

# "Walking Purposefully"

*Luke 9:51-62*

Our theme for 2026 is Walking with God. When we're walking with someone it usually means we're not hurrying. When we walk with someone, we will talk with them, sometimes about deep subjects. There's something about walking that lends itself to good and sometimes deep discussions.

We probably have never given much thought to the time when Jesus came to the earth. Paul says in Gal. 4:4

*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,*

Paul's focus is primarily theological, but geographically, Jesus was born when walking was the main mode of travel. Only wealthy people and soldiers had horses. Even if you had a mule, you still didn't travel much faster. So Jesus walked and as He walked He talked about God.

As we've seen so far, walking with God is modelled and taught in Scripture. It speaks of a close relationship with God and Jesus. But for the next 3 Sundays, we're going to focus on Jesus' walk with God and we will learn from the Master what that looks like for us also, since we are to follow Him and become like Him. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:5-6

*This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup>Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*

Luke 9 is a pivotal chapter in Luke's gospel. Matthew, Mark and Luke all follow the same episodes. Jesus has been travelling north, teaching and challenging the disciples to understand who He is and why He has come. He takes them to Caesarea Philippi (details that Matthew and Mark add, but that Luke omits), where a pagan temple sat at the base of Mt. Hermon where the source of the Jordan River was. It was here that Jesus challenged His disciples 'Who do you say I am?' and Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' Matthew states,

*Matt. 16:21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

Jesus said difficult things like this because He wanted to make sure His disciples understood what they were signing up for. And a week later Jesus takes Peter, James and John and reveals Himself in his glorified state along with Moses and Elijah. When they come down from Mt. Hermon, Jesus finds the other disciples trying without success to cast out a demon and then the disciples argue about who is the greatest, possibly spurred on by Peter, James and John who had a unique experience the others did not.

Up until now Jesus has been moving away from Jerusalem until His disciples state who He is. Now that they know this, His emphasis is on His going back, by way of the cross. And Luke paints this picture quite clearly here in 9:51,

<sup>51</sup>*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*

The ESV and the KJV/NKJV translate it literally, ‘*set His face toward*’, emphasizing the determination and resolve Jesus had to make His way towards Jerusalem. But strangely Luke says,

<sup>51</sup> *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven,*

Not, “*as the time for Him to be crucified was near*”. But isn’t that why He’s going to Jerusalem? Yes, but Jerusalem is not the goal for Jesus. The cross is the means to the goal. As those who wish to walk as Jesus walked, we must not lose sight of this ourselves. We too must

## **Walk With Our Future Goal in Mind** **(Luke 9:51-52)**

Again, the cross was not Jesus’ goal but the cross was the means to Jesus’ goal. Jesus’ goal was to finish the work God gave Him to do so He could glorify God and return to His Father. Listen to his prayer the night before He died,

*John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*

And this is how He prays for His disciples (which includes us),

<sup>17:13</sup> *“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. .... <sup>24</sup> “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

What was Jesus’ goal? The same as our goal:

### ***Eternal joy in God’s presence (v.51a)***

This is why Luke writes “*As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set His face for Jerusalem*” ... because suffering always precedes glory.

*Rom. 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. <sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed*

<sup>1 Pet. 4:12</sup> *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

When life becomes difficult, remember what we have to look forward to. We believed the gospel because we know this is how we get to be with God for all eternity rather than away from God in pain and torment. We receive eternal life when we believe in Jesus. Eternal describes the quality of life we now get from the Spirit who dwells in us and reminds us what the Word says about our future hope. It doesn’t mean don’t make plans on earth (see James 4:13-17) but what it does mean is live your life here to glorify God because that’s what your looking forward to. Our 70, 80, 90, 100 years is a mist that is quickly gone while eternity is forever.

Jesus determines now to get to Jerusalem because He must die for our sins. That's both a present goal and a future goal. Jesus goes to Jerusalem first because it means

### ***Salvation for many (v.51b)***

Jesus knows what awaits Him in Jerusalem. He is now starting to tell His disciples, yet they don't grasp the suffering before glory path that all Jesus' disciples must experience. But if Jesus doesn't die for our sins no one can be saved. That's why we can't save ourselves. Without accepting and receiving Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we can't be saved. As hard as the cross will be Jesus knows what is beyond the suffering: glory with the Father with all those who put their faith in Him. Knowing the cross will accomplish its purpose for many.

This is why focusing on our future goal is so important, especially when life is hard. Keep this picture in mind. Know that any trials we face are 1) part of God's plan to conform us into the likeness of His Son and 2) with our obedience we will glorify God through them. And in the meantime,

### ***God includes us in His great work (v.52, 37-50)***

Jesus sends His disciples ahead to see about food and a place to stay. Not all ministry is glamorous. There are many practical aspects to ministry that we all have to do our part in. Earlier, the disciples were trying to cast out a demon but were unsuccessful. Perhaps they were overconfident after their earlier success in 9:1-6 when Jesus sent them out to preach the gospel and heal people – which happened! Praise the Lord that God involves us in His work. But don't think your skills are what makes ministry successful. Don't complain about the mundane parts of ministry that are always needed and don't assume that even the mundane has no spiritual purpose. Because finding food and shelter in Samaria for Jewish disciples doesn't go well. This can be frustrating and sometimes believers can lose their focus when life or ministry doesn't go smoothly. If we're involved in God's work, the enemy will never be far away. And he knows all the little tricks that throw us off focusing on the goal and seeing the big picture. Not only should we walk focusing on the goal (our presence in God's presence) we need to remind ourselves to

## **Walk Expecting to be Distracted** **(9:53-56)**

In the interaction with the Samaritans we see two ways we too can be distracted. First

### ***By opposition from unbelievers (v.53)***

*<sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.*

Samaritans did not accept the whole Old Testament as their Scriptures, only the first 5 books of Moses. They also believed Mt. Gerazim in Samaria was the place God was to be worshipped (read John 4). So Jews going to Jerusalem are going to worship at the temple. Why should we help you? The disciples may have been a little surprised since Jesus and they had a warm reception when they came through Sychar on their way to Galilee (again John 4). But not this time. And this rattles the disciples who act immaturely. Which is another distraction

### ***By not yet mature disciples (vv.54-56)***

<sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” <sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and rebuked them, <sup>56</sup> and they went to another village.

