

INTRODUCTION

Last week I began this two-part message by mentioning the little book by Robert Fulgum, *All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*. I revised that title to the title of this message: “All I Really Need to Know, I Learn as I Walk with Jesus.” But sadly, some people never learn anything.

Bob was a single guy who showed up at work one Monday with both of his ears were badly burned. A co-worker asked, “What happened to you?” Bob said, “I’m pretty embarrassed, but I was using my electric iron to press some shirts on Saturday and my telephone rang. Without thinking, I put the iron to my ear and said, ‘hello.’ I burned my ear pretty badly!” His coworker said, “That’s one ear, what happened to the other one?” Bob said, “The same idiot called me back in a couple of minutes!” Some people just never learn!

In the final verses of Luke 9, as Jesus is walking along with His disciples, He gives them five life lessons. As we walk with Jesus, we need to learn the same life lessons. In Luke 9:46, we read:

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to the, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he is least among you all—he is the greatest.” “Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.” As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?” [even as Elijah did] But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and [see footnote: said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”] and they went to another village. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

LESSON ONE: GREATNESS (vs. 46-48)

Last week we learned the only way we can truly achieve greatness is to become like a little child. Remember, I said the childlike qualities we should reflect are (1) fun-loving; (2) total trust; and (3) complete dependence.

LESSON TWO: ACCEPTANCE (vs. 49-50)

John was ready to write off another servant of God just because he wasn't part of their group. I spoke about how we should be willing to accept those who are different from us as long as they truly honor the name of Jesus. Now let's look at the new lessons:

LESSON THREE: PURPOSE (vs. 51)

Look again at verse 51. “When it came close to the time for his Ascension, he gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey to Jerusalem.” The KJV says, “He steadfastly set his face toward Jerusalem.” He was a man on a mission! This is a great lesson about living a life full of purpose. Here's the lesson about Jesus:

1. Jesus was born to die for us

At this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus began to focus more and more on His final sacrifice in Jerusalem. All other religious leaders of history came to teach and to institute some new moral system, but Jesus stands alone in that He came to die. Why? Because each of us is a sinner, separated from God, and we need a Savior to bring us back into relationship with God. That's exactly what Jesus did according to 1 Peter 3:18: “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” God required a sinless sacrifice—and Jesus was the Righteous One. We are the unrighteous and in His death, Jesus reaches out to the Father with one hand (there's His Deity) and He reaches out to us with the other hand (there's His humanity) and He brings us into relationship with His Father.

The word that is translated “resolutely set out” or “steadfastly set his face” is a word speaking of a man bending down as walks into the face of a driving windstorm. Jesus would not be diverted from His purpose to die for our sins. It wasn't an easy stroll through a park; it was a tough uphill journey directly into the teeth of a hurricane of opposition. Jesus knew what would be awaiting Him in Jerusalem. He knew he would be betrayed by one disciple, denied by another and forsaken by all of them; yet He set His face toward Jerusalem. He knew He would be arrested and falsely accused; yet He kept His eyes on His purpose. He knew He would be beaten, bruised, and bloodied; yet He kept on purpose. He knew His face would be the target for the foul spittle of Roman soldiers; yet He kept on going toward Jerusalem. He knew His flesh would be torn and shredded by the whip; yet He kept on going. He knew the cold, hard, rusty iron spikes would violate his hands and feet; yet He kept on going. He knew He would carry the guilt and shame of all the sins of the world; yet He kept on purpose. He knew in the moment in which He became sin, His father would forsake Him; yet He kept on going. But it wasn't easy. And He also knew after three days He would come out of a borrowed tomb with healing in His wings—so He kept on going! He knew after a few days He would ascend back to the Father to be seated at His right hand—so He kept on going! Hallelujah!

