

On the Road with Jesus

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 9:51-10:24

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It's a joy to be back in the pulpit this Sunday after over a month away. I'm thankful to be in a church that gives me a study leave each year. I'm also thankful for a great staff team and missions partners who are more than capable to fill this pulpit when I'm away. If you missed any of the sermons over the last six weeks, I'd strongly encourage you to go and listen to them. According to one report I heard, "the preaching over the last month rocked." All of us are going to miss Curt's preaching throughout the year. But we'll be sure to have him back next summer. And we'll get Abdel and Brandon back as soon as we can!

We're returning to the Gospel of Luke this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 9. We won't read the passage all at once. We'll read it as we go along.

Our passage this morning is really an extension of our missions theme.¹ We're introduced to Jesus' mission in the first section. Then we see how our mission must be patterned after his in the sections that follow. I want to briefly look at Jesus mission in verse 51. Then we'll spend the rest of our time looking at our mission in the rest of the passage.

JESUS: RESOLVED AND REJECTED (9:51)

In verse 51, we come to a turning point in Luke's Gospel. Up to this point, Jesus has been ministering in Galilee. But now he begins his journey to Jerusalem. We're told that "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Being "taken up" refers to Jesus' ascension.² He knew the day for leaving this earth was drawing near. But before that day came, he had to go to go to Jerusalem. "He set his face to go..." What that means is that he was resolved and determined to go to Jerusalem.

And why was he resolved to go to Jerusalem? Because in Jerusalem he would accomplish his mission to save the lost. We see this in Luke 18:31-33: "And taking the twelve, he said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.'"

This was Jesus' mission. And it's critical for our mission! You see there are a ton of parallels between what Jesus came to accomplish and what the church is called to accomplish. Actually, in Luke's writings the ascension of Jesus is like the continental divide between Jesus mission and our mission.³ It's intentional that both the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts include the ascension. What *Jesus* does is on one side of the ascension. And what *the church* does through the Spirit is on the other side. Think about it.

¹ Bock says mission is the theme of 10:1-24. I think it's really the theme of 9:51-10:24. Bock, Darrell L. *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*. Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1994.

² Edwards; Garland; Bock

Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Luke*. The pillar New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2015; Garland, David E. *Luke*. Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011.

³ Edwards

Jesus went through Samaria and Judea to Jerusalem to bring salvation. And he was rejected along the way. After he was “taken up,” after his ascension, he sent the Holy Spirit on believers, as Brandon talked about two weeks ago. Then his disciples went *from* Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth to declare God’s salvation. And *they* met rejection along the way.

All who want to follow Jesus will have to follow him down the same road he traveled. He took the way to Jerusalem. He took the way of the cross. His disciples have to follow the same way (9:23). It’s no surprise that in the book of Acts that the church is called “the Way.”⁴ Disciples are those who are on the road with Jesus.

We see this fleshed out in the rest of our passage this morning. I want to spend the rest of our time this morning looking at three things that mark disciples who are on the road with Jesus.

1. They determine to follow Jesus.
2. They declare the gospel.
3. They delight in God’s sovereign grace.

DISCIPLES DETERMINE TO FOLLOW JESUS. (9:57-62)

First, disciples determine to follow Jesus. We see this in 9:57-62 where we’re introduced to three would-be followers of Jesus.

Luke 9:57-62⁵

⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”⁵⁸ 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.”⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”⁶¹ Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

This may seem like a new section, but it’s connected to the previous one by the fact that they’re “going along the road” to Jerusalem. All the teaching in these sections instructs us on how to live as disciples on the road with Jesus.

Jesus was determined to accomplish his mission. His disciples must be determined to accomplish theirs as well. Jesus “set his face” in one direction—toward Jerusalem. Jesus disciples must set their face in one direction—toward Jesus. But as one commentator says, there are many temptations for his disciples to have their faces twisted in two directions.⁶

There are all kinds of excuses to evade our call to resolute devotion to Jesus, but nothing should block the road. There are social demands, family demands, work demands, you name it. But all of these should take a back seat to following Jesus.

