

Luke 9:46 - 56

46 And an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the greatest. 47 But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great."

49 And John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us." 50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you."

51 And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him. 53 And they did not receive Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village.

In this passage this morning, we are at the shift in focus, of Jesus, from ministering to the multitudes from town to town in the region of the Galilee, to a decided focus shift to the disciples. And you will note in vs. 51 that *He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem*. The ministry centered in Galilee is over. The final months of His ministry is aimed at the 12.

Jerusalem, the ancient city that is a magnet of all the peoples on earth, the city of God. We don't know why God chose Jerusalem to be His dwelling place, we just know He did.

From the ancient patriarchs just a few generations after Adam until today, Jerusalem has been God's chosen center of His presence in the world.

It is first mentioned in Genesis 14:18 as the dwelling place of Melchizedek whom Abram gave a tenth or a tithe as it were of the spoils of war when he rescued his relative, Lot, from the kings who had defeated Sodom and Gomorrah.

Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High, and also a King. The writer of Hebrews uses Melchizedek as a type of Christ who is also Priest and King, Son of God Most High. The Jews had a separation by tribes so that no king could be a priest and no priest could be a king. Jesus is both priest and king.

We learn from the Psalmist in Psalm 76:2 that Salem is used interchangeably with Zion which is Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been at the center of God's redemption story of this lost and fallen world for virtually all of recorded history.

David and Solomon were at the pinnacle of its glory, and then it fell into a long decline of evil kings and good kings until the Jews finally were taken into captivity by the Assyrians, ten northern tribes, and then the Babylonians the two southern tribes for 70 years.

After the Jews killed Jesus, the Romans came in 70AD and demolished Jerusalem and the temple, and Jesus Himself prophesied on the night before the morning of His death that; *Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* Luke 21:24b

That prophecy has been true now for almost 2000 years. Jerusalem has been the center of the most degraded activity in the name of religion imaginable. And yet, God has kept His chosen people, the Jews, intact. They are distinct and separate today, and thanks to Britain and the United States, some of them are dwelling in their homeland.

Jerusalem will be at the center of God's final dealing with wicked men right up until Jesus returns from heaven and finishes judging the evil rebellion begun by Satan in the garden at the beginning. Jerusalem is in the news daily as those of us who believe prophecy watch God's words being unfolded in our

time.

And this morning we will see Jesus *resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem* because as He will say later in our study of Luke; 13:33 “*Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.*”

Jerusalem is where the prophets die, and Jerusalem is where Jesus is going in this final stage of His ministry. We are somewhere in the final 6 - 9 months, we can't be too dogmatic about the exact time. And this time is for the disciples.

We saw last week that the disciples are not ready for Jesus to be gone away from them. He leaves the 9 for a couple of days, and Satan has a little party in their midst while He is away. Everything comes unraveled. And quickly! So this is their time as they head south. And our scene opens with the disciples going at each other.

46 And an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the greatest.

Jesus comes down from the mount of transfiguration to the valley of chaos, a demented scene, disciples arguing with false religionists, demons thumping some poor child, a bereft man at the end of himself with a very sick demon possessed boy, and the disciples rendered powerless by all of it.

He sets the demons to flight, heals the boy and gives him back to his father, and spells out one fact for His disciples that He wants them to get into their thick heads. I'm not going to be with you forever to fix everything. I'm going to be delivered into enemy hands. I'm going to die and rise on the third day.

In one ear and out the other. Down the road they go and in the next paragraph, they're having a fight over who's going to be greatest. Who will be the titled ceremonial head of their movement after Jesus departs? Who will be the Pope?

Stop for a moment and think about original sin. What got us into this mess. What was the sin Satan was selling in the garden that caused the entire human race to fall into removal and separation from our creator? Death, as it were.

The answer is pride. Pride. From Isaiah 14 a picture into the heart of Satan;
13 *You said in your heart: "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit on the mount of assembly, in the far reaches of the north. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." 15 But you will be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit....*

And that's exactly what he sold to Eve in the garden; Gen 3:5 *"For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

The disciples are walking along the road, with a calculated distance great enough to not be heard by Jesus, and they're arguing about who will be . . . what? Greatest. Who will wield the most power and authority when Jesus is gone? Who's going to be the most like God, not in godliness, but in authority. Who will be the Boss.

This is the ugly sin of pride that every human heart is infected with at birth. This is not being like God. This is being like Satan.

What does godliness do with this same sin? What is God's attitude regarding the sin of grasping at the most power and authority? It's in Philippians chapter 2:

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus left heaven and became a slave. A servant of sinners. These sinners are walking along the road with this same Jesus and are arguing over who will be King in this new order of theirs.

