

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 6-20-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Luke 9:51-62

<sup>51</sup>When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” <sup>55</sup>But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup>Then they went on to another village.

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

**<sup>51</sup>When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers ahead of him.**

The word that is here translated as Jesus’ “being take up” is literally his ascension. It is clear that Luke has in mind more than just the literal Ascension (which is narrated in Luke 24:50-53 and in Acts 1:9). It is likely that Luke intends this term to include all of Jesus’ activity within Jerusalem. After all, there is about a 2,000 ft. elevation change between Galilee and Jerusalem, so one would literally ascend on that journey. Also, Mt. Zion, the Temple Mount, was at the highest point of the city, so that all who approached to worship would ascend (see the Psalms of Ascent—that is, Psalms 120-134 which pilgrims would sing together as they went up to worship at the temple).

At this point in the gospel, Jesus has resolved to go to Jerusalem to do there what God has ordained. This is a turning point in the gospel; everything before this has happened around the Sea of Galilee. After this point, everything that happens will take place on the way to or in Jerusalem. Jesus is literally a man on a mission and nothing can stop his momentum toward the cross and empty tomb. His journey, however, is not merely for travel purposes, but also has a missional component, hence the sending of messengers ahead of him.

**On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.**

The region of Samaria lay between Galilee to the North and Judea to the South. Since the time after Solomon when the formerly united Kingdom of David and Solomon was divided into two kingdoms (the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah), cultural and religious differences emerged between the Jews in the south and the Samaritans in the north. We are probably most familiar with the Samaritans from the Parable of the Good Samaritan, although in Jesus’ day it is entirely possible that many Jews would have said, “The only good Samaritan is a dead Samaritan.” The Samaritans only regarded the first 5 books of the Hebrew Scriptures as valid, whereas the Jews accepted all of the Hebrew Bible as authoritative. Further, the Samaritans were long associated with idolatrous worship practices, blending worship of the God of Israel with the worship of other pagan gods and goddesses. Jesus’ conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well in John 4 highlights some of the tensions between Jews and

Samaritans, including their dispute over where to worship God. For Jews, Mount Zion or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was the place where God was to be worshipped. As the Samaritans didn't have access to this mountain due to political borders and geographical distance, they worshipped on Mt. Gerizim. This dispute between the proper place of worship is a central focus of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:20. It is for this reason, Luke says, that the Samaritan village refused to accept Jesus: He was intent on going to Jerusalem rather than to their holy mountain. This causes the people to reject Jesus and refuse him hospitality.

**<sup>54</sup>When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup>But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup>Then they went on to another village.**

James' and John's response to the rejection in Samaria may strike us as unusually harsh; even comical. The notion that Jesus would want his disciples to call down fire upon others is (I hope) laughable. Their idea is not without historical precedent, however. In an ancient encounter between Samaritans and Jews, Elijah called down fire to consume a group of Samaritans who rejected Elijah and God's message (see 2 Kings 1). Likely, James and John notice the parallels between the Samaritans who rejected a prophet in ancient times and the Samaritans who rejected Jesus in their own day. They assume the response of Jesus ought to be the same as that of Elijah in ancient days. Jesus rebukes them and they move on.

**<sup>57</sup>As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup>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."**

We now come to the three "would-be followers" of Jesus. The first one professes the desire to follow Jesus wherever he goes. Perhaps realizing that the rejection in the Samaritan village might be just the first of many uncomfortable nights of sleep ahead for the group of followers, Jesus reminds this follower that the journey ahead will not be easy or comfortable. Interestingly, we are not told any of these three peoples' responses. We don't know if they went home sad or if they continued to follow Jesus.

**<sup>59</sup>To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

The second would-be follower of Jesus is called by Jesus and commanded to follow him. This potential disciple makes a seemingly reasonable request: to go and take care of the business of burying a relative prior to following Jesus. There are at least two possibilities here. First, it is possible that the man's father has just died. If so, and if the would-be disciple was the first-born son of the father, it would be his duty to attend to the burial of his father. To fail to do so would likely be seen as a violation of the commandment to honor one's parents. If this is the case, Jesus' response is harsh indeed and likely underscores the overwhelming importance of Jesus' mission. His goal of going to Jerusalem and beyond is greater even than the commandment to honor one's parents.

The second possibility is that the man's father has not yet died. He might be ill or even in perfect health. In this case, the man is saying to Jesus, "I will come and follow you in many weeks, months, or years once my dad is dead and I do my duties as a son." In other words, "I'll follow you, but not now. I'll do it later." Contrast this with the response of Peter and the others in Luke 5:11.

Jesus is blunt with the man, essentially saying, "Let those who are still spiritually dead take care of the mundane task of burial. As for you who are spiritually alive and awakened, go proclaim my message."

**<sup>61</sup>Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup>Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."**

The third would-be follower of Jesus brings up a reason for delaying his discipleship that seems to recall another story from the Elijah/Elisha saga, specifically 1 Kings 19:19-21. In this story—the call of Elisha—Elijah allows Elisha to go and say goodbye to his family before he follows. Jesus' response also draws on that story. In the call of Elisha story, notice that Elisha is plowing the fields near his family's home when Elijah calls him to follow. Jesus' blunt response suggests that his call is more demanding and more profound than even the call of Elisha. While

Elisha had time to say goodbye to his family and even to dispose of his plowing equipment and animals, Jesus' followers are too busy "plowing" to spend time on such formal goodbyes. Perhaps Jesus knew that the man's family would try to talk him out of following Jesus; perhaps Jesus knew that the man's heart wasn't really going to be in it. In any case, he extends the plowing metaphor, pointing out that if one isn't diligent and alert while plowing, one could easily mess up the whole field. So it is with those who labor in the kingdom. Jesus' ministry is not going to be aided by followers who are constantly looking backwards.

**Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Can you think of any ways that Christians today mirror the disturbing response of James and John in v. 54?**
- 2. Which person in the story do you sympathize with the most? Why?**
- 3. Why do you think Jesus is so seemingly harsh with those who profess to follow him? How do you think this applies in our lives of faith today?**