

Life Lessons from Jesus, part 3: Revenge

Luke 9:51-55

As we have been studying Luke 9 God has had us on a journey. As we have walked with Jesus, He has been teaching us things, showing us who He is and who He calls us to be as His disciples. He has called us to go on mission with the message of the kingdom of God. He has taught us to trust Him and not rely on our own resources. He has revealed to us the power and glory of who He is as the Christ of God and His mission to suffer, die on the cross and be raised again. He has challenged us to discipleship; to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. He has turned our concept of importance and greatness upside down. He taught us to stop excluding and start including His servants.

Now our journey takes another turn.

Look at verse 51. **"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."** Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He was a man on a mission! Jesus had already told His disciples about the nature of His mission, that He was going to die. Back in verse 22 of this chapter Jesus said, **"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."** And again in verse 44 Jesus told them, **"Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men."**

Jesus said He would be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes. Tell me, where did you find the chief priests in Jesus' day? At Jerusalem. Jesus is going to Jerusalem for a purpose. He is on a mission. It is a mission of mercy, forgiveness and compassion. It is a mission of sacrifice, to save lost people from their sin.

But as we have seen already in this chapter, the disciples did not yet understand Jesus. They were still thinking of an earthly kingdom. They argued about who would be the greatest. They tried to exclude others from the work of God. And in this episode, they miss the compassionate heart of God once again.

LESSON THREE: REVENGE (vs. 51- 55)

We see this lesson in the reaction of Jesus and His disciples to the refusal of the Samaritan village to welcome them. In verse 52 Luke 9 tells us, **"and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him."**

It is well known that Samaritans hated the Jews and Jews hated the Samaritans. Although the issues that divided them took place almost 500 years before Jesus came, the animosity remained. Where did these Samaritans come from?

Well, in the Old Testament, Israel was a united kingdom under the first three kings, Saul, David and Solomon. But after that, the nation split in two. Judah together with Benjamin became the southern kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital and center of worship. The other tribes, with Ephraim being the major one, became the northern kingdom with Samaria as its capital.

About 700 years before Christ this Northern kingdom fell to the nation of Assyria and a large percentage of the people were forcibly exiled into surrounding

nations. The king of Assyria replaced them with peoples from other nations who mixed with the remaining Israelites and intermarried.

The Samaritans therefore were partly Jewish and partly descendants of the other nations. Their religious beliefs were just as mixed as their heritage. They held on to the books of Moses, but their religious practices were partly influenced by their other cultural backgrounds and the nations that would rule over them over the next few hundred years before Christ came.

They had built a temple on Mt Gerizim at Shechem, which was later destroyed, but they continued to worship there. That is why when Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4 and verse 20, she says, "**Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.**"

In that same conversation in John 4, Jesus reveals how confused the Samaritan belief system has become, when He states that the Samaritans don't even know who they are worshipping.

The Jewish contempt for the Samaritans was so great that the Pharisees in trying to insult Jesus say this in John 8:48, "**Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?**"

To these Pharisees, calling Jesus a Samaritan was the biggest insult they could think of. They thought that to be a Samaritan was about as far away from God as you can get. They almost equated it with having a demon.

There was, however, one thing that both Jews and Samaritans had in common. After years of being oppressed by one nation and then another, both the Jews and the Samaritans resented foreign rule. They were both looking for a promised Messiah.

Over in John 4 again, in verse 25 the Samaritan woman at the well said to Jesus, "**I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.**" And even though it was rare for Jesus to openly state that He was the Christ, He answered this woman saying, "**I who speak to you am He.**"

Jesus often swam against the current of his culture in his time. He treated women and Samaritans like real people instead of with contempt like many Jewish leaders. He tolerated the tax collectors and zealots and prostitutes who came to hear him speak.

Even though Jesus seemed to hold no animosity toward the Samaritans, many Jews did, probably even Jesus' disciples. Many Jews avoided the area, and would have traveled along the Jordan River but not Jesus. He sent an advance party ahead to make arrangements for His coming. He planned to travel right through Samaria, because He wanted to give them the opportunity to receive Him.