47 But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great."

It doesn't do any good to fall back 20 yards from Jesus in order to have this argument. Jesus knows what is in men's hearts. Jesus reads minds. *Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart*

They've fallen 60 feet back and are having an animated discussion in hushed tones. We can only imagine. 3 got to go up the mountain with Him. So it's one of those inner 3 who will be pope. And the others are lining up behind their candidate. Peter's got 5 with him. James and John would co-reign. Their mother is related to Jesus and she can fix it. They've got 4 with them.

See what happens? Personality cults. It's our default in our flesh. It's Corinth. I am of Paul. I am of Appolos. I am of Peter. I am of Christ. I'm a "red letter" christian which trumps ordinary christians.

In our flesh, we do this. We can't help it. We form groups that fight the other groups for power. Authority. Ascendency. We've got the most powerful people in our group. Beware, we can crush you. Jesus needs to crush this flesh, this sin. So for an object lesson He takes unto Himself a toddler.

47 But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side,

In parallel passages we know that this child is just a wee toddler. He can stand and walk. Jesus picks him up and holds him in His lap. The kid is of a particular age that we're well acquainted with. Sometimes you pick them up and a whiff of what's going on inside their pants hits you and you hand them

off to their mama. That's what we've got here.

The disciples are having a discussion on value. Who has the most value. Who is the pre-emminent disciple. Top dog. Most value.

We're guilty of this. It's what I call the "human condition". Some guy comes to church to visit our church and he's a brilliant guy, young, gorgeous family, nice kids, maybe he's been to seminary, he's a solid christian from our particular tribe, he's got everything going on that I hold in high esteem. High value.

Someone else comes the same day. We recognize them from town. A never-do-well that knows what the inside of the drunk cell at our local jail looks like. Total nobody. Low value.

We want the high value guy. The low value guy, we figure, he's more trouble than he's worth. High maintenance, low return. He probably won't be back anyways. We don't expect to see him twice and honestly we don't get too worked up about it. Low value.

Jesus picks up a toddler. The stinky pants variety. And He says, let's have a value lesson, boys. See this kid? What does he bring to the table as far as value?

What can he add? Nothing. It's a good thing God made little kids cute, because that's about it. Beyond that, they stink. They add nothing to the conversation. They're completely dependent . . . for every need. They bring nothing, they require everything. Bottom line, in this discussion the disciples are having, the kid is a total liability. No value. Negative value! He actually costs the bottom line.

Folks, this is us. In the Kingdom of God, in God's world, ultimately, we're of zero value. We're like a stinky pants completely dependent toddler. That's how we come into the kingdom. Smelly pants and all.

They're arguing about greatness. Jesus says, you're the equivalent, in God's kingdom, of this toddler. You bring nothing. You cost everything. And, you're not even cute.

47 But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great."

It's a mindset re-arrangement. In the Kingdom it's not like the dog eat dog systems of this world. *for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great.*" The order is different. Think about this with me.

In God's kingdom, where does our righteousness come from. It's imputed to us. We all have the same righteousness. We all have the righteousness of Christ, imputed to our accounts. We're all the same. We're all great, but none of the greatness is our own.

Paul asks the Corinthians who were boasting about their particular greatnesses; *For who regards you as superior? **And what do you have that you did not receive?** But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?* 1Cor. 4:7

Anything you have that is of value in God's kingdom . . . came from where? God. We bring nothing to this deal. Anything, that's of eternal value, something happens that God is gracious enough to let us have some little part in, that's of eternal value . . . it's all Him. He causes it. We bring nothing.

Jesus says something else here that we need to consider, while we're considering, because John is going to pick up on it in the next couple of verses. Here's Jesus' quote; *"Whoever receives this child **in My name** receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great."*

What does it mean to receive someone **in His name**? That becomes

important. We pray, in His name. We operate, in His name. What is that?

There is a real sense, that in Jesus absence, we are operating His business for Him, in His name. The president sends some ambassador to Croatia to do the business of the United States, in a sense, as an emissary that operates with the authority designated to him by another.

That's very common, throughout all history. I don't have any authority of my own, but I come in the name of the president of the United States, and whatever authority I do have, is backed up by the names that sent me. The president, and the congress, and our armies.

Jesus commissioned us to do His business. If I tell someone they are guilty of sin and therefore stand in the path of swift judgement, what good is that? One sinner telling another sinner. I've got nothing to back up anything.

But if I come in the name of Jesus, with all the authority of the revealed word of God, and tell some sinner, there's a way out of this judgement. He forgave my sins. He removed my sins as far as the east is from the west, and He can do the same for you.

