Where Jesus Leads: Following Him on the Way to the Cross

1. Read Luke 9:51-62. Verse 51 is a major turning point, not just in Luke's Gospel, but in the whole story of salvation. This is the moment Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem. But the strange thing is this: He is not going there to take power. He is going there to lose everything. He is not heading for a throne, but for a cross. Not for applause, but for rejection. Not to be welcomed as a winner, but to be condemned and killed.

   That is the deep irony of the Gospel: when God comes to save, He does not go where we would look for Him. We expect Him in strength, success, and glory. Instead, He goes to shame, weakness, and suffering. We assume God comes closest when people are at their best, when they have cleaned themselves up and have something to offer. But Christ comes closest at our worst. We think God would avoid the very mess we try to hide. Instead, He walks straight into it. He enters rejection, takes up disgrace, and stands in the place of the guilty.

   So the great surprise of salvation is that God saves by going exactly where we assume He would never go. He does not keep His distance from sin, sorrow, and shame. He is the friend and healer of sinners, the shepherd and guide of wandering sheep, the faithful leader of faithless followers.

   The rejection by the Samaritan village is especially significant, because Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem—the historic center of Jewish worship—and what happens? The Samaritans refuse Him. Given the deep hostility between Jews and Samaritans, this rejection is not surprising. Yet what tragic rejection might this also foreshadow?

   Answer: He will not only be rejected by outsiders or rivals, but by His own people—the very ones He came to save.

2. Why is it so hard to follow Jesus today? Perhaps because He still refuses to fit into our plans—whether those plans are about making a great life or preserving one. What happens when Christians follow Jesus only to discover that He does not offer the kind of success the world admires, but something far more costly?

   Following Jesus is hard today because He does not promise that life in a sinful world will get easier—often it gets harder. To follow Him is to walk against the grain of a fallen culture, a disordered heart, and powers of sin that do not yield quietly. Gen Z may hope faith will give direction in a confusing world; retirees may hope it will bring peace and rest after long struggle. But Jesus does not guarantee either group what they want or hope for. And of course, that's the rub. Because the world would say that any God worth His salt would promise precisely these things. **But Jesus calls the young to obey Him even if it costs everything, and He calls the old to trust Him even when age brings loss, weakness, loneliness,**

and the stripping away of independence. Yet the hardship is not meaningless, because He Himself walked this road first.

When our lives don't turn out as we hoped, we need an answer that is not abstract, but personal. Distant religious language does little to help, nor does a tidy blueprint for surviving loss. What we need is to know we are not walking a road our Lord has not walked first. We need to know that He understands not suffering in the abstract, but this suffering—our suffering; not injustice in general, but this injustice—ours; not disappointment as an idea, but the kind that wakes us in the night, tightens the chest, and tempts us to grow harder, colder, and less hopeful than before.

Not every question will be answered on this side of heaven. Not every sorrow will be explained, not every frustration relieved, not every purpose made clear. The Christian life is not ultimately about having all the answers, but about enduring—about continuing to walk the road set before us with Jesus. It is learning to live in Him, through Him, and because of Him, even in our most broken moments, trusting that where understanding fails, His presence will not.

3 In this section, Jesus teaches us more about the kingdom of God. Specifically, He warns against underestimating the commitment discipleship requires. In verses 57-62, what seems to be the problem with these "would-be" followers?

All three men seem sincere. We should be careful not to overanalyze their motives.

The first is willing to go with Jesus wherever He goes. But he obviously does not understand where Jesus is headed: to rejection, suffering, and the cross. Jesus responds by reminding him that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Following Christ is not a path of earthly security or comfort.

The second man wants to go, but not right away. First, he wants to bury his father. That's a noble request. But I think the issue here is: will he ever go? Or will there always be other matters to take care of first? Luke does not give us all the details, and this is likely intentional, so that we do not become distracted by questions we cannot answer. But the point here is to highlight the question: What is more important to us than following Jesus?

The third man also expresses a desire to follow, but first he wants to say farewell to those at home. Again, this request may sound reasonable, even admirable. But Jesus' response presses beyond the surface of the request and exposes the deeper issue: divided allegiance. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." The issue is not merely delay, but hesitation of heart. Discipleship requires a forward-looking loyalty and hope that does not keep turning back.

Of course, Jesus is not saying in some absolute sense that caring for one's parents or showing love to one's family is a bad thing. He's just being very blunt here about the reality of the sinful heart. It all comes down to one question: **What relationship will be primary in life?** This is not a question of achieving perfect strength or flawless faithfulness. Because for us perfect faith and flawless following is impossible. We are sinners. And Jesus knows well the weakness of those who follow Him. He is right in saying that we are not fit for the kingdom of God. But that is what makes verse 51 so important. He is the one who makes us fit. And that is why He has set His face toward Jerusalem.

By faith in all that Christ has doen for us, who can look the Son of God in the eye and say, “You are not first”? Even the closest family relationships cannot supersede our relationship to Him. And there may well be times when our allegiance to Christ brings distance, awkwardness, or even hostility between us and those closest to us. It does not take much imagination to see how that may happen in our own culture today.

Consider also the liturgies for Baptism and Confirmation. The questions are asked: “Do you renounce the devil? ... Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” And the Christian replies: “I do so intend, with the help of God.”

4. Read Luke 10:1-16. In verse 3, Jesus says, “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” That image is meant to jar us. Because, in ordinary life, if a lamb were sent into a pack of wolves, we would expect only one outcome: the lamb would be torn apart. So Jesus does not soften the danger of the Christian mission. He does not describe His messengers as vicious predators, hunters, or spiritual conquerors. He calls them lambs.

