

Jesus' Last Journey 1

This study is based on Luke 9:51–10:24

and *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 53

—see also *Messiah*, chapter 53.

The turn toward Jerusalem

Jesus walked the roads and paths of Israel for three and a half years. From north of the Sea of Galilee, on both the east and west sides of the Jordan River, to Tyre and Sidon on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, to the shores of the Dead Sea in the south, Jesus had covered the countryside. According to Matthew 9:35, “Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and sicknesses” (NCV).

As Jesus traveled toward Jerusalem for the last time, He changed His method of working. Before this time, He had always tried to avoid publicity. He hushed those who praised Him and quieted anyone who declared that He was the Messiah. Sometimes He left towns before daylight so no one would know where He was headed. He tried to keep the crowd's expectations under control while He taught new truths about the kingdom of God.

Now His attitude toward publicity had changed. As He traveled toward Jerusalem, great crowds walked with Him. Announcements were sent ahead to the towns He would pass through, telling all that He was coming. Before, He had worked quietly—but now that He was headed for His own sacrifice, He invited attention.

As they traveled the countryside with Jesus, the disciples had longed for Jesus to go to Jerusalem, stand in the temple square, and declare Himself to be the Messiah. They wondered why Jesus hesitated. They were sure that the people would gather on His side, support His cause, and band together to drive out their enemies. They had begged Him to do so, sure that all of Israel would flock to follow Him.

But now they understood the depth of His enemies' hatred. Now they realized what would happen if Jesus should fall into their hands. They knew that the danger would increase with every footstep taken closer to Jerusalem.

The disciples would have done anything to stop Jesus from making this journey. They begged Him to turn back. Jesus could hear the fear and concern for Him in their voices. Knowing what lay ahead, it was hard for Jesus to lead His friends into so much misery.

Reflect on the story

“Satan was at hand to press his temptations upon the Son of man. Why should He now go to Jerusalem, to certain death? All around Him were souls hungering for the bread of life. On every hand were suffering ones waiting for His word of healing. The work to be wrought

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by the gospel of His grace was but just begun. And He was full of the vigor of manhood's prime. Why not go forward to the vast fields of the world with the words of His grace, the touch of His healing power? Why not take to Himself the joy of giving light and gladness to those darkened and sorrowing millions? Why leave the harvest gathering to His disciples, so weak in faith, so dull of understanding, so slow to act? Why face death now, and leave the work in its infancy? The foe who in the wilderness had confronted Christ assailed Him now with fierce and subtle temptations. Had Jesus yielded for a moment, had He changed His course in the least particular to save Himself, Satan's agencies would have triumphed, and the world would have been lost.

“But Jesus had ‘steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.’ The one law of His life was the Father's will. In the visit to the temple in His boyhood, He had said to Mary, ‘Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?’ Luke 2:49. At Cana, when Mary desired Him to reveal His miraculous power, His answer was, ‘Mine hour is not yet come.’ John 2:4. With the same words He replied to His brothers when they urged Him to go to the feast. But in God's great plan the hour had been appointed for the offering of Himself for the sins of men, and that hour was soon to strike. He would not fail nor falter. His steps are turned toward Jerusalem, where His foes have long plotted to take His life; now He will lay it down. He set His face steadfastly to go to persecution, denial, rejection, condemnation, and death” (*The Desire of Ages*, 486; see also *Messiah*, 273, 274).

Questions to consider

1. Why did Jesus change His method of working as He neared the end of His ministry? What practical benefits did this change bring? What risks?

2. What temptation did Satan use against Jesus at this time? Would that temptation have appealed to you?

3. “The one law of His life was the Father's will.” How would you describe the “law” of your life?

Reflect on the story

“Jesus sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to announce that He was coming. But these Samaritans hated the Jews and they refused to let Jesus stay there because He was going to the Jewish people in Jerusalem. Because of their prejudice, they missed out on the blessing He could have brought to their whole town.

“James and John were greatly insulted at this rude treatment. Seeing Mount Carmel in the distance, they were reminded of the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. ‘Lord, do You want us to call fire

down from heaven to destroy these people?' they asked.

"They were surprised at Jesus' sharp answer. 'You don't realize what kind of spirit you're speaking with. I didn't come to destroy people. I came to save them.'

"Jesus never forces people to accept Him. He accepts only the willing surrender of love. A desire to hurt others who don't agree with us or appreciate our work can only come from Satan. Nothing offends God more than when people try to harass or torment those who won't accept their religious views.