Now let's learn something about ourselves:

2. Your life direction will determine your destination

Jesus was a man on a mission. He was a person with a purpose: Are you? He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. Let me ask you: Where are *you* headed? Do you have a goal? Do you have a purpose? In what direction is your face set? So many people live their lives with no sense of direction or purpose. Once a traveler stopped for gas at an old country store many miles off the beaten path. Next to the little gas station was a barn whose side was lined with dozens of painted targets. In the exact center of every bull's eye was a bullet hole. The stranger asked the old man pumping the gas, "Who made those bullet holes?" The old man, spit his tobacco out in a stream, and said, "I did." The stranger said, "I've got to hand it to you, you're a great shot!" The old man grinned and said, "Not really. I shoot the bullet holes first and then I paint the target around the holes!" That's the way too many people live their lives. There is no target, no goal and wherever they end up in life, they paint a target around it and say, "This is where I was aiming." That's why so many people end up miserable in life.

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14) Have you ever been in a crowd of people and they were all going in one direction and you were trying to go in the opposite direction? It's tough to swim against the flow but that's what Jesus has commanded us to do. You know whether or not you are heading in the opposite direction of most people in our culture, you know your direction.

Here's a good direction to head toward: Matthew 6:33. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." It is a noble goal if you make the purpose of your life to know Jesus and to seek Him and His kingdom. It's the only purpose that is eternal. If your main purpose is to make money, what good will that money do you a thousand years from today? Even if your goal is something as noble as being a good wife or husband, in a thousand years, that purpose will be exhausted.

Why don't you set your face toward the goal of knowing and serving Jesus? That's a goal that will serve you well for the next couple of millions years or so!

LESSON FOUR: REVENGE (vs. 52- 55)

Our next lesson is seen in the reaction of Jesus and His disciples to the refusal of the Samaritan village to welcome them.

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

Samaritans hated the Jews and Jews hated the Samaritans. Although this happened 2,000 years ago, it's the same today in this region of the world. This area is now called the West Bank and it is dangerous for a Jew to travel into West Bank today. Most Jews avoided the area, and would have traveled along the Jordan River but Jesus 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. But the people in the village rejected Jesus and rejected the messengers of Jesus.

Today, we live in a generation of people who have heard about Jesus. He is giving them the chance to receive Him but they 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. It’s the same today. Jesus won’t *force* you 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?

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

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 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)

James, the half brother of Jesus (not James the brother of John) later wrote: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” (James 1:19-20)

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. There’s a little poem that goes, “There once was a dog named August; Who was always jumping to conclusions; One day he jumped at the conclusion of a mule; And that was the last day of August!” 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.” I’ve said it before, but anger and bitterness is a toxic acid that always destroys its own container.

I don’t know if you realize this about me, but I used to have a problem with losing my temper. I recall one basketball game I played in as a high school senior. I was constantly driving to the basket and getting hacked, but the referee under the basket was missing the fouls. As I would run back down the court to get on defense, I would shout, “Come on ref!” I was getting angrier by the moment. Finally the referee warned me to cool it or I would be ejected. The next time down the court one our players, Cecil Schofield, was fouled. As he went to the line to shoot, the offending referee handed him the ball. I was glaring at the referee, but I shouted encouragement to Cecil. I said, “Come on, Cecil you can do it!” The referee blew his whistle and pointed at me and said, “Number 34, you’re out of the game!” I was shocked. (I had no idea the ref’s first name was Cecil!) But I had already said enough angry things to be thrown out. I can remember the gym got quiet as I walked over to the bench. I was embarrassed for my parents; I was embarrassed for my Lord because by then I was trying to live for Jesus before my high school friends. I had allowed my anger to ruin my testimony.

I heard about a student Sunday School teacher who used creative object lessons to teach his high school students. One Sunday, he wanted to teach them about anger. He had a big white poster board on the wall. He told each one of the students to draw a picture to represent someone they disliked or had made them angry. Sally was a high school junior who had just broken up with her boyfriend. She drew a likeness of the girl who “stole” her boyfriend away from her. One student drew a picture of her younger brother. Another drew a picture of mean high school teacher. Then the teacher gave them some darts and had each student took turns throwing darts at the pictures they drew. Sally enjoyed it as she found herself venting her anger at the other girl. The students were so enthusiastic, they threw with such force, parts of the poster board were torn and ripped. They complained when the teacher finally called for a halt because the class time was almost over. At that moment, the teacher simply walked up the poster board and turned it over. On the other side was a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross. But his body and face were covered with holes and his eyes and right shoulder had been ripped away by the darts. The wise teacher closed the class with these words of Jesus from Matthew 25 and then dismissed the class. “In as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me.” Let’s listen to Jesus today. Let’s learn we need to avoid the angry spirit displayed by James and John. Here’s the final lesson.

