

No Stranger-Danger with Jesus
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(READ Luke 9:51-56)

This passage marks a shift in the Gospel of Luke. For the last number of chapters, Luke's goal and purpose in writing was to help us understand who Jesus is. You may remember this question being asked over and over again: "Who is this man, Jesus of Nazareth?" So, all of the stories and accounts that Luke has recorded in the previous section have primarily been focused on answering that question; Jesus is the Christ, the chosen one of God. The one God has sent to save his people from their sins.

But now, Luke has a different focus and it's signaled for us in Jesus' turn to Jerusalem. Do you see that there in vs. 51? "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." That reference to *when the days drew near for him to be taken up* sounds a lot like the departure Jesus was planning and preparing for that's referenced in vs. 31. The redemptive and delivering work of Jesus would be complete at his ascension, the moment when Jesus was taken into heaven. That's what Luke is talking about here. So, with that in mind, with the completion of all of Jesus' work including his suffering on the cross approached, it says *Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem*. What does that mean? It means he became committed, he was resolved, focused on Jerusalem, the place where all of this work will take place.

That's a remarkable thing. When's the last time you've faced something momentous? Something that's really important and significant, but also something that was going to cost you dearly. That's usually what momentous things include, right? Most of the time, things of great significance require a lot of us. I remember when my father faced his cancer treatment. Chemotherapy. Bone marrow transplant. The terrible side effects that come with all this radical invention. It's significant and important treatment, but it's hard, too. Hard enough that some people decide to trust God with their remaining days and forego the treatment. You need to be determined to go through all that; to know the cost, to know the risks, but still say, "because of the benefit, because of the hope of healing, I need to set my face towards this. I need to be prepared, resolved, and focused."

That's what Jesus was like when he thought about his suffering and death. He knew it was going to happen; he predicted it. I'm guessing Jesus knew some of the details of his suffering; the blows to his body, the insults of the people, the betrayal of his disciples and even his Father turning away from him. But he was resolved; he was determined. He set his face towards Jerusalem.

As we progress now into Luke you need to keep this in mind; when you hear Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce, on prayer, on money, on worry and anxiety, he gives these teachings with his face towards Jerusalem and calling his followers to do the same thing. Here's why this is important: the Christian life is a calling to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, to join him in this redemptive suffering. Jesus' teachings aren't for those kicking back in their spiritual lazyboys.

These are not instructions for those somewhat distracted and preoccupied with more important matters. No, Jesus' instructions are for followers whose faces are also focused and determined on earthly sacrifices for eternal rewards; Jesus' teachings and ultimately his atonement are for those who are willing to take up their own cross and die with and for Jesus. That changes how you live your Christian life, friends. Your Christian life and faith will be entirely different when you join Jesus with your faces set towards suffering yourself. I'm thinking we'll see what that means as we keep working through Luke.

So, with a face set towards Jerusalem, Jesus and his followers make their way to a village of Samaria. (PIC) Here's a map of Palestine. Most of Jesus' ministry happened in Galilee (that's where we've been for a number of chapters). Here's Jerusalem, down in Judah. And here's Samaria right in the middle. We don't know exactly who the Samaritans were; their origins are somewhat debated. They are certainly foreigners to Israelites, but it seems with biological connection. Most think that Samaritans are partially Jews; they are made up of the Israelites who remained in Israel during the exile and sinfully intermarried with people who did not follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, over the years, ethnic, cultural, and religious differences was a wedge between these neighbors. Here's what we know for sure: Israelites don't like Samaritans and Samaritans don't like Israelites. It was common for Israelites to avoid Samaria completely; when a family would travel from Galilee to Jerusalem, instead of taking the short route and going through Samaria, most would go around Samaria to avoid even interacting with them.

Do you know who the Samaritans were to the Israelites? They were the *others*. One of our favorite things to do as a family is watch the TV series (PIC) *Lost*. For those of you who have not had the fortune to enjoy this TV series, *Lost* is about group of people stranded on a deserted island after a plane crash. And the island they are stranded on is mysterious. And part of the mystery of this island is the presence of another community people; they are simply known as the *others*. That may not be all that descriptive, but what else do you call people you know nothing about. They don't know who they are, where they are from, what they want, what they have, what they believe or what they value. Do they want peace or war? Are they friendly or hostile? Can they be trusted or not? The stranded passengers of Oceanic 815 don't know. All they know is that they are others. They aren't of us. They don't belong to our tribe. And do you know what that made the others? It made them a threat. It made them fearful and dangerous.

Isn't that how we treat the *others* in our life? And it's understandable, right? We're usually afraid of what or who we don't know. And our fear makes us protective; it makes us suspicious. And what happens is that *others* quickly turn into *enemies* to attack and oppose. And while it may be natural, it's contrary to the ways of Christ. Jesus says, "Love your enemies;" the law of God says, "take care of the stranger." Now, we're going to examine in a minute what we must do to resist the urge to turn others into enemies, but for the moment, let's just acknowledge this reality and temptation. And that to be a follower of Jesus we need to transcend this temptation.