Even the most reasonable excuses are rejected by Jesus. In verse 59, Jesus calls a man to follow him and he says, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” The responsibility to bury your parents was one of the most important ethical and religious requirements of the law.⁷ But Jesus says that

⁴ Edwards

⁵ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Garland

⁷ Garland; Bock; Edwards

following him and proclaiming his gospel must take priority. In verse 61, the third would-be disciple says he'll follow Jesus after he says goodbye to his family.⁸ The desire to look to the past is strong, but we're called to follow Jesus, no turning back! As Jesus says in verse 62, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This verse reminds me of John Bunyan's book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. At the very beginning of the book, Christian asks Evangelist what he must do to be saved. And Evangelist tells him that he must flee the wrath to come. Christian replies by saying he doesn't know where to go. Evangelist tells him to go to the wicket gate (or the narrow gate) which is the only way to get on the road to eternal life. Earlier he had tried to talk to his family about these things, but they wouldn't listen. So as he's running toward the narrow gate, his wife and children come out to him and plead with him to return home to the City of Destruction. But he put his fingers in his ears and ran on crying, "Life! Life! Eternal Life!" Bunyan goes on to conclude, "So he looked not behind him but fled toward the [wicket gate]."⁹

This is the picture of what we must do if we are determined to follow Jesus, no turning back. There are many things to distract us on this road. Our homes, our families, our jobs, our social calendar—all good things! But if we want to go on the road with Jesus we must be resolved to follow Jesus, no turning back. We must set our face toward him, not twist it in two directions. Jesus must have no rivals. He must be number one. Is he number one in your life? Are you determined to follow him?

DISCIPLES DECLARE THE GOSPEL (10:1-16)

That's the first thing we must do if we're going to go on the road with Jesus. The second thing we must do is to declare the gospel in the face of difficulty and depend on God. We see this in 10:1-16.

Luke 10:1-16

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ²And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

¹³"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

¹⁶"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

⁸ Elijah let Elisha do this before he became his disciple (1 Kgs 19:19-21). But the call to follow Jesus is more urgent than it was in Elijah's day.

⁹ Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Carlisle, Penn: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017, p. 4.

The Mission

The mission of the disciples is clear. They're called to declare that the kingdom of God has come near in the person of Jesus. God's redemptive reign¹⁰ is present in Jesus Christ. Through the cross he will redeem and reconcile his people to God. They will have peace through Jesus. Peace is the first quality of those who receive salvation.¹¹ So his disciples are called to declare peace to those they meet.

At first they declare it in Israel. But eventually they declare it to all the nations. In fact, the seventy-two that are sent out most likely parallel the seventy-two nations in Genesis 10 that were eventually scattered throughout the earth in Genesis 11. Now through the offspring of Abraham, through Jesus, all the nations of the earth can be blessed. That's why Jesus' disciples must declare this message to all peoples even today. This is our mission.

Jesus' disciples are also called to demonstrate the gospel. In verse 9, we're told they're called to heal the sick and say to them, "the kingdom of God has come near to you." The call to heal the sick could also be translated "serve those who are in need." That ministry could certainly include healing the sick. But it doesn't need to be limited to healing or to the sick. When Jesus' disciples help the weak, they are demonstrating that the kingdom of God is at hand. And good works that flow out of the gospel adorn the gospel and help it to go forth.

It's interesting that Jesus tells his disciples to declare the gospel from house to house. They're called to sit at the dinner table with people, to receive their hospitality, and then to declare the peace that comes from the redemptive reign of Christ. One of the commentaries I read on this passage reminded me that the Jewish table was the most cherished and protected sector of Jewish communal life. To enter that space was to enter into relationship. The mission Jesus sends his disciples on is a relational ministry rather than a programmatic ministry.¹²

I think there is something instructive here for us. If we want to be faithful to share the gospel of *eternal* life with non-Christians, we have to first share *everyday* life with them. And if we're going to share everyday life with them, we have to actually know some non-Christians and spend time with them.

