

All in

(Luke 9:51-62)

Moving on from John to Luke, as we have been studying the life of our Lord chronologically, Luke introduces today's passage with an important statement: "Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem." This is a game changer in Luke's Gospel:

- Jesus is not a victim of destiny — Echoing the language of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus establishes that he chooses the cross, not the other way around. He is the suffering Servant of the Lord who takes away the sins of the world.
- This is a theological statement more than a geographical statement — Jesus "sets his face" means that no one will change his mind about the matter. Surely, many have tried to change his mind: the devil, Peter, and even his family; but he knows his mission, and he will accomplish it.
- We are all pilgrims — His journey alludes to his followers' journey. We are only pilgrims on earth. As Jesus' prize is in heaven, so his disciples' prize is also in heaven.

Just as Jesus set his face toward his Father's interests, so his disciples should journey through life with a similar mindset. Spain's coach, Luis de la Fuente, was asked what's his team's secret? He said, "When you go on a trip, everything becomes much easier if you have like-minded travellers with you."

As Luke depicts Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem, he shows us five people who could possibly join him on his journey—but they were unable to, due to their wrong mindset. We want to learn from their mistakes so that we may make the journey of faith in a way that is pleasing to our Lord.

1. Non-disciples — The Samaritans

As already mentioned elsewhere, Samaritans and Jewish people did not get along. The Jewish Talmud reads: "Let not the Samaritans have part in the resurrection."

The Samaritans, because of an ethnic issue, rejected a spiritual blessing. Before we cast a stone at them, we need to honestly acknowledge that many times we look at appearances before we look at the heart.

Application: We have obviously rejected many blessings that God had in store for us simply because we did not like its "package." I can surely say to you: God's best blessings are often found in places, people, and circumstances we do not like.

2. Judgemental disciples — John and James, the “sons of thunder”

Thankfully, our Lord does not share in the Jewish national hatred. On at least three occasions, Jesus’ interactions with the Samaritans are remarkably positive: the parable of the Good Samaritan; the woman at the well in John 4; and Jesus commended the faith of the Samaritan who was healed of leprosy and was the only one (out of ten!) to return and give glory to God.

Such behaviour and kindness, apparently, were not learned by his disciples. Once the Samaritans refused to give shelter and food to the group, John and James wanted to decimate the whole village by calling down fire from heaven in judgment.

How would they perform such an act? We do not know. Had they ever done such a thing? Never. Were they a bit full of themselves? Certainly!

Application: Before we cast the first stone at them, we should humbly admit that sometimes we too think we are God’s police officers— we often focus more on exposing people’s sin than on bringing them healing.

These first two situations could be underscored by the word *misjudgment*. In the first scenario, there is a misjudgment based on appearances; in the second, there is a misjudgment of purpose. They thought their power and authority were meant to destroy, while Jesus intended them to save.

3. Hasty disciples — A man who pledges to follow Jesus everywhere

Matthew tells us that this man was actually “a teacher of the Law.” As you read his pledge, your mind goes straight to Peter in the Upper Room on the night of the Last Supper. Peter said, “I will be with you; even if everyone else deserts you, I won’t...”

Surely, the number one issue in this statement is that it is an “I” statement. Grace calls us; discipleship never starts within ourselves, but with him. He calls us to himself with the words, “Follow me.” This is not a volunteering initiative; it is a calling.

Because this statement is self-centred, it is doomed to fail. Hence, Jesus responds: “You have not yet examined the cost of discipleship. Even the animals have a place to sleep, but I”—who had just been refused shelter in Samaria—“have no place to lay my head.”

Application: Far from the glamorous life that many falsely promise, Jesus transparently warns that, in order to fulfil the calling, the believer sometimes runs into various unpleasant situations.

4. Hesitant disciples — A man called by Jesus who wants to delay his obedience

Here the right approach happens: it is not the disciple who chooses the Rabbi Jesus; but it is the Rabbi who chooses the student. However, what the previous individual had in excess—haste—this one lacks. He understood that discipleship would cost him everything, and so he wanted to delay it.

“Let me bury my father first,” he requests. This is by no means a request to perform a funeral ceremony. He is actually thinking of taking care of his aged father for as long as necessary, and only when he is gone will he be able to commit fully to his calling.

Since the fifth commandment demands that one honour one’s parents, it is obvious that Jesus is not denying care for the elderly. What Jesus is addressing here is: procrastination. A true disciple looks for ways to serve Christ despite a busy life and unpleasant circumstances. A false disciple, however, looks for excuses not to serve him: life is busy, money is short, I have to work... and the list goes on and on.

Due to his hesitancy, Jesus tells him, “Go and preach the Kingdom!” Though he rejects the ministry Christ is giving him, Christ’s calling still remains. There is a difference between mission and vision. A mission has a time span, a circumstance, and a context. Vision is something you carry with you wherever you go, whatever the circumstances or context.

Though he lost the opportunity to follow Jesus in his itinerant ministry, he had no right to despise the preaching of the Gospel where he remained. It is interesting that he is worried about his father’s imminent death, while Christ is worried about people’s spiritual death...

5. Divided disciples — A man who had his eyes on Jesus and on something else at the same time

Once again, the main issue here is the “I” statement. Discipleship starts with Jesus.

At first sight, this petition is similar to the former one. They both use the excuse “*but first*,” and both involve family petitions. If all we had were their statements, we would consider them to be the very same issue expressed in two different petitions. However, because of Jesus’ reply, we realize that they are different issues. The former person was delaying his obedience; this one is divided in his obedience.

“Let me say farewell to my family first...” I want to make an experiment here. Let’s replace the word family with a couple of other words: “Let me say farewell to my hobby first.” “Let me say farewell to my career first.” “Let me say farewell to my dream first.” Can you see that the issue is not delayed obedience, but a struggle to part with something that must remain in the past if he truly wants to follow Christ?

These are not necessarily sinful things. As a matter of fact, in this particular case, it is a good thing: family. Nevertheless, discipleship is an “all-in or all-out” matter. It is impossible to serve Jesus with a divided heart. Either you will please him and despise the other, or you will despise him and please the other. Jesus’ words could not be clearer: if you lay your hand to the plough but keep looking back, you are not fit for the work of the Kingdom.

Application: We could all agree that many times the good things – that are not sinful in themselves – gets in the way of the most important thing, God himself; right?

Conclusion:

There is a common symptom in all five approaches: loving something/someone more than God—they did not set their faces on God as Jesus did!

The Samaritans did not want Jesus because he did not look like them. The sons of thunder wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans because their egos had been hurt. The hasty disciple wanted to volunteer his time, not his whole life. The hesitant disciple put his family first. The divided disciple wanted to serve both God and himself at the same time.

Religion is self-centred. Legalism is self-centred. Self-righteousness is self-centred. Only the Gospel is self-giving. That is why Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem—to die a sacrificial death for us. He is the Gospel. He is, by definition, a self-giving Saviour.

Discipleship starts with Jesus, is preserved by Jesus, and finishes with Jesus. It is grace from beginning to end. He enables us to follow him. He calls us according to his grace and mercy. This journey is a privilege!

- Every person in this passage asks, “What will following Jesus cost me?”
- Jesus asks, “What will it cost me to save them?”

Jesus demands nothing of us that he has not first done himself. As he set his face to fulfil his Father’s calling, so we too must set our faces toward Jesus in order to fulfil our calling. Jesus does not demand perfection, but he does demand total allegiance. Jesus submitted to his Father wholeheartedly, so he expects us to submit as well. Jesus gave his life for his disciples, so he expects his disciples to do the same.