The disciples are truly that; what I mean by that is *disciple* means *learner* and James and John have a whole lot of learning to do. Thankfully, Jesus is happy to give them (and us) the teaching that's necessary. So, consider what happens. The passage doesn't say it explicitly, but it

seems quite clear that Jesus was still on mission; he was still preaching the good news. He wanted to let these Samaritans know that there was grace to be received from God, but they needed to receive it just like everyone else: turning from their sin and turning to Jesus. I'm pretty confident in saying this because vs. 53 says that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus *because* he set his face towards Jerusalem. Somehow, Jesus and his disciples made these Samaritans aware of who he was and what he's up to. He's going to Jerusalem; he's got a plan of sacrifice and of glory that's going to be fulfilled in the Jewish capital. And it's because of that the Samaritans rejected Jesus. They didn't want it. We don't know why necessarily. Did they reject the call to suffer and sacrifice? Did they not believe they needed mercy from God? Were they hung up on the cultural and religious differences themselves? All we know is that they rejected Jesus because of the mission he was on.

Notice the response of James and John in vs. 54, "And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" Ah, there's nothing quite like the love of Jesus in our hearts, right? Wow! Talk about some anger issues, right? But think about it for a minute: where did that come from? I think it came from an us vs. them mentality. They are the others, the outsiders. They didn't deserve us coming here in the first place. Now, they reject our master, Jesus, and his gracious offer of salvation! How dare they!

Would have the disciples felt such anger and animosity about people from Jerusalem? Would they work a little harder to persuade their fellow Jews? Would they be a little more patient? Would they say such harsh words about people from their hometown? James and John were certainly from a village in Galilee somewhere like Jesus; if their hometown refused to receive Jesus, would they call for fire and brimstone on them or would they ask Jesus to stay another day with the hopes that maybe they'll trust Jesus tomorrow?

Look what Jesus says in vs. 55, "But he turned and rebuked them." Remember last week how I mentioned that when Jesus corrected the disciples about their arguments about who was the greatest he didn't just rebuke them; he used it as a time of instruction to help the disciples understand the nature of his kingdom. Well, this time he just offers a rebuke. The disciples know better; they've seen Jesus care for people. They've seen him help the foreigner. They know Jesus doesn't play favorites like this. This time, Jesus gives them a sharp rebuke. That's not what Jesus is about. He's come to seek and to save the lost. Yep, there's a time of judgment coming that nobody can escape. But for now, at this moment, Jesus has one thing on his mind: save as many as possible. Rescue the lost. Heal the hurting. Offer the gift of the kingdom to as many as possible and if they say *NO*, then let's give them a little time and come back later.

Here are some things for us to consider from Luke 9. First of all, to God, we are all outsiders. We are *others* to God. The Bible says we are estranged from God. That's how we all start. Col. 1:21 says, "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds." That's us, friends. That's what Paul is saying. We are the others; we're the ones on the outside; we are the one's that don't fit into God's family. But we cut Paul off; he's got more to say. Listen further, "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind... he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death."

That's the good news of Jesus Christ. If you're somewhat new to this faith-thing, this Jesus-thing, or you're still trying to figure it out; this is what's most important and most glorious. Jesus Christ takes strangers and makes them his friends. He takes enemies and makes them his sons and daughters. Our sin, all the stuff that we do wrong and say wrong and think wrong, has made us strangers to God - even worse, enemies of God - but when Jesus died on that cross to pay the penalty of your sins and my sins, he did that to make us a part of his family.

If you feel estranged; if you feel like an outsider or like an other in this world, there's one place you can belong and that's in the family of God. Jesus was ready to accept Samaritans; he wanted and still wants Samaritans apart of his family. The others; the outsiders. And he wants you a part of his family, too. But you have to receive him. The Samaritans wouldn't receive him. They wouldn't receive his gift of forgiveness; they wouldn't follow him when it led to suffering. And because of that, they remained outsiders by their own choice. Friends, receive Jesus by faith. That means admit that your sin has made you a stranger to God. Be sobered by that reality. But then, rejoice that God forgives you. Be glad that Jesus died for you. Receive his acceptance as a gift and just say "thank you." And then, start following him. Do what he says. Believe his words. This is good news for you and for me.

The second thing we should consider is that looking at others and counting them as strangers or enemies falls short of God's way. God accepts us even though our sins make us a stranger to him. That means he's calling us to welcome and accept others, too. So, fight the urge to turn those people unlike you into strangers and enemies. Do that two ways. First of all, constantly remember how Jesus found you when you were a stranger. We can't remain unlovingly hostile to people when we remember that God found us in our hostility to him. He broke down the walls to be in relationship with us. Remember how God found you and you'll be ready to receive others. Secondly, make a point of getting to know the others in your life. Make a point to learn about them, to listen to their experiences. Step outside of your comfort zone. But you might be thinking, "But that makes me afraid." I know; me too. But trust God to be your shield; trust that God will keep you. And as you do, you'll discover those strangers, those others, aren't so different than you.

Key vs. Luke 9:51

Questions for the week

- What are daily or weekly sacrifices you make in your journey of faith that's a way of joining Jesus on the road to Jerusalem? If you don't have any, do you think your faith needs to change?
- What are some thing you do when you meet or interact with people unlike you?
- What changes do you need to experience to be a servant to those who are unlike you?