LESSON FIVE: PRIORITIES (vs. 56-62)

When we started Luke 9 several weeks ago, I told you the theme of this chapter is discipleship.

Glance back at verse 23 and you’ll see Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” The chapter ends with three potential disciples who have misplaced priorities. We will see

1. Following Jesus must have priority over your: POSSESSIONS

Everywhere Jesus went He told people to follow Him. The first potential disciple sounded pretty enthusiastic. He said, “Lord I will follow you anywhere!” Remember, Jesus has the ability to see beyond a person’s words to examine our hearts. He saw in the heart of this man he really hadn’t counted the cost of discipleship. He warned the man even foxes and birds have places to stay, but the Son of Man was what we would call today a homeless person. Here was a man who obviously cherished and treasured his home and his possessions. Jesus told him in order to follow Him he would have to leave his comfort zone.

The idea of home is precious to all of us. Most of us agree with the saying, “Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” We get attached to the people in our home, and to the “stuff” we have accumulated through the years. Have you ever stopped to consider the earthly poverty of Jesus? He had no possessions. When He died, his only possessions were the clothes on his back. His was so poor He had to get his tax payments out of the mouth of a fish. He was so poor He had to be buried in a borrowed tomb! I love 2 Corinthians 8:9, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” Oh, Jesus *was* wealthy—He possessed all the wealth of the Universe, but He laid it all aside to come down this planet. It’s a riches to rags story! I said a moment ago Jesus was a homeless man. Actually He had a home. His home was in heaven and He never felt quite at home in this world. If you are His follower, you will put more value on *that* home than you will on the home where you hang your hat. When you become a disciple of Jesus, you won’t hold onto the possessions of this world very tightly and your possessions won’t possess you. And when you come to Jesus, you become a “rags to riches story.” He takes the filthy rags of your self-righteousness and exchanges them for the exquisite robe of righteousness He gives you.

2. Following Jesus must have priority over your: PLANS

This second potential disciple seems to have a legitimate excuse. He wants to be excused to bury his father. On the surface you may think Jesus’ reply is harsh and uncaring. Jesus doesn’t accept the excuse. Instead He says, “Let the dead bury the dead—but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” Is Jesus implying we should neglect our family in their time of need? Not at all.

Bible scholars agree the phrase “First, I must bury my father” refers to the duty of a firstborn son to stay close to his home until his father died. Now, we can be certain this man’s father had not just died in the past few hours. Jewish burial customs dictated a corpse be buried within 24 hours of death, because they didn’t embalm like the Egyptians had done for years. So, if the man’s father recently died, he wouldn’t have been out in the setting where Jesus was calling for disciples; he would have been following the carefully prescribed burial customs. No, this man’s father was still alive. He was telling Jesus one day he *would* follow Jesus. That day would be sometime in the future after his father died, *then* he would follow Jesus. In other words, this potential disciple already had his prearranged plans in place and he would not deviate from his plans.

Jesus was using a play on words when He said, “Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead.” But because there were thousands of people dying spiritually, it was a higher priority to preach the good news of the kingdom to them.

This potential disciple was the first spiritual procrastinator. Have you ever been guilty of spiritual procrastination? Maybe you’ve haven’t gotten around to it yet. You really *intend* to follow Jesus, but there are some other things you think you have to do first. Oh, you intend to stop just attending and start serving Jesus in Sunday School but you haven’t gotten around to it yet. You *intend* to follow Christ in baptism, but not yet—you have some other plans first. You *intend* to join a church and get involved but not yet—you have some other plans first.