That becomes me operating in the name of, and with the authority of the one who sent me to proclaim that message, and who has all the power to make it happen. I'm just the ambassador. I don't actually have any of the power. And the more I understand that I've got more in common with the stinky pants kid, than with the pope, the better off I am in God's kingdom.

You're an ambassador operating with someone else's check book. On your own, without the King of kings backing you up, your value is about the same as the kid Jesus picked up for His demonstration. And, you're not even cute. Smelly, but not cute.

All of the value, all of the glory, belongs to Jesus. We bring nothing. In fact it's the greatest privilege we'll ever experience, that He allows us to be there for the ride. That's His lesson to these men who are having an argument about

who's the most important. And John picks up on the idea of operating in His name.

49 And John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us."

It's a great question! John gets it. We bring nothing. We operate with your checkbook, because alone, we're bankrupt. In your name is where the power is. In your name is where the authority is. So, clarify something for us then. *we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us."*

There was a guy, and he isn't part of our group, he's some kind of a free agent, and he's casting out demons, in your name. What about that guy? And we tried to stop him. The greek indicates they kept trying to stop him, it's a continuous action.

You aren't part of our group. What makes you think you can go around casting out demons in Jesus name if you're not part of our group??! What about that?

In Acts 19 we have a parallel of this very thing happening. Fascinating story. This occurred at the height of Paul's powers as he traveled in Jesus name doing miracles and casting out demons and bringing the good news to the whole world. Great story;

11 And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. 13 But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 And the man,

in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?? Here's a case where someone is claiming the authority of the name, but doesn't actually have that authority backing them up.

This is pragmatism at it's best. Pauls' got it going on. Casting out demons in Jesus name, and they come flying out, and it works. This really works. So the seven sons of Sceva are good pragmatists and willing to go with whatever's working at the moment. Name Jesus. But they don't belong to Jesus, nor do they have His authority and power backing them up. And they barely escape with their lives. They come running out of that place naked and wounded.

But in the case John describes, as near as we can tell from what John says, this guy was actually effective. He was casting out demons in Jesus name, and as far as we know they were coming out. Maybe the demons hadn't caught on yet. Or maybe this guy is a believer who is acting in Jesus name with full authority.

It'll be fun to get clarification on that some day in heaven. But in any case, Jesus answers John; *50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you."*

he who is not against you is for you." This book is very black and white. There's right and there's wrong. There's God's laws and there's everything else which is opposed to God's laws.

Jesus says; if the guy is aligned with God's book and God's laws and God is bearing good fruit, don't hinder that.

I carry that out to an extreme. In some instances, even though we dis-agree with every doctrine, and the people do not belong to God, if they are fighting for God's principals, we should be co-belligerents.

If the Mormons are fighting against opponents of religious liberty in our government, I'll join their fight. They may be hell bound in their doctrines, but they're fighting that particular battle on the side of God. They may have everything else wrong, but I'll join with them where they're right. *he who is not against you is for you.*”

We just have to be very careful, in some of those types of things, that we don't cause confusion by joining with someone that has everything else wrong. I'm happy to be a co-belligerent against a common enemy, but after that we must, sadly, go our separate ways.

Some guy's doing battle with Satan, and he's effective, as far as we can tell, he hasn't come running out of the house naked, yet, don't hinder him. Our battle is with Satan. If some guy is winning that battle, don't hinder him!

John also brings up the question of discernment here. Who do we hang with and who do we not hang with? Because people will identify our values with the people we combine with.

In the case of being co-belligerents with Mormons over religious liberty, we want to join that battle, but we don't want to confuse anyone that it must be OK to be a Mormon. All roads lead to heaven. They don't.

John says, this guy wasn't part of our group. So we told him to quit doing what he was doing. Personally, I want to fellowship with any christian that holds the same first order truths about salvation by grace plus nothing that I do. 2nd and 3rd orbit differences don't bother me. I can fellowship with people that baptize babies. If their salvation doctrines are solid.

But groups who do not believe in the basic doctrines that can lead to salvation and forgiveness of sins, their doctrine stops short of regenerative salvation, I don't feel I can fellowship with them. Perhaps we can be co-belligerents on some issues we have in common, but there can be no spiritual fellowship.

And lately, for me at least, I have begun to firm up the line with people who

do not recognize that all of the scripture is inspired and every word means what it says with authority. Folks who believe they have authority over the book, to pick and choose what's in and what's out, I must dis-fellowship.

51 And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him. 53 And they did not receive Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem.

Ever get a door slammed in your face? I've had a few and would love to have a few more before it's over.

I used to be a part of something called Evangelism Explosion when I lived in So. Cal. and attended Grace Community Church. It was a deal where you went out in teams of 3, one trainer and two trainee's. And the folks you would visit were addresses of people who had visited the church and filled out a card. So it wasn't completely cold turkey door knocking.

