

Luke 9:51-62 - “Faces Set Toward Jerusalem”

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If we consider the context of our Gospel reading, things were looking good for Jesus and His disciples. Over the last few Sunday's we've been hearing how Jesus was not only healing the sick and casting out demons, but He was also preaching the Good News that the kingdom of God had come in Him! These were exciting times! The Savior had come, showing clearly that He has power over sin and all the forces of evil. The Lord is almighty, He loves us and He is with us! What could possibly go wrong?!

Then our text begins by telling us that Jesus “*set His face to go to Jerusalem.*” The reason Jesus was going to Jerusalem was to suffer and die on a cross to save us. Were Jesus' disciples ready to see their unbeatable Savior suffer and die on a cross? Based on their reaction, I guess not. Even though Jesus had told them at least three times about His death and resurrection, their faces were still set toward comfort in this life not crosses.

But before we're too hard on Jesus' first disciples, let's think about ourselves. We know that Jesus suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sins, and that He rose from the dead. By doing so He has opened to us the way of eternal life with God in paradise. Yet, how often are our faces set toward selfish comfort in this life instead of crosses in this life for the sake of others?

What are some of the first things that comes to our minds during times of suffering? Where's God? Has God has abandoned me? Is He punishing me? While times of suffering are always a good time to examine our lives in the light of God's Word and to repent of our sins, it's also important not to get caught up in thinking that the more I follow God's law the better my life in this world is going to be.

The more we think this way, the less prepared we will be to handle the crosses we will experience in this life as a faithful Christian, and the less of a true witness of the Christian faith we will be to those around us. So, how does God correct any false thinking in us? Through His Word. Take for example the attitude of the Samaritans and Jesus' disciples in our text. We're told that the people of Samaria did not receive Jesus because “*His face was set toward Jerusalem.*”

To understand what was going on it helps to know that many years earlier, when God's people returned to Jerusalem from their Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple, some Jews from Samaria wanted to help. But many of God's people who had been left behind in Samaria during the Babylonian captivity ended up intermarrying with unbelievers from pagan nations who had been moved into Samaria. As a result, the pagan worship practices of their spouses gradually became intermingled with the worship practices of God's people. So, the Jews in Jerusalem turned down the offer of these Samaritan's to help rebuild the temple. They said: “*You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel*” (Ezra 4:30).

As a result, the Samaritans eventually built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria, contrary to God's Word. Since that time, many of the Jews from Jerusalem did not associate with the Jews from Samaria. This is most likely the reason many of the people in Samaria rejected Jesus. He was a Jew who's “*face was set toward Jerusalem,*” not Samaria.

Since the Samaritans rejected Jesus, His Jewish disciples felt that this was as good a time as any to destroy them once and for all. It appears that they had the mistaken idea in their minds which I mentioned earlier. The thinking that since they were more faithful to God's Laws than the Samaritans, they, therefore, deserved less suffering in this life, while the Samaritans deserved more suffering, and even death!

Who was right, Jesus' disciples or the Samaritans? Neither. The attitudes of both were sinful. Both deserved to be consumed by the fires of hell.

What about those in the rest of our text? One said, *"I will follow You wherever You go."* Would he, even if it meant following Jesus to Jerusalem and to the cross?

The next man said, *"Lord, let me first bury my father."* That sounds like a reasonable request. So also does the request to *"first let me say farewell to those at my home."* So don't you think that Jesus' response was too harsh when He said, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"*? If that's true, and Jesus only speaks the truth, then none of us deserve anything good in this life, let life in paradise by what we say or do!

And that's exactly what Jesus is saying. All this is the Law, which exposes the truth that we are all sinners, and deserving not only the worst of suffering in this life, but eternal suffering in hell.

So, where's the Gospel? It's in these words: *"[Jesus] set His face to go to Jerusalem,"* for it's in Jerusalem that He would undergo the fires of hell—the eternal suffering that we deserve to save us. And unlike us, Jesus did not shy away from the cross. He remained faithful in every way, putting us and our salvation before Himself. It's in Jerusalem that Jesus did what we were unable to do, to overcome our sins, death and the devil, and rise to eternal life.

How does all this help us to understand our times of suffering? If we set our faces to Jerusalem and especially to Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, what do we see? Of all people, Jesus did not deserve to suffer and die, yet He suffered more than any of us, not for His sins but for ours. And He did all of this simply because He loves us and desires to save us.

Through the suffering of this world, God continues to work for the good of His people (Romans 8:28). Do we need to know all the details of how He does this? No. Through what Jesus did in Jerusalem, God enables us to trust Him and His love for us. Such trust results in not only our eternal good, but also the eternal good of those around us as they witness God's love and peace in us especially during times of suffering. Let me reemphasize this in the children's sermon.

[Children's Sermon] Do you want to see a picture of the only person who does not deserve to suffer in this life, because He never did anything wrong [picture of Jesus]. Do you want to see a picture of someone who doesn't deserve anything good in this life because of the bad things they've done [mirror in picture frame].

Why, then, does Jesus suffer and die on a cross, and so many good things happen to us in this life? Because when Jesus suffered and died on the cross He was being punished for all the bad things we do, so that when we die, everyone who has faith in Jesus will go to heaven and be forever free from all suffering and death.

So, whenever you wonder about the good and bad times in your life, think about Jesus' suffering and death on the cross so that we, who don't deserve anything good in this life, can go to heaven when we die. And thank God for all the good things He gives us in this life and the next, because of His sacrificial love for us in Jesus Christ.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.