

## The Journey

Luke 9:51

When does a journey begin? Does it begin when you first think of going on a trip? Does it begin when you decide upon a destination? Or maybe it starts when you make a reservation. Have you had a moment like this? “I can’t believe we’re actually going to Hawaii.” “You mean you’re taking me to Paris?”

But something definitely changes once you know you’re going somewhere. You schedule time off from work. You arrange for someone to take care of the dog and cat. You buy clothes for the trip. Then the day comes when you pack your bags. It feels very real at that point. If you’re my girls that’s like a week before you leave. If you’re like me. It’s the night before. You see the trip hasn’t started geographically, but it has certainly started mentally and emotionally.

But then comes that point when you finally pull out of the driveway. We were here. Now, we’re going there. “Did you remember the passports? Did you close all the windows? Did you lock all the doors? Did you turn the air down?” You finally get on the airplane and strap in. You feel your back press against the back of your seat as two giant Pratt and Whitney jets launch you on your journey. You first board the ship and you check out the room with its view. You lean over the railing as you pull away from the pier. You are officially on your way.

But not all journeys are vacations or adventures. There is the young soldier who is shipped out for the first time. What will you face in Afghanistan? What will it be like in Iraq? It takes just a couple of days to get there, but the journey lasts years. There is the journey that ultimately leads you to Rochester Minnesota and surgery at the Mayo Clinic. It’s a journey filled with so many stops and detours along the way. How many doctors? How many hopes and disappointments got you to this point?

Some journeys aren’t geographical. They aren’t from point A to point B on a map. There is the journey that begins with a first kiss and ends with a kiss on wedding day. That begins a whole other journey. There is the journey that begins when she holds out a little plastic handle with a blue plus sign. There is the journey that starts with submitting your college application and ends with a cap and gown.

There are darker destinations as well. There is the heart-rending journey that ends with a divorce decree. There is the journey of grief when a loved one dies. The destination is supposed to be

someplace called “New Normal,” but nobody seems to know where it is or what it even looks like. There is the journey that ends with closing the doors on your business, and your dreams with it.

Over these next few weeks we are going on a journey with Jesus. There is a section of Luke’s gospel that stretches over ten chapters known as **the journey to Jerusalem**. This journey stretches from 9:51 all the way to 19:41. It’s almost half the book, and yet it only covers only a few weeks of Jesus’ life. It chronicles the ministry of Jesus as he makes his way for the last time to Jerusalem. He has been here twice before during his ministry years. But this time is different. Jesus has a date with destiny.

Jesus’ ministry lasts three years and we might think that the gospels give equal time to all of them, but they don’t. The gospels, and Luke especially, begin to zero in the closer we get to the cross. There is a great emphasis on the final days of Jesus. Everything is building to a crescendo.

The journey to Jerusalem begins in 9:51, *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”* At first, it almost seems like a throwaway verse as a part of a larger story about a Samaritan village that didn’t receive Jesus, but something changes here. There is a change in priorities, a shift of focus.

**Luke 9:51 is a pivotal point in the book of Luke.** This chapter is the high-water mark of Jesus’ earthly ministry in a couple of ways. Earlier in the chapter we have **the feeding of the 5,000 which marks the height of Jesus’ popularity with the masses.** John even tells us in his gospel that the people wanted to make Jesus king by force, not because he filled them spiritually, but because he filled their bellies with free food.

**Chapter 9 is also a spiritual highpoint** in Luke’s narrative. **The twelve disciples are sent out** on their own for the first time. **Peter makes that good confession** that Jesus is the Christ. The Son of God. There is also a **literal mountain top experience** for the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain, where they see Jesus not just as the Son of Man, but as the Son of God. They see Jesus in his full divine glory. This is known as the transfiguration. Two Old Testament heroes of the faith, Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets also appear in the glorious splendor of their resurrection bodies. The Scripture says *“They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem (9:31).”* Jesus is already looking to his final journey to Jerusalem and what will happen there. He is already thinking about fulfilling his mission.

So many things seem to shift after this verse. From here on out, **the crowds get smaller**. Jesus' popularity begins to wane. In fact, it seems at times as though Jesus is turning away the crowds. He ignores all the advice of the church growth experts, and seems intent on building a smaller following. As David Platt points out in his book *Radical*, Jesus is the only preacher to start a sermon with thousands of people listening, and end it with only 12 people in the audience, and call it a successful sermon. He's more interested in small group ministry. He spends a lot of time preparing the twelve disciples. He spends time in people's homes—the home of Mary and Martha, the homes of Pharisees, the home of Zacchaeus. He seems more interested in the quality of his followers than the quantity.