At our last Members Meeting, we announced that Lucas McGarity will be taking Curt's responsibilities for missions and evangelism. I'm so excited for Lucas to assume this role. The reason I'm excited is because Lucas models what we want to see in the church. He has relationships with non-Christians. And he loves them. He weeps for them. He prays for them. And he shares the gospel of peace with them. His heart is for all of us to do the same. But more importantly, Jesus' heart is for you to do the same. The mission is clear. We're called to declare and demonstrate the gospel. And we do that in the context of relationships.

The Conditions

But this passage not only tells us what the mission is; it also tells us what the conditions will be like as we carry out this mission. And the conditions will be difficult. They'll be difficult in at least four ways.¹³

¹⁰ Edwards

¹¹ Edwards

¹² Edwards

¹³ Edwards

For one, there will be few laborers (10:2). Therefore, disciples are called to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. In difficult times, disciples must be dependent on God for success. And this involves praying for missionaries and praying for people to be raised up to share the gospel. But there will be more difficulties than deficient numbers of laborers.

Second, there will be danger. In verse 3, Jesus says, “Behold, I’m sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” If you want to know if it’s dangerous to share the gospel in this world, just talk to the Christians from Damascus in the Arabic church that meet in our basement every Sunday.

Third, there will be limited resources. In verse 4, Jesus told his disciples to not take extra money or an extra suitcase or extra sandals. All of this I believe is to help them stay dependent on God for their success. Just as Jesus was dependent on his Father, so must we be dependent on the strength that God gives. God provided what the seventy-two needed. And he will provide what we need.

The last difficulty we’ll face is rejection. Some will receive the message and some will reject the message. But we’re not called to fret over people who reject the message. We’re simply called to shake the dust off of our feet and move on (cf. 9:56).

We’re responsible for faithfully declaring the gospel. Those who hear the gospel will be responsible to God. Jesus says in verse 16, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

In the first part of our passage, I skipped over 9:52-56. In those verses, Jesus is rejected by the Samaritans. His disciples wanted to call down judgment on them right there. But Jesus rebukes his disciples, because he wants them to know that now is not the time for judgment.¹⁴ Now is the time for salvation. At first, Jesus didn’t come to judge; he came to seek and to save the lost. And now is not the time for judgment either. Now is the time to declare the message of salvation. When Jesus comes again, it will be the time of judgment. And those who reject Jesus will be brought down to hell (cf. 10:15).

So what does this mean for us?

Well, if you haven’t yet placed your trust in Jesus, today is the day. Jesus is the King of kings. Through his Word, God calls you today to repent of your sin and bow the knee to Jesus. He calls you to look to the cross of Christ as your only way to have peace with God. The day of judgment is coming. But today is not the day of judgment. Today is the day of salvation, if you would believe.

But what about for those of you who have already placed your trust in Jesus? You need to remember that now is not the time for judging others. Now is the time to declare the gospel and to trust God with the results. There’s much to discourage us as we go about this mission. Life on mission is difficult. That’s why we must depend on God.

DISCIPLES DELIGHT IN GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE (10:17-24)

There’s a great temptation to think that the success of our ministry or the lack of success depends on us. But that’s not true. We’re dependent on God.

This comes out clearly in the last section of our passage in 10:17-24. This teaches us the third thing that’s true of those who are on the road with Jesus. Disciples delight in God’s sovereign grace.