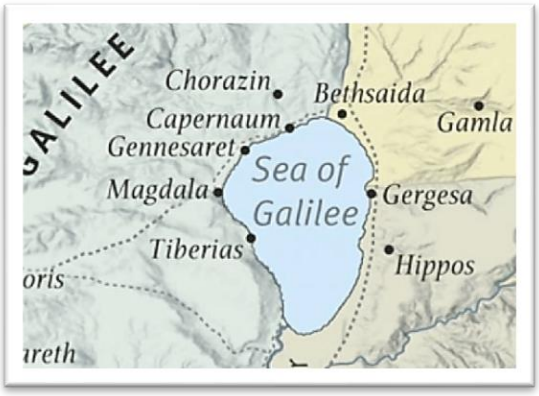
   That language is even more striking when we consider the technical force of the word “lamb.” It evokes sacrificial imagery familiar from the Old Testament: the Passover lamb, the lamb of the burnt offering, the lamb associated with peace offerings. In other words, Jesus is not merely saying that His disciples will be weak in the eyes of the world. He is identifying their mission with sacrifice. They go bearing, in their lives and witness, the pattern of the Lamb Himself. Their ministry will not be marked by worldly power, coercion, or visible strength, but by weakness, suffering, and humility in the face of hostility.

   He has called them to a mission in which rejection is expected, suffering is not accidental, and worldly opposition is part of the calling. They are sent with full knowledge that the world is at enmity with the kingdom they proclaim. Like sacrificial lambs, they are sent not to dominate the world, but to serve within it, to suffer for the sake of the truth, and to bear the image of the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

   Discussion question: If Jesus intentionally sends His people out as “lambs among wolves,” how should that reshape our expectations of Christian living and ministry today—especially when we are tempted to measure faithfulness by comfort, safety, influence, or success?

   It reminds me that faithfulness is not the same thing as ease or visible success. If Jesus sends us out as lambs, then hardship, rejection, and weakness are not signs that something has gone wrong, but often part of following Him. So instead of asking, “Is this comfortable, safe, or impressive?” we should ask, “Am I being faithful, humble, and obedient here?” That helps me remember that the goal of Christian life and ministry is not to win by worldly standards, but to bear witness to Christ with trust and love, whatever the cost.

5 Consider the map. Remember that Jesus' home was in Capernaum. So why does Jesus condemn the nearby Galilean cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida?



Because their citizens refused to repent and believe in Him as the Messiah, despite witnessing His mighty miracles firsthand.

- **Unmatched Privilege:** Along with Capernaum, these towns formed the "Evangelical Triangle" around the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus spent the majority of His earthly ministry. They received unparalleled exposure to His teachings and healing power.

- **Rejection of Truth:** Despite this abundant evidence, the residents did not change their hearts or accept His message.

- **Severe Judgment:** Jesus stated that if wicked, pagan Gentile cities like Tyre and Sidon had seen the same miracles, they would have repented long ago in "sackcloth and ashes". Consequently, Chorazin and Bethsaida would face a harsher judgment than those condemned cities.

This condemnation emphasizes the biblical principle that to whom much is given, much is required; having greater access to spiritual truth brings greater accountability when it is rejected.
Would you

Note: Jesus said, "Stay in that house." Eat and drink with them and "do not move around from house to house." Speculate as to why that might be. What might they be tempted to do if they moved from house to house? Perhaps if they moved from house to house, they might be tempted to find the "best" house to stay at. They might also be tempted to strive for gain instead of giving Jesus' peace, healing, and proclaiming the kingdom.

An interesting observation is that by staying at one place the entire for the entire period of time a strong relationship and a strong base might be formed. From there then possibly other emissaries might be sent out in the future. This might also be the basis for the early house churches.

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6 Read Luke 10:17–24. The disciples return exhilarated by what they have seen God do through them: demons submit, Satan's kingdom is shaken, and Jesus confirms that their ministry has truly struck a blow against the powers of darkness. In dramatic language He says: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). The gospel they proclaim is powerful. It plunders Satan's domain. In that sense, this moment echoes Jesus' promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. Wherever Christ is preached and received, Satan's rule is being broken.

Yet Jesus immediately redirects their joy. Why does He tell them not to rejoice mainly in spiritual power or ministry success, but rather that their names are written in heaven? What does that reveal about the deepest foundation of Christian joy, identity, and ministry?

Their greatest joy is not that God works through them, but that they belong to Him. Jesus redirects the disciples away from finding their identity in ministry success, authority, or visible results, and anchors their joy in saving grace: their names are written in heaven.

This is the foundation of Christian identity and joy. We rejoice not first in what we do for God, but in what He has done for us in Christ. That guards us from pride in success and despair in failure, because our standing with God does not rise or fall with ministry outcomes.

Luke deepens this by showing Jesus rejoicing in these things. The greatest privilege being known and saved by the Father through the Son.

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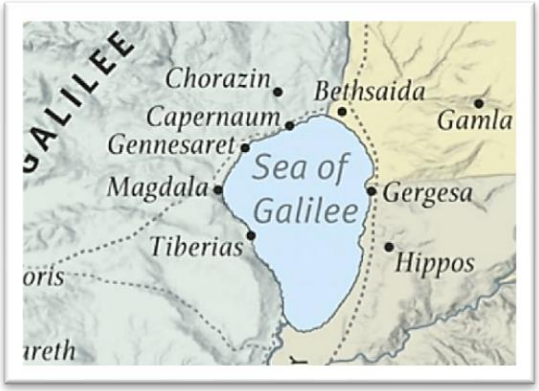

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