After 9:51, **Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders intensifies**. He calls them on the carpet, and they look for ways to bring him down. He goes right into the home of a Pharisee and then pronounces six judgments on them.

This isn't just a physical journey. Yes, he is travelling to Jerusalem, but Jesus isn't just going from point A to point B. In fact, if you get a Bible atlas and you track each of Jesus' stops in this journey; you will quickly realize he's not going in a straight line. There is a lot of zigzagging and back and forth. He's not like most men who are all about getting there and setting a land speed record in the process. I remember growing up and we were on a road trip, if I said, "Dad, I have to go to the bathroom," he'd say, "tie it in a knot." There would be no stopping. But Jesus makes a lot of stops along the way. If Jesus is so determined to go to Jerusalem, why so much meandering around?

**Because this journey isn't just about geography.** It's a spiritual journey. Jesus never loses sight of the destination. He wouldn't be diverted or distracted in his journey. The ultimate goal is always in view, but Jesus is never so task-oriented that he loses sight of where he is, what he is doing, and who he is with. He doesn't let the journey cloud his vision of the moment. He sees the needs and opportunities that lay before him. At one point, Herod wants to kill Jesus, and Jesus says, "*Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal (Lk. 13:32).'*" Is Jesus just giving his itinerary for the next three days, or is there a prophetic tone when he talks about reaching his goal, his destination on the third day?

Our text begins with the explanation of why the journey begins here and now. Because "*the days drew near*" our verse says. This is just a single word in the original. My Greek dictionary defines it as "to come to the end of a period of time, with the implication of the completion of an implied plan."

Think of it this way. “It’s almost time.” You know that scene in a spy movie or a heist flick, where all the characters must synchronize their watches, because everything is happening on schedule. There is a timetable to keep. Jesus has an appointment in Jerusalem. He has a mission to accomplish, and a schedule to keep. The countdown clock is ticking down. Tick. Tick. Tick. It’s almost time.

And what’s the clock counting down to? The time *“for him to be taken up or received up.”* This isn’t about Jesus being put up on a cross. This is the same word used in the book of Acts to describe Jesus’ ascension into heaven. He’s not just looking to his death on the cross. He’s not just looking to his resurrection. He is looking to returning to heaven where he is seated at his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. This was a way of referring to everything that would happen in Jerusalem that would ultimately end with his return to glory. Jesus’ mission wasn’t completed when he died on the cross for our sins. It wasn’t completed when he rose from the grave conquering death. **It was completed when he returned to heaven to secure for us an eternal home.** If Jesus’ ministry had stopped on earth, we wouldn’t have a heavenly hope.

The Greek text next literally reads *“he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”* Some translations say he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Others say he was steadfast or determined. This was a figure of speech meaning a iron-willed determination. He has a goal in mind and nothing is going to divert or distract him from that goal.

- Luke 9:53 *“But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.”*
- Luke 13:22 *“He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.”*
- Luke 17:11 *“On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.”*
- Luke 18:31 *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.”*
- Luke 19:28 *“And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.”*

**Everywhere he went and everything he did, Jesus was keeping the destination in mind.** Jesus has an appointment with destiny in Jerusalem.

Here is what we must understand about Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem. Jesus knew what was going to happen to him. They didn’t take his life. He gave it. They didn’t have to catch Jesus. He came to them. Nothing that happened in Jerusalem caught Jesus by surprise. The betrayal, the arrest, the kangaroo court with its false witnesses, the beatings, the crucifixion, all of it. It was all a part of the

plan. Jesus didn't find himself caught up in circumstances beyond his control. He purposely set his face toward that goal and he went.

I was reading a couple of liberal theologians this week. One said that Jesus went to Jerusalem to make a demonstration against imperial control over the city and the temple.<sup>i</sup> For him this was nothing more than a political statement—the ancient equivalent of a march in D.C. Another says that he went expecting to ignite some sort of revolutionary powder keg, and his followers expected divine intervention and he thought he would be able to set up a literal earthly kingdom, but his plan backfired severely.<sup>ii</sup>

But what does Jesus actually say about why he was going to Jerusalem. Earlier in chapter 9 he says quite clearly, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* A little bit later he tells the disciples, *“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men (9:44).”* In chapter 18, when they are just about to Jerusalem Jesus again tells the twelve,

<sup>31</sup> *See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.* <sup>32</sup> *For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.* <sup>33</sup> *And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.*

Now let me ask you, why was Jesus going to Jerusalem? To die and rise again. Why would he do that? Why would Jesus go to Jerusalem knowing what was going to happen to him there? We can answer this question on at least three different levels.