¹⁴ Garland

Luke 10:17-24

¹⁷The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" ¹⁸And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

²¹In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²²All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

²³Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

One of my favorite preachers is Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In my opinion he was the best preacher of the twentieth century. When Lloyd-Jones was dying of cancer, his friend and biographer Iain Murray said to him, "How are you managing to bear up? You've been accustomed to preaching several times a week. You've begun important Christian ministries. Your influence has extended to Christians on five continents. And now you've been put on the shelf. You're reduced to sitting quietly, sometimes doing a little editing. I'm not so much asking how you're coping with cancer. Rather, how are you coping with being out of the mainstream?" Lloyd-Jones responded in the words of Luke 10:20. He said, "Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."¹⁵

So often we're moved by our success in life and ministry. But that can distract us from rejoicing in God's success in our own salvation. Don Carson says, "It's easy to idolize success." But we need to rejoice in what God has done for us, first and foremost.¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones may have been put on the shelf. But his name was written in heaven!

We also need to realize that all the success we have in ministry is a result of God's sovereign grace. In verse 21, Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit that the Father had hidden the gospel from the wise and understanding and revealed it to little children because this was the Father's gracious will.

Jesus rejoices that "spiritual knowledge and understanding are not human achievements of the educated, morally upright, or enlightened, but are made possible only by the inscrutable will of God."¹⁷ And this is all so that there will be no pride in our ministry or our salvation. And so that all glory will go to Christ. When this is how we see our ministry and our salvation, we can delight in God's sovereign grace, not our own achievements.

So we've seen that being on the road with Jesus involves determining to follow Jesus, declaring the gospel in difficult times through dependence on God, and delighting in God's sovereign grace. To close I want to share a story of what happened when some people went on the road with Jesus in missions. I think this story ties together much of what we've learned today.

¹⁵ Story found in Carson, D. A. "February 23." in *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word, Vol. 1*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 1998.

¹⁶ Carson

¹⁷ Edwards

No Turning Back

About 150 years ago, there was a great revival in Wales. As a result of this, many missionaries came from the UK to northeast India to spread the Gospel. The region was known as Assam and comprised hundreds of tribes. The tribal communities were quite primitive and aggressive. The tribesmen were also called head-hunters because of a social custom which required the male members of the community to collect as many heads as possible. A man's strength and ability to protect his wife was assessed by the number of heads he had collected. Therefore, a youth of marriageable age would try and collect as many heads as possible and hang them on the walls of his house. The more heads a man had, the more eligible he was considered.

Into this hostile and aggressive community, came a group of Welsh missionaries spreading the message of love, peace, and hope of Jesus Christ. Naturally, they were not welcomed. One Welsh missionary finally succeeded in converting a man, his wife, and two children. This man's faith proved contagious and many villagers began to accept Christianity. Angry, the village chief summoned all the villagers. He then called the family who had first converted to renounce their faith in public or face execution. Moved by the Holy Spirit, the man sang his reply, "I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back."

Enraged at the refusal of the man, the chief ordered his archers to arrow down the two children. As both boys lay twitching on the floor, the chief asked, "Will you deny your faith? You have lost both your children. You will lose your wife too." But the man replied, again singing, "Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back. No turning back."

The chief was beside himself with fury and ordered his wife to be arrowed down. In a moment she joined her two children in death. Now he asked for the last time, "I will give you one more opportunity to deny your faith and live." In the face of death the man sang, "The world behind me, the cross before me. No turning back. No turning back."

He was shot dead like the rest of his family. But with their deaths, a miracle took place. The chief who had ordered the killings was moved by the faith of the man. He wondered, "Why should this man, his wife and two children die for a Man who lived in a far-away land on another continent some 2,000 years ago? There must be some supernatural power behind the family, and I too want that supernatural power."

In a spontaneous confession of faith, he declared, "I too belong to Jesus Christ!" When the crowd heard this from the mouth of their chief, the whole village accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior.¹⁸

Though few of us will face as perilous a situation as these missionaries, all of us are called to determine to follow Jesus, no turning back. We're called to declare the gospel of Christ. And we're called to rejoice when God delights to save some by his sovereign grace.

¹⁸ ["499\) The Story Behind the Song 'I Have Decided to Follow Jesus'." Blog post, EmailMeditations. August 23, 2014.](#)