"Jesus spent a good portion of the final months of His ministry in Perea, the area across the Jordan from Judea. Here, with crowds following Him at every step, He repeated many of the things He had taught in other places. He sent out seventy other disciples—ones He had been teaching and training as they followed Him—to go two-by-two to the villages He would visit. Even after His rejection at the Samaritan town, Jesus directed the seventy disciples to visit the cities of Samaria first.

"Just before He returned to heaven, Jesus directed His disciples to Samaria as one of the first places they should preach His gospel. When they went to Samaria, the disciples found that the people there had been won over by Jesus' love. Many Samaritans joined their former enemies, the Jews, as they began the Christian church.

"When Jesus sent out the seventy disciples, He told them that if the people of a city wouldn't listen to them, they should shake the dust off their sandals and remind them that God's kingdom was coming. They weren't to do this out of anger or spite, but to show how serious it was to refuse to listen to Jesus' gospel. If the people rejected Jesus' message, they also rejected their Savior" (*Messiah*, 274, 275; see also *The Desire of Ages*, 486–489).

Questions to consider

1. Why did the Samaritans miss out on blessings Jesus could have brought? What attitudes or prejudices do we have that might make us miss out on blessings?

2. When is it right to respond with anger while defending God's cause?

3. If nothing offends God more than harassing those who won't accept our religious views, what should we do when others reject our message?

4. What might have been the result if Jesus had ignored or encouraged the disciples' anger at the Samaritans? Would they have neglected to share the gospel with the Samaritans after Jesus' return to heaven?

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5. How do we reconcile the statement “Nothing offends God more than when people try to harass or torment those who won’t accept their religious views” with His instruction that the disciples shake the dust off the sandals when leaving the cities of those who refused to listen?
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Reflect on the story

“Then His mind reverted to the Galilean towns where so much of His ministry had been spent. In deeply sorrowful accents He exclaimed, ‘Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.’

“To those busy towns about the Sea of Galilee, heaven’s richest blessings had been freely offered. Day after day the Prince of life had gone in and out among them. The glory of God, which prophets and kings had longed to see, had shone upon the multitudes that thronged the Saviour’s steps. Yet they had refused the heavenly Gift.

“With a great show of prudence the rabbis had warned the people against receiving the new doctrines taught by this new teacher; for His theories and practices were contrary to the teachings of the fathers. The people gave credence to what the priests and Pharisees taught, in place of seeking to understand the word of God for themselves. They honored the priests and rulers instead of honoring God, and rejected the truth that they might keep their own traditions. Many had been impressed and almost persuaded; but they did not act upon their convictions, and were not reckoned on the side of Christ. Satan presented his temptations, until the light appeared as darkness. Thus many rejected the truth that would have proved the saving of the soul.

“The True Witness says, ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.’ Revelation 3:20. Every warning, reproof, and entreaty in the word of God or through His messengers is a knock at the door of the heart. It is the voice of Jesus asking for entrance. With every knock unheeded, the disposition to open becomes weaker. The impressions of the Holy Spirit if disregarded today, will not be as strong tomorrow. The heart becomes less impressible, and lapses into a perilous unconsciousness of the shortness of life, and of the great eternity beyond. Our condemnation in the judgment will not result from the fact that we have been in error, but from the fact that we have neglected heaven-sent opportunities for learning what is truth” (*The Desire of Ages*, 489, 490; see also *Messiah*, 275).

Questions to consider

1. If the towns of Galilee will be judged more harshly than heathen towns, will Christians also be judged more harshly than atheists? Than Muslims or Buddhists?
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2. Are we in danger of listening to others and holding on to our traditions instead of trying to understand God's Word for ourselves? How can we recognize this danger in ourselves?

3. How can we be sure that we heed the knock at our hearts? What might be the result if we do not?

Reflect on the story

“The most respected, the greatest and wisest men of that time, did not understand what Jesus was. But these fishermen and tax collectors knew. From time to time, when they were most open to the Holy Spirit, the disciples realized that God—dressed in the body of a human—was really standing with them. Often when Jesus taught them from the Old Testament—especially verses that pointed to Him, the Messiah—the disciples understood better than those who had written the words.

“The only way we improve our understanding of truth is to keep our hearts open to the Holy Spirit. Science is too limited to understand the plan of salvation. Philosophy cannot explain it. Salvation can be understood only by experience. Only a person who sees his or her own sinfulness can understand the precious value of the Savior” (*Messiah*, 276; see also *The Desire of Ages*, 494, 495).

Questions to consider

1. What is the only way salvation can be understood? What does this mean?

2. The greatest, most respected religious leaders of that time didn't understand who Jesus was. But simple fisherman did. What does this say to us today?
