaritans were prejudiced against the Jews because the Jews insisted that the only proper temple to the true God was in Jerusalem. They were offended because they were convinced that Jesus was continuing the stereotype in his determination to go to Jerusalem.

"When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?'" (Luke 9:54, EHV). James and John sought revenge. Since the two of them were first-hand witnesses of the transfiguration, perhaps they had Elijah on the brain. Elijah had called down fire from heaven. That seemed to be appropriate for these prejudiced Jesus-deniers.

"But he turned and rebuked them. 'You don't know what kind of spirit is influencing you. ⁵⁶For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them.'" (Luke 9:55-56, EHV). When Elijah had called down fire from heaven, it was against a king who had hardened his heart and rejected God. Did James and John ever give a thought to teaching the people of this Samaritan village who Jesus was? It would seem not. They were too busy feeding their anger. Prejudice and anger are emotions that cause us to look backwards. They are not fit for the kingdom of God. Jesus came to save sinners.

"As they went on the way, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' ⁵⁸Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head'" (Luke 9:57-58, EHV). Perhaps this man was making a hasty promise before he considered all the ramifications. Jesus did *not* tell this individual that he would not be welcome, but had he thought about everything that meant? Jesus didn't live in a mansion, like some famous athlete or actor. Fame and fortune were not guaranteed to followers of Jesus. Earthly wealth and status aren't what Jesus came for, or what those who follow him should expect.

"He said to another man, 'Follow me!' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' ⁶⁰Jesus told him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:59-60, EHV). Is there something wrong with showing respect to loved ones who have passed away? Not at all. But Jesus can read the heart. He knew that this man had distracted discipleship.

So many things in this life result in distracted discipleship. There are so many fun things to do in life. God won't mind if I don't go to church this week because I'm camping or hunting or fishing. God won't mind if I skip my Bible study today because there are just so many things around the house that need my attention. God knows I have to go to work today; it's ok if I don't spend even a moment in prayer, thanking him for all he has done for me.

Distracted discipleship. Looking backwards, rather than heavenward.

"Another man also said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those

at my home.’⁶² Jesus told him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:61-62, EHV). There’s no hurry to discipleship. My discipleship should be comfortable. God will understand if I take some time for myself. There’s no need for *me* to help with the soccer camp or the lawn mowing or the church maintenance. There’s no need for *me* to be the one to volunteer my time for ushering or the periodic church cleaning or the evangelism committee. In fact, there’s no need for me to be involved in personal evangelism to friends or coworkers or neighbors—that’s what we pay people for. God will understand that I’m too busy right now to participate in the work of the church. God will understand that I “need” all my income, so I won’t bother to consider what portion to give for his work.

Distracted discipleship. “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

III.

Fortunately, *Jesus* wasn’t distracted.

“When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem...⁵⁶For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s souls, but to save them” (Luke 9:51, 56, EHV). Jesus knew that soon he would be going back to the Father’s side in heaven. Still, there were some things that needed to be accomplished first. He came to save souls.

What needed to be done was to be accomplished in Jerusalem. It wouldn’t be easy, but nothing worthwhile is easy. It would, in fact, be the most difficult task in the history of the world. Saving souls requires everything. Saving souls is impossible for human beings.

But Jesus is both God and man. He had lived his whole life without ever sinning once. Now he was determined to finish the job the Heavenly Father had sent him to do. He was determined to go to Jerusalem because that was where it would all come to a head.

In Jerusalem all the forms of our distracted discipleship were on his shoulders as he marched, dragging his cross behind him, to Calvary. On his shoulders were our hasty promises and our prejudice and our anger. On his shoulders were all those times we have made *our* comfort and our wishes the priority, and have forgotten the promises we made at our confirmation to be faithful to the Lord Jesus, even until death.

Jesus forgives our conditional discipleship and our distracted discipleship with the work he was determined to do in Jerusalem. It has been done. It is certain. It is finished. That’s why the day finally came when Jesus was taken up into heaven. His work was completed, and his followers were given their instructions to carry on with the message of what he has done for the world.

IV.

Determined. We take our cues from Jesus. He was determined to get to Jerusalem to finish the work of our salvation. That work has been completed. He has gone to the Father’s side.

Before he left he made promises to all his disciples. He would never really leave us or forsake us. Despite the fact that we can’t see him or touch him, we know that he is with us, keeping that promise to the end. He also promised that he would return to take us to be with him. We know he will keep that promise, too.

Determined. The work has been completed. Our work is *not* yet completed, or he would already have come for us. Focus your attention and your determination on Jesus. Nothing is more important than staying firm in your faith. Equally important is that others would join you. Stay determined. Amen.