

The Samaritans Reject the Lord; Responses of Would-Be Disciples

Luke 9:51-62

*Luke 9:51-56: Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, **52** and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. **53** But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to 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, just as Elijah did?” **55** But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner 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 to another village.*

Background Notes

In the earlier part of this chapter, after Peter’s great confession of faith, the Lord began to reveal to His disciples that the earthly Kingdom they expected would be postponed. It would not be set up at that time because the nation was rejecting their Messiah and King. Instead of being received as King, the Lord would suffer and be killed. Look at Luke 9:22: *“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”*

Beginning in verse 51, the Lord began His journey toward Jerusalem. This was not the final week of His earthly life – the Luke 9 time period was at least six months away from the crucifixion. There would be other side journeys, as we’ll see. But our Lord’s great Galilean ministry was drawing to a close. His course was set, and He was determined to carry out the will of His Father in every detail, including His death in Jerusalem. The time would pass by quickly now as the cross drew near.

Notice verse 51. It says “the days of His being received up” or “the days of His ascension,” not “the days of His *death*.” The glory of the Lord’s finished work and return to Heaven are in view in this verse, not His suffering and death. It reminds us of Hebrews 12:2 - *“For the joy that was before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.”* That’s certainly the way we should face suffering for the sake of Christ. Focus on the joy and glory that will follow, not on the details of the present pain and suffering.

As our Lord and His disciples made their way south, the Lord directed them to go through Samaria. He actually made arrangements to stay there, probably overnight, because the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem was a three-day journey. Most Jews would not travel through Samaria. They would intentionally bypass Samaria by crossing the Jordan River and traveling south through Perea.

The Jews considered the Samaritans to be a “mixed race.” The Samaritans were the descendants of Jews from the northern tribes of Israel who had intermarried with non-Jews that were forcibly settled in the land by the Assyrians conquerors.

Let's read about that in 2 Kings 17:24-41: *Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. 25 And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. 26 So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, “The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.” 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, “Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.” 28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord. 29 However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt. 30 The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 So they feared the Lord, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. 33 They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. 34 To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel, 35 with whom the Lord had made a covenant and charged them, saying: “You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them; 36 but the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice. 37 And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods. 38 And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. 39 But the Lord your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.” 40 However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. 41 So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.*

That is the origin of the Samaritan people. Because the Samaritans were not full-blooded descendants of Abraham, and because they had their own religious practices, there was constant friction between the Jews and Samaritans. The Lord and His disciples did not receive a favorable reception in Samaria, and that brings us to our doctrinal points.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Son of Man is our model for preaching.

The Samaritans did not welcome the Lord and His disciples because they were Jewish, and because they were on the way to Jerusalem where the true Temple of the Lord was located. The Samaritans did not worship in Jerusalem. They had their own temple on the top of Mount Gerazim. In John 4, when a Samaritan woman said to the Lord, “our fathers worshipped in *this* mountain,” she was referring to Mount Gerazim in Samaria.

When James and John saw that they were not welcomed, they asked the Lord if they should command fire to come down from Heaven and consume the Samaritans! (We would never say anything like that, would we? How about those friendly drivers who cut us off in traffic? We would never want to see their SUVs get zapped - would we?) Do you remember that the Lord called James and John the “Sons of Thunder” because of their fiery zeal (Mark 3:17)? Well, “fiery zeal” must be channeled properly! The Lord had to rebuke James and John for their wrong spirit on this occasion. The Lord set the example for His disciples - then and today - when He said in verse 56, “*The Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.*” This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t preach about hell and eternal destruction, but our aim is to save and rescue folks from hell, not send them to hell.

John learned his lesson well. In Acts 8, John was back in Samaria, ministering to the people with a more patient and long-suffering attitude. Our mission is not to force people, or to manipulate people, or to zap people! Our mission is to share the gospel and gently lead people to Christ for salvation. The Son of Man is our model for preaching.

2. The Son of Man is our model for priorities.

Verses 57-62: Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, 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.” 59 Then He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” 60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” 61 And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” 62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

In these verses we see three would-be disciples who all made excuses when the demanding terms of discipleship were explained. In the first case, the Lord explained that the normal expected comforts of life might have to be given up if a disciple’s priorities are in order. Even animals and birds have homes, but the Lord did not have a house or home. His disciples today may be called on to give up the comforts of houses and homes.

In the second case, the Lord called the would-be disciple to follow Him, but this man had a different set of priorities. “*Permit me to go first and bury my father.*” Most likely his father had not actually died yet, but he probably was quite

elderly. So the man wanted to wait until his father died and the inheritance was settled - and *then* he would follow the Lord. The Lord said, *“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”* In other words - don't delay! Don't let affairs hold you back. There will always be family entanglements and affairs that need our attention, but somehow they'll be worked out without you if you'll simply come and follow me. And that is still true today.

In the third case, the would-be disciple wanted to take time to say good-bye to everyone back at home. Chances are, this man was far more interested in going-away parties and telling all his friends of the important ministry he was going to do, than in actually doing the work of the Lord. Once again, it was a matter of priorities. The Lord's answer in verse 62: *“No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”* If you're always looking back and longing for home when you're supposed to be serving the Lord, you will not set a straight course. This has certainly proved to be true in Christian ministries today.

Notice in verse 58, that the Lord used Himself as the model to follow. *“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.”* The Son of Man is our model for priorities.

Practical Application

“Let the dead bury the dead.”

What did the Lord mean by that statement in verse 60? He meant that we should let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. Unbelievers can take care of the normal and necessary requirements of life, such as burying the dead - but unbelievers can't proclaim the Kingdom of God. Only we who are spiritually alive can do that.

So don't allow your lifetime to be consumed by doing something that an unbeliever can do. This doesn't mean that Christians shouldn't have regular jobs. Again, it's a matter of priorities. Even in a secular job, we as disciples shouldn't let our lives become consumed by our jobs. Do a good job and a responsible job, but recognize that you are there primarily to represent the Lord and His Kingdom. There are plenty of non-Christians to do all the necessary jobs in this world. So put the Lord first - and “let the dead bury the dead.”