So from what we know from John 4, this episode in Luke 9 is not the only time that Jesus reached out to Samaritans. In John 4 Jesus reached out to a lonely woman at the well of Jacob, offering her living water for her soul. In that case, many from that woman's village believed in Jesus.

But not this time. Verse 53 says, **“But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.”** The people in the village rejected Jesus and rejected the messengers of Jesus.

Why do they reject Him? It states that they reject him because he is heading for Jerusalem. Why did they reject Jesus because He was going to Jerusalem?

Maybe it was because, as we found, in the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well, that the Samaritans viewed Mt Gerizim, not Jerusalem, as being the place that God should be worshipped? They were probably expecting the messiah to come to that very mountain, not to go to Jerusalem. Jesus couldn't be the person that they were expecting, because He didn't follow their preconceived ideas and beliefs about the way that the messiah would come.

Jesus must have felt the rejection and His disciples are clearly angered. Verse 54 says, **“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?’”**

James and John offer to call down fire from heaven and destroy the whole town. And they use Elijah as a justification for it. What are they talking about? Well, if you go back to 1 and 2 Kings there are two episodes where fire comes down from heaven. One in 1 Kings 18 at Mt Carmel where the fire comes from heaven and consumes the sacrifice and the altar. There the enemies of God, the prophets of Baal, are destroyed, but not by the fire. Elijah has them killed by the sword.

The other episode is in 2 Kings 1. There Elijah sends word to Ahaziah, king of Israel, that the Lord says king is going to die. The king gets mad and sends a captain with fifty men to bring Elijah in. They see the prophet sitting on the top of a hill and say to him, "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'"

Elijah answers the captain, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

So Ahaziah sends another captain with another 50 men to make the same demand. And they meet the same fate. Finally the king sends a third captain with another 50 men. This time the captain fell on his knees and begged Elijah to have compassion on him and his men. And the Lord told Elijah to go with this humble captain to meet the king. Of course Ahaziah does end up dying on his bed just as Elijah told him.

But that is the example that James and John recall, Elijah calls down fire from heaven and destroys God's enemies. God did it before, why would He not do it again?

James and John, the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17), were deadly serious. They were not naive, and they were not joking. They believed Jesus was an Elijah-like Messiah, and thus Elijah's life was a precedent for what should happen now. The two disciples' memory was good, but what they failed to understand was that though Ahaziah was rejecting God, the Samaritans were not necessarily. They were simply returning the rejection of the Jews. The situations were not the same.

In Elijah's case it isn't that Elijah was being disrespected. God often allowed his prophets to be rejected and persecuted without fire from heaven. The king and his men were showing contempt for God. Elijah was commissioned to a special ministry as prophet in a theocracy, and it was his God-ordained task to confront an evil monarch who was attempting to usurp God's authority. Elijah was specifically authorized to measure out the reprisal of God's wrath. Elijah acted with an authority comparable to that of modern civil authorities (cf. Rom. 13:4)—not in a capacity that parallels that of ministers of the gospel.

James and John had it wrong. So Jesus responds in verse 55, **"But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.'"**

Jesus shows us the compassion of God. God is not like you and I. God doesn't lose his temper like we do. Thank goodness. God will judge, but God is not quick to judge.

James and John had forgotten that the nature and heart of God is to show mercy, to have compassion, and to forgive. God revealed His character to Moses (Exo 34:6 NASB), **"Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;'"**

Again in Numbers 14 when the people rebelled, wanted to fire Moses, and pick a new leader to go back to Egypt, God could have destroyed the people. Instead the Lord forgives them when Moses prays, reminding God of His great love saying, **"The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations,"** (Num 14:18 NASB).

At least seven more times in the Old Testament those exact same words are used to describe God, **"gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm,"** (Jonah 4:2 NKJV). Also in Neh 9:17; Psa 86:15; Psa 103:8; Psa 145:8; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3.

Jesus' desire was not to "blast 'em." Rather, as the prophet Ezekiel says, **"For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord GOD. 'Therefore turn and live!'"** (Ez 18:32). Jesus' first objective was to save lives, not destroy them; to heal, not to kill (Luke 9:56).

