



Luke 9:51–56

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’ 55 But Je-

sus turned and rebuked them. 56
Then he and his disciples went to
another village.

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

Far from being a random collection of Jesus stories, the Gospel of Luke is proving to be a well-planned and documented account of Jesus life and what it means to know and follow him.

Of course this should be no surprise, as the prologue told us that Luke was seeking to write an orderly account for the governor Theophilus from all the information that he had gathered from eye-wit-

nesses. And today's passage marks what many commentators consider a new section in Luke's Gospel.

Chapter 9 verse 51 reads: "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Up until this point, Luke has collected a series of events which help us get a picture of who Jesus is. Luke has recorded Jesus defeating the temptation of Satan in the desert and then driving out impure spirits (chapter 4). He has recorded Jesus healing many (ch 4 & 5), he has recorded Jesus challenging the religious leaders of his day for misunderstanding the law of God and Luke has recorded Jesus' own teaching on the real shape and purpose of the Kingdom of God (chapter 6). Through Chapters 7 and 8 Jesus shows his mission

is for all people – Jews, Romans, the rich, the poor, the good and the bad. Finally after all of this, Luke records for us in chapter 9 the disciples own recognition that Jesus is the Son of God and Peter, James and John were given a glimpse of Jesus glory at the transfiguration.

By chapter 9, there is no doubt that Luke is presenting Jesus as the powerful Son of God. But it is still hazy as to what his ‘mission’ is really all about. Certainly Jesus has shown and taught us about God’s kingdom, but it is only now that we gain real clarity on what his mission, foretold at his birth actually involves – not fame and earthly glory but rather crucifixion and an empty tomb.

Chapter 9:51 is the textual marker indicat-

ing Jesus setting resolutely out to complete his mission. This section has been labelled by many as the travelogue and continues all the way through to chapter 19:28 – the moment Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Of course Luke is a master craftsman of story. So we will see that there is a theme throughout these next 10 chapters – the theme is what it looks like to follow Jesus as the Son of God. So as Jesus makes his way resolutely towards Jerusalem, we go with him, learning what it means to follow him. Today we begin the journey to Jerusalem.

And the first thing we learn is somewhat surprising. Not everyone will want to follow Jesus with us. We read that Jesus and

the disciples planned to stay in Samaria but because they were on their way to Jerusalem, they were not received well by the residents. A quick history lesson will remind us that Samaritans and Israelites were not on friendly terms. Indeed after the Assyrian invasion of the northern Kingdom in 722BC many Assyrians remained in the area, married Israelite women and settled in the area of Samaria. Thus there was animosity between Israelites and Samaritans as the Samaritans were considered traitors who had literally 'slept with the enemy'. The animosity appears to go both ways and Jesus and his disciples are denied lodging.

What comes next is interesting. The disciples ask Jesus if they can call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans. What is

this all about? Well if you were to go back to 2 Kings 1 you'd see that it was the prophet Elijah who called down fire from heaven on two delegations of soldiers sent from the idolatrous King Ahaziah. And guess where King Ahaziah had his throne? Samaria. The disciples see the rejection of the Son of God is equally idolatrous as King Ahaziah and get excited that it could now be their turn to bring judgment on these evil ones.

This gives us an interesting insight into the minds of the disciples. They really saw themselves on the cusp of God's kingdom and they were with the greatest ever prophet, so why couldn't they do what has been done in the past?

But Jesus, we are told, rebukes them. He

takes all the wind out of their sails. He pops their bubble. You see the first thing the disciples will need to learn is that rather than bringing judgement down on everyone else, the Son of God is going to Jerusalem to bare the judgement and fire of God upon himself. As the years go by and the disciples receive the Spirit, they will no longer be wanting to call down fire from heaven on people, but rather be declaring that people put their faith in the one who has borne the fires of God's judgement on our behalf and conquered the grave!

But the disciples are not at this place just yet. They are learning what it looks like to follow Jesus remember? And this is their first lesson. Judgement belongs to God and the mission of the Son of God is to

take it upon himself.

Think & Pray

It's easy for us to judge, isn't it? To be quick to call down condemnation. Certainly there is wisdom in a loving warning. There can be great power in a gentle rebuke. But as followers of Jesus we learn to direct those who are under judgement to put their faith in the one who has borne the punishment they deserve. Having risen from the dead, Jesus takes the title of judge – not you, not I. Could there be space for us to be more known for our words of salvation and life, than our words of judgement and condemnation. Since we can't call down judgement on anyone, let us grow in our ability to lead them to the one who can save them.

Why not consider those God has placed around you to be a witness to. What opportunities may you have to share your faith with them? What invitations could you extend to those who are searching? Why not pray that God will open up ways for you to be a blessing to those who do not yet know Jesus as their lord and saviour.