But you'd get spouses of someone who perhaps was searching and someone else answered the door and they figured it was the Mormon's or the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the door would be shut, sometimes with gusto.

And that's what we have here. Jesus has set His face towards Jerusalem. And that means He was determined. Nothing was going to interrupt His resolve. It's time to go to Jerusalem.

And the shortest route to Jerusalem goes right through Samaria. That's the direct route. But Samaritans hate jews and jews hate Samaritans, so for most jews, when they need to go from Galilee to Jerusalem, it means a trip down the Jordan river all the way to Jericho, and then up, up, up to Jerusalem. Longer, but easier than perhaps dealing with folk who hate you.

When the Assyrians captured the 10 northern tribes and forced them to leave their homeland, they never got to return. And those areas were populated with

gentiles and some jews who were able to remain, and so there was all this inter-marriage and they could make no real claim to be jews. Bunch of half breeds up there.

So the jews wouldn't have anything to do with them. They looked down their noses at Samaritans. Their religion was corrupt. They weren't welcome in Jerusalem and they could not worship at the temple in Jerusalem, so lots of hard feelings.

More-over, in about 110BC the Maccabean ruler at Jerusalem, one John Hyrcanus, besieged the Samaritans and destroyed their temple at Mt. Gerizim and he enslaved many of the Samaritans. So jewish hatred ran deep in Samaria. Rather similar to how Moslims feel about christians even now, because of the Crusade's.

So Jesus sends a party ahead to prepare meals and lodging on their trek through Samaria. And when the people of the village learn that His face is toward Jerusalem, they say, nope, we don't want Him. He can't come here. Don't come to our town.

You can sort of picture it. The disciples get to the village and they inform the locals to go get your sick and lame and blind and anyone with demons and Jesus is coming to your village and there could be healings.

And somebody says, why's He coming here? Where's He heading to. And the disciples say, He has resolutely set His face towards Jerusalem. And the Samaritans say, tell Him He isn't welcome here.

That would be bad enough. No one enjoys getting a door slammed in their face. But James and John have a wrong reaction. You remember James and John. Sons of thunder. Here they live up to their name.

54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

Where did that come from! Sounds like there was more than a little mutual hate. Say the word Lord, and we'll call fire down from heaven and incinerate them. Serves them right. They'll be incinerated anyways, let's do it now. Really? Where did you even get an idea like that?

Who had they seen up on the mount of transfiguration? Elijah. Let's deal with this how Elijah would deal with it. Well, how was that. Glad you asked. This is such a great story I'm going to just read the whole thing. It doesn't take long. It's in 2 Kings Chapter 1;

1 Now Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. 2 And Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber which was in Samaria, and became ill. So he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness." 3 But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' 4 "Now therefore thus says the LORD, 'You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" Then Elijah departed.

5 When the messengers returned to him he said to them, "Why have you returned?" 6 And they said to him, "A man came up to meet us and said to us, 'Go, return to the king who sent you and say to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die.'"'" 7 And he said to them, "What kind of man was he who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" 8 And they answered him, "He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

9 Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" [you're under arrest] *10 And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. 11 So he again sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said to him, "O*

man of God, thus says the king, 'Come down quickly.'" 12 *And Elijah answered and said to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty."* Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. 13 *So he again sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. When the third captain of fifty went up, he came and bowed down on his knees before Elijah, and begged him and said to him, "O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. 14 "Behold fire came down from heaven, and consumed the first two captains of fifty with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight."* 15 *And the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him."* So he arose and went down with him to the king. 16 *Then he said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron—is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word?—therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die.'"*

17 So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken.

You've got to admit, it sounds pretty fun to be Elijah. And James and John who have just been on the mountain and seen Elijah are thinking; W-W-E-D It's Samaria, WWED What would elijah do. Call down fire from heaven and burn them up. That's what. Bunch of baal worshipers. Burn them up.

55 But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] *And they went on to another village.*

This is the beginning of the age of grace. Jesus rebuked them. They aren't enemies. They're the mission field. We don't incinerate the mission field guys.

for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

To our God, those Samaritans are no more wicked than the men who are calling for their doom. Maybe less.

After the resurrection, Philip, recorded for us in Acts ch. 8, goes up to Samaria and holds a revival. Could we help but wonder if any of the redeemed after Philip's journey to Samaria might be some of the same folks that James & John were going to incinerate.

Those folks who would cause us problems and remove our religious liberties that allow us to honor a free conscience based in this book are not our enemies. Like these Samaritans, they are the mission field.

Jesus doesn't call down fire on them, He simply goes to a different village.