

“The Road to Glory” — Luke 9:51-62

May 24, 2020 — Mercy Hill Church — Pastor John Ferguson

I was sitting in a booth at a Denny’s restaurant in Calgary catching up with an old friend when the waitress came to the table to take our order. Denny’s was promoting the “Tuscan Sandwich,” and my enthusiastic waitress said, “This is the best thing I’ve ever eaten!” Me: “Really? The best thing you’ve ever eaten?” Waitress: “Well, no. But it’s really good.”

False Advertising: Everybody hates it, but we’ve all been exposed to it. That’s why we are hyper-suspicious.

Sometimes, Christians can sometimes give a distorted view of who Jesus is and what Christianity is about; that’s especially the case when they say that following Jesus is nothing but a bed of roses; or promise all your dreams will come true; or say that Jesus will give you your best life now.

That’s why it’s good to go back to the original gospel accounts of the life of Jesus to see what Jesus actually said and didn’t say. When we do so, we encounter an amazing person who was unlike any other. And the great thing about Jesus is that he doesn’t engage in false advertising. In fact, when it comes to this thing called Christianity and what it means to follow Jesus, Jesus is crystal clear. Uncomfortably clear.

Q: What does it mean to follow Jesus of Nazareth?

Today, we’re going to look at a passage that is all about what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus has a very different idea than we do of the Good Life. For us, it’s all about building our own little kingdoms. For Jesus, it was all about the Kingdom of God—God’s kind reign expressed in and through the the lives of people who have been reconnected and reconciled to God, and who now exhibit a new way of being human—the way illuminated for us by Jesus of Nazareth.

And we’ll hear Jesus say in essence, ***Following me means setting out on a new journey with me that involves a change in your deepest commitments and priorities.***

“The Road to Glory” — Luke 9:51-62 (“Jerusalem now looms large in the mind of Jesus”, Hughes 369).

51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

1. **Major turn in the narrative of Luke:** for the next 10 chapters, Luke will remind us at least 10 times that Jesus is on a determined march toward Jerusalem (9:51-57; 10:1; 11:53; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31, 35; 19:1).
 - Jesus is going to die and make atonement for his people, and nothing will stop him.
2. **The end game, Luke tells us, is not just the crucifixion of Jesus, but also his ascension** (Heb 12:2).
 - By saying, “taken up,” Luke is echoing a famous story of the prophet Elijah who was “taken up” to heaven (cf. 2 Kings 2). This is like a hyperlink on a webpage. For the ones who have eyes to see, he’s giving a head nod to one of the defining stories in the history of Jesus’ nation of Israel.

52 And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. 53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

1. **There is a behind-the-scenes simmering hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.**

- Samaritans were Jews who intermarried with Gentiles. Samaritans set up their own copy of the religious life of the Jews, even building their own temple on Mt. Gerizim, made their own edited version of the Law of Moses, and set up an alternative religious worship. The Jews publicly cursed Samaritans & prayed that they may not enter eternal life. And I promise you, the feeling was mutual.

2. So the Samaritans did not receive this Jewish messenger from God because his plans did not center on Mt. Garizim, but Mt. Zion where Jerusalem of Israel was.

- James and John (“the sons of Thunder” - Mark 3:17) asked Jesus for permission to call down fire from heaven. They were livid that Jesus had received such a cold response from the Samaritans. Maybe they even had in their minds the time that the prophet Elijah prayed for fire to come down from heaven. If Jesus is the Messiah, then he’s even greater than Elijah, and before him all his enemies should be consumed with fire and brimstone. Will Jesus give them the green light?

55 But he turned and rebuked them.

1. The word “rebuke” is often used of Jesus rebuking demons.

- John 3:17, “For did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that it might be saved through him.”

2. Luke 6:27, 28, “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

- Following Jesus involves displaying mercy even to one’s enemies.
- Os Guinness, “The link between a belief & its outcome is important to examine. Some bad behavior, however, is an accurate reflection of a belief, while other bad behavior is such a contradiction of its belief that it is no reflection at all.”

3. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, and after he was taken up into heaven, Jesus would once again send out his messengers to announce the good news of Jesus. One by the name of Phillip “went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ... They believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” “And there was great joy in the city.” (Cf. Acts 8:5-25). Even Peter and John would go there: “Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”

56 And they went on to another village. 57 As 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.**”**

1. Jesus here indicates that you will never quite fit in to this world.

- Hughes 372, “Jesus was saying that if you walk with him, you will sense that the world is not your home. There will be dissonance, discomfort, unease, and rejection. He was saying that to follow him, one must embrace a life of discomfort.”

2. Have you consciously or unconsciously said, “I will follow you, as long as it doesn’t cost me much”?

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.**”**

1. How does this fit in with the command of God to “Honor your father and mother” (Ex. 20:12)?

- Some commentators highlight the fact that the period of mourning could actually last up to a year when the bones of the decomposed body would be gathered and put into a bone box.

2. Jesus seems to be saying, *Your first priority is to follow me. If I am not your first priority, I am not a priority at all.*

- Maybe the sense of what Jesus is saying is this: *Let the walking dead bury the dead. You have another assignment: Go and proclaim the kingdom of God.* IOW, I want you to be about the business of bringing spiritual life to where there is only spiritual death.

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.**”**

1. Again, here is a man who says, “Ok, but first...” Jesus uses an agricultural proverb to make his point: you must have singular devotion in following me. Today, the illustration might be, *No one can ride a bike in a straight line by looking behind them.*
2. First things first, “Do not be anxious about your life.... But seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you” (cf. Matthew 6:25-33).

So, why did Luke record these moments in his historical biography of Jesus?

Luke is presenting to us not a guru or an inspirational teacher, but a Savior who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. To rightly understand who Jesus is means that we cannot put any conditions or caveats on following him.

Jesus is either the most important priority in our lives, or he is no priority at all. He’s either the sun around which our planet orbits, or he’s nothing at all.

- CS Lewis, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”
- Jesus is either of supreme importance, or is of no importance. He cannot be moderately important. He cannot only be interesting or inspirational. To see Jesus rightly is to see in him our all and all.

Following Jesus means Jesus comes first.

Jesus is calling for a complete transfer or loyalty and priority.

1. Count the cost.

(1) Luke has told us in his gospel about three different reactions to the invitation to follow Jesus:

- Rejection: home town of Nazareth (4:16-30) & the Samaritans (9:51-53).
- Conditional Acceptance: “I will follow, but first...” (9:57-62)

- Unconditional Acceptance: "...they left everything and followed him" (5:11; cf. 5:27-28)

(2) Do we place conditions upon following Jesus?

- Do we say, "Jesus, I will follow you as long as you give me a good and promising career (or a husband, or a trophy wife, or perfect kids, or life without sickness and disease, or _____)" ?
- Jesus: *If you put any conditions upon following me, then you are not really following me. And you don't understand who I am nor the road to glory I am calling you to.*

(3) Jesus: *If you want to follow me, I want all of you.*

- CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, "Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You... Hand over the natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours.""
- That my friends, is the road to glory. To become like Christ.

So when we are asking you to count the cost, what are the alternatives? The scandalous claim of the gospel of Jesus is that he has eternal life and gives it freely to all who come to him. To receive that gift of eternal life it to receive Jesus into your life.

- John 1:11-12, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."

Where else can we go? Jesus has the words of eternal life. And if we receive him—if we believe in his name, the Name that is above every name—then nothing can remain the same. Everything changes and Jesus is now the center.

Following Jesus means Jesus comes first.

2. Set apart Christ as Lord daily.

Jesus kept marching towards Jerusalem having already given up everything he called his disciples to give up. And just as he set his face toward Jerusalem, so we are to set our face on him, and to follow him wherever he calls.

(1) 1 Peter 3:15, "Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts....."

- Make Jesus your north star; he is the sun around which your planet orbits
- "As you wish!" And "Your wish is my command."

(2) Revelation 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

MHC, may you respond, "Jesus, You are my Alpha and Omega, my first and last, my beginning and my end. You are my everything. Apart from you, I have nothing. Therefore, where you go, I will follow. And I will follow you on the road to glory because you are the road to glory."