

Rejection and Commitment (Luke 9:51-62)

At this point in his Gospel, Luke focuses on Jesus' determined pursuit of Jerusalem and His redemptive work that would take place there. This "Travel Narrative" extends from Luke 9:51 through 18:14 and records a great deal of material unique to Luke's Gospel. In this larger section Luke mentions three times that Jesus was going to Jerusalem (9:51; 13:22; 17:11). These three references may refer to a single journey but more likely refer to three separate journeys to Jerusalem in the course of Jesus' final months of public ministry. The tone of the Travel Narrative is both somber and triumphant as Jesus anticipates His death and resurrection. One aspect of Jesus' focus on the cross included increasing rejection. While Jesus called for commitment many chose rather to reject Him. True faith in Jesus Christ is a committed faith. Jesus invites us to greater levels of commitment, to transformational faith.

Jesus never forces Himself on those who don't welcome Him—He blesses only receptive hearts (9:51-56).

Having previously been welcomed in some of the villages of Samaria, Jesus now experienced outright rejection because He was concentrating on His redemptive work that would take place in Jerusalem.

Jesus determined to go to Jerusalem—He had a mission to fulfill (9:51).

Jesus' earthly ministry was drawing near its conclusion. In just a few months He would die on the cross for the sins of the world. His death and subsequent resurrection would fulfill the redemptive aspect of His work, at which time He would return to His heavenly glory. Interestingly, Luke refers to Jesus' "assumption," or return to heaven, as the culmination of His earthly ministry. Knowing that these momentous events were approaching, Jesus "set His face" to go to Jerusalem. His resolve was certain. He would fulfill His redemptive mission.

The people of Samaria rejected Jesus—He didn't satisfy their expectations (9:52-53).

While Jerusalem was in the forefront of Jesus' mind, He still had a message to share with others. Therefore, Jesus sent messengers ahead of Him into one of the villages of Samaria to prepare for His itinerant ministry. However, the people of this village refused to receive Jesus because He was aiming for Jerusalem. The Samaritans—half-Jews—were at great odds with the Jews and the center of the Jewish faith, Jerusalem. Jesus simply didn't fit within their religious expectations.

The disciples asked to destroy those who rejected Jesus—He had much more training to accomplish (9:54-56).

Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, were incensed that the Samaritans would reject Jesus. They asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven to destroy these reprobates. Many Greek manuscripts include a phrase that identifies their response with the prophet Elijah, who called down fire from heaven and destroyed God's enemies (2 Kings 1:10-12). These two disciples, two brothers to whom Jesus had given the name "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17) due to their fiery dispositions, were ready to act and inflict harsh judgment. Only later would John become the Apostle of love. Jesus rebuked these disciples. Again, many Greek manuscripts include Jesus' words on this occasion. Jesus warned these disciples that they didn't understand the kind of spirit within them that drove them to such actions. He also reminded them that He, the Son of Man, didn't come to destroy people's lives but to save them. Jesus then led His disciples to another village. He wouldn't force Himself on those who didn't want Him, but Jesus always blesses receptive hearts.

Jesus never downplays the difficulty of following Him—He welcomes only committed hearts (9:57-62).

Jesus encountered three individuals who, while showing some interest in following Jesus, were unable to commit themselves to Him.

Jesus calls His followers to surrender their comforts (9:57-58).

While Jesus and His disciples were walking along the path a man approached Him and promised to follow Him wherever He would go. This was indeed a bold and beautiful offer. However, the man's commitment was shallower than he realized. Jesus knew the man's heart and pressed him about his commitment. He pointed out that He, the Son of Man (a messianic title), had fewer comforts than even foxes or birds. Foxes have holes in which to take refuge. Birds have nests. But Jesus had not so much as a place to lay His head. Jesus possessed nothing of value and lived an austere life. Was this man ready to make such a sacrifice? Apparently, the man gave up his bold ambition in favor of human comfort.

Jesus calls His followers to surrender their relationships (9:59-60).

Next, Jesus encountered a man to whom He gave a generous invitation: "Follow me!" This was the invitation Jesus had extended to His other disciples (Matthew 4:19; John 21:19). There can be no greater path in life than following Jesus. However, this man declined Jesus' invitation. He said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Whether or not the man's father had already passed away is a matter of speculation. Either way Jesus emphasized the importance of surrender. He told the man to let the dead bury their dead, probably indicating that the spiritually dead world was equipped well enough to deal with material issues. This man was instead to engage in a higher

calling, to go and announce the kingdom of God to others. This man declined an invitation by the Son of God to do the work of God for the sake of his own personal interests. Jesus must take priority even over family and other relationships. This doesn't mean that we must disregard our families, but that Jesus must always take precedent in our lives. Too many parents surrender to their children's wishes instead of making Jesus the center of their homes. However, when we love Jesus most, we love our families best.

Jesus calls His followers to surrender their lives (9:61-62).

A third man approached Jesus along the path and promised to follow Jesus. However, he asked Jesus to allow him to first go back and say goodbye to those in his household. Jesus replied with an illustration. When a farmer puts his hand to the plow, he must look straight ahead in order to plow a straight furrow. Those who would put their hand to the plow of spiritual service and then look back are not "fit for the kingdom of God." Partial commitment is no commitment at all. The kingdom of God deserves full, unflinching surrender. Jesus must take first place in our hearts. One man wanted to first bury his father, another wanted first to bid his family goodbye, but both revealed that Jesus would never be first in their lives. However, Jesus calls His follower to make Him first, central to our being. Only then are we fit for service in the kingdom of God. Only then will the rest of life take shape. True faith in Jesus Christ is a committed faith.