**On the first level, he did it for you.** He did it because he loves you and wants to have a relationship with you, and he was willing to pay any price to make that relationship a possibility. This is more personal than he died for people. He died for humanity. He died for your sins. He rose that you might conquer death. He ascended to heaven that you might have a room in the Father's house. The apostle Paul saw this as a very personal act. Listen to the personal pronouns in Galatians 2:20 says, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* There is a line in C.S. Lewis' Science Fiction novel, *Perelandra*, that captures this very personal nature of the love and grace of God. *“When He died in the Wounded World He died not for men, but for each man. If each man had been the only man made, He would have done no less.”*

**On the second level, he did it for the Father.** He wanted to honor God the Father and fulfill his will. This is why the night before his crucifixion as Jesus wrestled in prayer with the Father he said, *“Not my will, but your will be done.”* It also had to be done to satisfy God’s justice and to turn back his righteous anger for our sins. It is God’s holiness that we have violated in our sin, and it is to God payment must be made for that sin. This is one of great doctrines of the Christian faith. It is called the Substitutionary Atonement. Jesus was our substitute in paying the penalty, so that you and I could be at one with God. God sent his own Son to make that payment for you. Galatians 1:4 says Jesus, *“gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”*

**On the third level he did it for himself.** This was his mission, his purpose. This is why he was born. This was his nature, his character as our Creator and Savior. He didn’t just do it because it was the right thing to do, or because we needed it, or because he had to. He did it because it’s who he is.

Hebrews 12:2 also tells us why he did it? It says he did it for the joy. What? Yeah, he did it for the joy. *“Jesus...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* Have you ever endured a great hardship because of the reward, or the joy that awaited you on the other side? You endure weeks of grueling practices so that you could win the championship. You train and train and train to run the big race. You went to school and studied into the wee hours instead of partying so you could get that degree and career you wanted.

Jesus did it for his own joy. But what joy is he talking about. It can’t just be the joy of sitting at the right hand of the father. He already had that joy. That’s where he was before he came to earth. He could have stayed there. He could have enjoyed that glory forever. But there was something he could get only by coming and dying that was even better than that— something worth coming and dying for, something that would give him indescribable joy, and that is sharing his eternal glory with you. That’s what changes. We will get to sit with him in glory at the right hand of the father. To sit at the right hand of someone is to share equally in their power and honor and their glory. His joy is that he would share that with you as your Creator and Savior. Revelation 3:21 says, *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*

You see the cross wasn't the ultimate destination. It was just a scheduled stop on the way. It wasn't even the empty tomb. Easter Sunday is not the destination. The destination wasn't in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was just the way to get there.

In a very real sense, you were the destination. You were the destination! You were why he did it. Jesus' greatest joy was to be found in sharing his glory with you. Now if his greatest joy is to be found in sharing his glory with you, where do you think your greatest joy is to be found? If the destination that drove him was to share his glory with you, what do you suppose your destination is?

If you are a Christian, then your greatest destination is to share with Christ in his glory! Everything else is just a stop along the way. If you're living life with any other destination in mind then it's a distraction and a diversion from the real thing. If you're not a follower of Christ this morning, then I want to ask you, what are you living for? What is your destination? What's the point of living? Why are you here? What is this all adding up to? We are all headed somewhere in life? Do you have any idea where you are going? Do you know why you are going there? And do you know how to get there. I can tell you how to get to Jesus. He paid the price. The ticket's already been bought. You turn from your sin and you turn to him. You place your faith in Jesus. He is the way to the Father. You trust him and the fact that he died to forgive your sins. In faith, you join with him in the waters of baptism where you are united in his death and resurrection. You receive the forgiveness of sins. You receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You rise to walk in newness of life, and you share in his joy with him.

Jesus is the ultimate destination for your journey. No matter where you are in that journey. No matter where you came from in that journey, there is no better destination than Jesus in his glory. Are you living life with that destination in mind? Does it drive where you go and what you do? Is it why you are here? What's your destination?

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<sup>i</sup> Crossan, J. D. (2012, March 31). Why Did Jesus Go To Jerusalem? A Holy Week Reflection. Retrieved March 08, 2017, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dominic-crossan/a-death-in-jerusalem\\_b\\_1391563.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dominic-crossan/a-death-in-jerusalem_b_1391563.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Why Did Jesus Go To Jerusalem? (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2017, from <https://ehrmanblog.org/why-did-jesus-go-to-jerusalem/>