For every potential disciple who is still trying to finish his own plans first, let me tell you a sobering truth: You are going to run out of days long before you run out of intentions. Jesus says, “Follow me!” I love the fact when Jesus told someone to follow He expected them to act at that moment. He didn’t say, “We are going to sing twelve verses of an invitation hymn.” He said, “Follow me” and turned around and started walking—will you follow?

Finally,

3. Following Jesus must have priority over your: PAST

Potential disciple number three wanted to “go back” to his family and friends and say farewell. These family and friends were probably not going to say, “Great! You are going to follow Jesus. Good for you!” Jesus knew when a person took up the cross, it affected all past relationships. When most people decide to *really* follow Jesus, their old friends and family think they are crazy. They think they have gone off into some kind of religious frenzy.

This disciple used one of the most dangerous words in the Bible. Did you catch it? This one word is so harmful you should never utter it to God. It’s an abomination before Him. It insults and profanes the holiness of God. Have you found the word yet? It’s the horrible word “but.”

This man said, “I will follow you, *but* ... ” And it doesn’t matter what he said after, because the word “but” canceled out his first statement.

CONCLUSION

In my last church, one of my favorite ladies was a retired librarian. I had asked her to correct any grammatical mistakes I made in the pulpit, which she did on occasion but always with a sweet and kind spirit. She was a very dignified, educated lady. One day she was giving the devotion for her Sunday School class luncheon where I was a guest. Her theme was “A Dangerous Three Lettered Word: ‘But’.” She used this text as her focus. I’ll never forget that devotion. I don’t remember her exact words, but she basically said the word “but” was a powerful negative conjunction. It negates, or cancels out the impact of any statement preceding it. She gave examples of people who make excuses, such as “I *would* attend church *but* I’ve got company; *but* it’s the only morning I can sleep in, etc.” She talked about people who say, “I *would* serve the Lord *but* ... *but* ... *but* ... *but* ... ” She really got fired up! All the little ladies were nodding! At that moment she departed from her prepared remarks and said, “Pastor, I just wish we could kick all the “buts” out of our church ... ” There was a moment of stunned silence as she realized what she just said. After a few moments, I said, “Yes, ma’am. You take names and I’ll kick butts!” At

that moment, everyone started laughing—and we couldn’t quit! *But* she sure got her point across!

Have you been handing Jesus some excuse? Like David Ring says, “I have Cerebral Palsy. What’s your excuse?” Jesus says you can’t look backward if you are following Him. I didn’t grow up on a farm but I worked on one for part of a summer. Mr. Wiggins told me not to look back at the plow, but fix my eye on a tree ahead and steer toward it instead. I’ve got to confess I peeked backward a couple of times and every time I did, there was a swerve in the furrow line.

As you and I walk along with Jesus, He brings us closer and closer to being conformed to His likeness: self-denial; and dying daily to our own feelings and desires. As we move along, He wants us to forget the past. We can’t go back there. We must fix our eyes on Jesus and keep growing and progressing. Are you doing that?

This church doesn’t need more members; we need more disciples and more disciple-makers. We don’t need more believers; we need more disciples and disciple-makers. Will you hear the call of Jesus today? He is saying, “Follow me.” It may mean following Him into salvation, into church membership, into baptism, into service, whatever it is. What’s your excuse?

When the Spanish explorer, Cortez, landed at Vera Cruz in 1519, he only had 700 men. How was he able to conquer what we now call Mexico? When they landed, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move. We need to burn the ships to our past and press on in discipleship.

OUTLINE

LESSON ONE: GREATNESS (v. 46-48)

LESSON TWO: ACCEPTANCE (v. 49-50)

LESSON THREE: PURPOSE (v. 51)

1. Jesus was born to die for us

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."
1 Peter 3:18

2. Your life direction will determine your destination

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." *Matthew 7:13-14*

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

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." *James 1:19-20*

LESSON FIVE: PRIORITIES (v. 56-62)

Following Jesus must have priority over your:

1. Possessions
2. Plans
3. Past



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes