

This Journey is for Everyone

Christianity is a faith of marvelous mystery. It is filled with paradoxes that only find their resolution in the power and majesty of God. We're in this world, but not of it. We find our life by losing it. We receive by giving. We are exalted when we are humble. Our weakness is our strength. We lead by serving. All the riches of the kingdom come to those who are poor in Spirit. We are free in Christ, and yet we are his servants. The first will be last. The last will be first. We have incredible dignity created in the image of God, and yet we are fallen in our sin and filled with depravity. We wrestle with the opposite pull of God's sovereignty and our own human free will and responsibility. There is a glorious tension between these extremes. Like the positive and negative poles on a battery, there is power between them.

This morning we want to celebrate one side of a glorious paradox. We saw the other side of this mystery a few weeks ago when we looked at Luke 13:24 where Jesus urges us to make every effort to enter by the narrow door. Jesus warns that there will be many who try to enter, but won't get in.

The other side of this paradox is that even though the door is narrow, and few will be those who find it, the door is open to anyone and everyone. Just a few verses down in verse 29 Jesus proclaims the universal appeal and draw of the kingdom of God. *"People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God."* This feast is a symbol when Jesus comes back and sits in fellowship with his people, they will be people of all sorts, from all backgrounds, from all sorts of places.

We will not sit down for that feast until Jesus returns, and yet there is a meal that we share with Jesus now, and with each other. It is a meal of fellowship. It is a meal of thanksgiving. It is a meal of remembering. We call it the Lord's supper. Communion. The Eucharist which means thanksgiving. This meal reminds us that any believer who partakes of the bread and the cup is one with Christ, one in his blood and in his death, and in his life. And if we are one with him, we are one with each other.

Our big idea for this morning is simply this. This is a journey for everyone. It doesn't matter who you are. We've been travelling with Jesus through 10 chapters in Luke as he makes his final journey to Jerusalem and the cross. As we follow this journey, we are learning about our own journey as we follow Jesus in life.

What we will see this morning is that it doesn't matter where you're from, this journey is for you. It doesn't matter what's happened to you, this journey is for you. It doesn't matter what you've done, this journey is for you.

I. It Doesn't Matter Where You're From

I want to point out three encounters on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem that shows this journey is for everyone. We begin where we were last week, Luke 9:52-55 where Jesus sent emissaries or messengers to a Samaritan Village to prepare the way for Jesus.

Verse 52 says, "*And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him.*" Now last week we dealt with the fact that this village rejected Jesus, but that's not what I want to talk about this morning.

What we need to see this morning is just how significant it is that Jesus sent people to a Samaritan village at all. That's a big deal. Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Let me give you a real quick history lesson here. We jump back about 1,000 years before the time of Jesus. Solomon, the king of Israel dies, and hands the kingdom over to his son, Rehoboam. Unlike, his father, Rehoboam was a tyrant who ruled the people as a brutal task master. This led 10 of the tribes to break away and form their own kingdom under the rule of Rehoboam's brother, Jereboam.

The 10 breakaway tribes formed the northern kingdom called Israel, and their capitol was Samaria. Benjamin and Judah remained as the southern kingdom known as Judah with Jerusalem as the capital. Because of this split, the northern tribes quit worshipping God in the temple and quickly gave themselves over to idol worship. Every king they had was an evil, wicked, idol worshipping king.

Because of their rebellion and unfaithfulness, God sent the kingdom of Assyria to punish them. Israel did not repent. They continued in their wicked ways. So under the military might of their rulers Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon I, and Sennacherib, they dismantled, destroyed and sent Israel into captivity. The 10 tribes disappeared from history, and today are known as the ten lost tribes. Only the poorest of the poor were left behind. Meanwhile, the Assyrians brought in captives from their other conquests and resettled in and around Samaria. These foreigners intermingled, intermarried, and interbred with the few Jews who remained. It was their descendants who were known as the Samaritans.

Although the southern kingdom of Judah would itself be conquered and sent into captivity, under God's provision, they later returned to the Promised Land and Jerusalem, and were able to

maintain their national and ethnic identity. They despised the Samaritans who tried to hamper their efforts in rebuilding Jerusalem.

The Jews looked down on them as unfaithful half-breeds that had been rejected by God. Let me give you an idea how deep this hatred ran. Jews had proverb that said, “a piece of bread given by a Samaritan is more unclean than Swine’s flesh.” They referred to the Samaritans not as a nation, or a people, but as herd, like pigs or cattle. To call someone a Samaritan was worst of insults. Jews would walk thirty miles out of their way, just to avoid walking through Samaria. Just being there would make them unclean.

Of course, multiple times in the gospels, Jesus doesn’t avoid Samaria. He walks straight through. It doesn’t matter to him. He doesn’t care what people think. He doesn’t care what they say, or what they Tweet, or what they post on Facebook. In John 4, Jesus sits down at a well and offers living water to a Samaritan woman, and because of that one encounter reaches a whole village.

Even though this one village rejects Jesus, he doesn’t turn his back on Samaritans. In the very next chapter, Jesus tells one of his most famous parables. Ironically, the main character of this parable has become so synonymous with loving your enemies and helping strangers, he has become a figure-of-speech. There are laws named after him. It is the parable the good_____. Don’t you find it interesting that after a Samaritan village rejects Jesus, that he turns around and makes a Samaritan the hero of one of his most famous stories?

In another encounter in Luke 17 that we’ll look at in just a moment, Jesus heals a Samaritan of leprosy. In fact, he heals ten of them, but of the ten, only this Samaritan comes back to say, “Thank you.” Luke 17:10 says, “He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thank him.” Then Luke adds this one detail, “and he was a Samaritan.”

Here’s the point. It doesn’t matter where you’re from. Jesus doesn’t care what city you call home. He doesn’t care what side of the tracks you grew up on. He doesn’t care about the color of your skin. He doesn’t care what national borders surround your home or what flag flies over its capitol. None of that matters to him. No matter where you’re from, this journey is for you.

II. It Doesn’t Matter What’s Happened to You

Let’s look a little deeper at those 10 lepers that Jesus heals, because there is another powerful message there.

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance 13 and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." 14 When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

Leprosy in the ancient world included more than the modern Hansen's disease that also goes by the name of leprosy. It applied to a whole host of skin conditions and infectious diseases. People with leprosy were more than shunned. They were banished. They were excluded from religious and social life. They were not welcome in the temple or synagogue. They could not participate in feast days. As they travelled, they had to shout out "Unclean! Unclean!" so that others could maintain safe distance. Expelled from society they lived outside the city walls, they were forced to live in leper colonies until they could prove they were clean.

The general assumption was that leprosy was a mark of God's disapproval. Surely, you had done something to deserve this. God was punishing you for some evil thing in your life. So, it wasn't just the fear of infection or the heebie jeebies that kept people away. Lepers were believed to be cursed. But Jesus saw lepers as an opportunity to show the love and power of God. Jesus didn't shun lepers. He welcomed them. He didn't keep a safe distance. He touched them. He didn't ignore them. He healed them.

Here's the point here. It Doesn't Matter What's Happened to You. No matter what you've been through. No matter what anyone's done to you, or said to you, This journey is for you. It doesn't matter what anyone else says. Jesus invites to follow him.

You see, here's the thing. No matter how unloving people have been, whether it's was your parents, or supposed friends, or rebellious children, or even some misguided church, it doesn't mean that you are unlovable. Jesus loves you. He wants to have a relationship with you. He invites you to follow him. This journey is for you.

III. It Doesn't Matter What You've Done

There is one more person I want you to meet this morning, and this time we know his name. If you spent any time at all in church as little kid, you probably remember him. We find his story in Luke 19, and his name is Zacchaeus. Do you remember the song?

Zacchaeus was a wee, little man,
And a wee, little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,
For the Lord he wanted to see.

And as the Savior came that way,
He looked up in the tree,

Spoken: And he said, "Zaccheus, you come down from there,"

For I'm going to your house today.
For I'm going to your house today.

If there was anyone in Judea more hated than Samaritans, it was tax collectors. I don't think the IRS is anyone's favorite. There's probably not an agent on your Christmas card list, unless you are related. But this comparison doesn't even come close.

Judea was not a free country during the life of Christ. They were a province of Rome. They had been conquered by force, and they were kept in line at the tip of a spear. Rome's economy and wealth flowed from taxes they collected from their provinces. There was an income tax, import taxes, export taxes, sales tax, property tax, emergency tax, inheritance taxes, there was a poll tax you had to pay just for being alive and tolls whenever you travelled.

The job of collecting these taxes was farmed out to the highest bidder, These tax collectors then did everything they could to collect above and beyond what was required to line their own pockets. The system was thoroughly corrupt. To make matters worse, these tax collectors were often fellow Jews who were sticking it to their own people for the benefit and their oppressors and their own bank accounts.

Tax collectors were seen as being synonymous with sinners. They were regarded as traitors and thieves. One of the worst things the Pharisees could accuse Jesus of is that he ate with tax collectors. It was meant as an insult, but Jesus took it as a compliment, because, yes, Jesus even invited tax collectors to follow him. You see, it doesn't matter what you've done, this journey is for you.

It doesn't matter how low down, dirty of thing you did, this journey is for you. It doesn't matter who you betrayed, let down, disappointed, or stabbed in the back, this journey is for you. You past doesn't have to keep you from following him.

Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector to be one of his disciples. Scandalous. Jesus doesn't care. Jesus calls out Zacchaeus and invites himself to dinner. Imagine the murmurs and the stares. Verse 7 says, *"All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to the be the guest of a 'sinner.'"* Jesus doesn't care. Because the love of Jesus reached Zacchaeus in his deepest, darkest place. Jesus met him in the very place that everyone else hated and despised. Jesus loved him in his place greed and theft.

Look at verse 8, "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'"

This is sorrow and repentance. Zacchaeus is a changed man, because Jesus loved him where he was at. And listen to what Jesus says, "*Today salvation has come to this house, because the man, too is a son of Abraham. For the son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*"

It doesn't matter how lost you are, this journey is for you.