Where did James and John get this idea? From Elijah in 2 Kings 2 when God told Elijah to go tell the king of Samaria he would die from his injuries because he sought direction from a false god. He sent soldiers to capture Elijah who then called on God to bring fire down from heaven. They are in Samaria. They just saw Elijah on Mt. Hermon with the glorified Jesus. Now we understand how this came to their minds. But Jesus rebuked them for their lack of mercy. Jesus wasn't about that. He wasn't here to judge at this time but to help people find God knowing the kingdom was there because the King was there.

None of us are fully mature disciples of Jesus. We can all get in God's way by our sinful actions and attitudes. And we get distracted by each other when we do that. People leave churches because of thoughtless words or actions said by an imperfect fellow follower of Jesus. Sometimes we are hurt by over-imaginative brains, perceiving hurts when none were there or intended. Some leave churches altogether, forgetting that they too, are imperfect followers of Jesus. We all screw up. We all hurt one another, mostly unintentionally. Don't quit on God because of believer's immature actions. The reason why we walk away from immature believers is because we also are immature and can be as harsh and unforgiving as James and John.

In vv.57-62 Jesus encounters 3 would-be disciples. The first and last vow to follow Jesus while the other one is called by Jesus Himself. All 3 have excuses as to why they can't follow Jesus right at that moment. And not surprisingly, we will find that their excuses don't sound much different than our excuses.

And here's another thing to keep in mind if we're going to walk as Jesus walked:

## **Walk Humbly Knowing We'll be Discouraged** **(9:57-62)**

V.57 begins, <sup>57</sup> *As they were going along the road. . .* “

What road? The road to Jerusalem. One fellow blurts out 'I'll follow You Jesus wherever you go.' But He doesn't know where Jesus is going. He doesn't know or understand what Jesus said earlier, “if anyone wants to come after Me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me” (9:23).

*And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”*

To the casual follower that says 'I'll go wherever you go' Jesus essentially points to a cave or a bush and says 'Okay, how about there? I'm going to sleep there tonight. And then some other uncomfortable place the next night and somewhere else just as uncomfortable the next night – and yeah, that's where I go!' Animals have places to stay but the Son of man has no creaturely comforts.

In v.59 Jesus calls a man to follow Him

*But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” <sup>60</sup> But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.”*

It sounds like Jesus is harsh on the man but this is where we need to understand Jewish culture. If the man's father had really died why was he following after Jesus? In the Jewish culture the

expression 'to bury one's father' means to look after one's father until they die and then you have the responsibility to look after the remaining family. So the man essentially says, 'As soon as my obligations of looking after my parents are finished I will follow you.'

"Let the dead bury their own dead" is Jesus' way of saying, those who don't care about spiritual things can look after earthly things; but I'm calling you to go and proclaim the Kingdom of God!

Who of us hasn't asked someone to get involved in God's work only to hear the same type of answer: 'Yup, as soon as ... my kids grow up ... as soon as I retire ... as soon as I get some things off my plate. Sometimes those are legitimate reasons and people to come through but often they are excuses not to make serious commitments to following Jesus.

A third man approaches Jesus in v.

*"I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."* <sup>62</sup> But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

The expression 'say good-bye' is another one of those cultural euphemisms that we don't catch but Jesus' readers would have. It literally reads "ask leave of". In other words this would-be follower says I must ask my parents at home if I have permission to take leave of them. Anticipating that his parents will say no, the man has a readymade excuse. He could even show Jesus how sorry he was but mommy and daddy won't let him (an adult himself) go follow Jesus. In essence he was saying the authority of my family overrides Jesus' authority.

These three people all show ways we can get discouraged in walking with Jesus because unbelievers are hard to reach and even those who follow Jesus have divided loyalties. We have to know this is part of ministry. All these people said no to Jesus. And when people say no to you and I try not to take it personally, they are saying no to Jesus. That's why we need to walk humbly because we can make it about ourselves and not the Lord. We get discouraged because we can't get help and so we're going to quit too – which is exactly what these 3 were doing. We're here to serve Jesus not ourselves.

There's a great short passage that summarizes all of this, Hebrews 12:1-3

**12** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

We're to keep our focus on Jesus – that's our goal – because he kept His focus on the joy he would have again with His father in heaven. A joy we will get to share in as well. It involved suffering but He knew it wouldn't last. He endured, we're to endure.

While Jesus was tempted to sin and experienced discouragement and distractions, He persevered and accomplished God's goal, the race marked out for Him. We too have races marked out for us that will involve temptation to sin and people and things that distract us from God's purpose for us. Also, we're not alone. Others who have finished the race cheer us on. But they are not our focus, Jesus is. And the goal is the joy of sitting down in the presence of His Father for all eternity.

When Jesus prayed for His disciples the night before He died,

<sup>24</sup> *“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

He knew they would lose focus, be distracted and get discouraged. But He also knew they would turn back to Him and be used for His purposes once the Spirit came. May we walk purposefully like Jesus with future glory in mind, aware of discouragement and distractions but not letting them entangle us from finishing the race marked out for us.

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