Here are the lessons I learn from this story. First, a lesson about Jesus:

1. Some people will reject Jesus (and His followers).

Today, we live in a generation of people who have heard about Jesus. He is giving them the chance to receive Him but many have chosen to reject Him as well. Our job is much like that of the advance party of disciples. We are to announce to this world Jesus is coming—get ready for Him. But we sometimes get the same reaction, people laugh and scoff and go on with their lives as if Jesus didn't even exist.

We need to remember it is *not* our job to get people to *accept* Jesus, it's our job to *tell them* about Jesus and to encourage them to be prepared to meet Him.

Jesus won't *force people* to accept Him; He lets you choose, just like the people of that village 2,000 years ago. We must remember when people reject us they are actually rejecting the One who sent us.

But the key question is: How do we react when people reject our offer? That's our second lesson:

2. We are not to judge and punish those who reject us

It's not our job to judge unbelievers or to take vengeance on them. Leave that to Jesus. He knows people's hearts and motives. We don't.

We often forget these "saints" like St. James and St. John were ordinary folks just like us. Can't you hear them? "*How dare those dirty Samaritans refuse to show us hospitality? What an insult! We'll just call down fire from heaven and burn them to filthy ashes!*" Now do you know why the Bible calls them "The Sons of Thunder?" Jesus rebukes their hateful, vengeful spirit. He informs them they have the wrong kind of spirit. It was a bitter, angry, hateful spirit. It certainly wasn't the Holy Spirit! Jesus didn't come to destroy people; He came to save them!

Here were two disciples of Jesus who spent much of the last two years with Him. But they were ready to destroy an entire village—all in the name of God. I fear much harm is done for the cause of Christ today because of people who have the same spirit of James and John. They are sons and daughters of thunder. When they are wronged or hurt, you can see the emotional storm clouds gathering. Watch out! There will be a flash of lightning-quick anger and then the rumble of verbal thunder and someone's spirit has been consumed with the terrible fire of anger.

It's not our job to judge and punish those who reject Jesus. Even when we are insulted, or when Jesus is insulted, it doesn't give us the right to call down fire on those people. God will deal with them in a perfectly just way in His own time. **"Vengeance is mine. I will repay," says the Lord.**" (Romans 12:19).

We live in a generation where people are getting more and more angry. Today we have road rage, where people use their cars to bash someone who has cut them off. We have air rage, where frustrated passengers berate airline personnel. We even have fan rage where parents who are assaulting coaches and officials after their kid's soccer, baseball, or hockey match. We live in a generation of rage-aholics.

The Bible warns about the danger of the root of bitterness. The root of bitterness is unresolved anger and rage. When you become angry you become bitter. When you become bitter you strike out and want to hurt somebody. But you usually end up getting hurt as well. Do you have a hair-trigger temper and it only takes a minor provocation to set you off? Someone once said, "the emptier the pot, the quicker it boils." Bitterness is a toxic acid that always destroys its own container.

Let's listen to Jesus today. Let's learn we need to avoid the angry spirit displayed by James and John. You never know what God might be doing in a person's heart, even if on the outside they are hostile to Jesus.

D. L. Moody made a covenant with God that he would witness for Christ to at least one person each day. One night, about ten o'clock, he realized that he had not yet witnessed; so he went out in to the street and spoke to a man standing by a lamppost, asking him, "Are you a Christian?" The man flew into a violent rage and threatened to knock Moody into the gutter.

Three months later, Moody was awakened at the YMCA by a man knocking at the door. It was the man he had witnessed to. "I want to talk to you about my soul," he said to Moody. He apologized for the way he had treated Moody and said that he had had no peace ever since that night on Lake Street when Moody witnessed to him. Moody led the man to Christ and he became a zealous worker in the Sunday school.

Is there any person, or any section of the community, that we come across that we feel are too far away to receive the gospel and find God's mercy?

I believe that God is calling us to open up doors of witness that we are selves have closed. We have not reached out to people because we feel that they will reject us and our message. Maybe we feel that they will never change and probably don't deserve Gods mercy. Instead God wants us to reach these very people.

Maybe it is you Jesus wants to save today. Jesus said, "**For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.**" Please don't reject Jesus today. Accept him. Turn to Him because He died for your sins. Believe in Him because God raised Him from the dead. Trust in Him because He is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Let Jesus save you today.