

Luke 9:51-62

If we were to put a title to our text, it would surely have to be something like, “How Not to Follow Jesus.” There just isn’t anyone here for us to imitate. But perhaps this is a good thing. We’re not the best followers either. So should others imitate us? Maybe on our good days. But not all the time. Definitely not on our bad days. James and John are having one of those bad days here in our text. Both of these men will become apostles, and we are to imitate the apostles. But not in everything.

To apply an analogy here, James and John are good soil. I’m drawing from Jesus’ parable of the four types of soil. In fact we see all four types in our text. The seed of the Word of God grows in good soil. James and John are this soil. They follow Jesus well. But not this day. Keep in mind that good soil has chunks of manure throughout. Well we see one of those chunks in our text.

James and John react to the unbelief exhibited by the people in a Samaritan village. These people flat out reject Jesus. They refuse to welcome Him into their town. We know what type of soil this is, and so do James and John. They’re the hardened path. They have no use for Jesus. So why should they be permitted to live? “*Shall we tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*” This is what James and John ask of Jesus. Hey, Elijah did it to some pagans back in 2 Kings. And God did it to Sodom and Gomorrah. These Samaritans are just as wicked. They just told Jesus to get lost! So let the fireworks begin. And James and John want to light the fuse.

Oh they light a fuse alright. But not the one they are wanting to light. They light the fuse of Jesus’ anger. He stops short and turns, and He rebukes them to their face. In the Greek the word means a sharp, scathing rebuke.

And you know what? Sometimes I deserve the same rebuke. Last week a burglar fleeing police lost control of his vehicle. It flipped over the barricade on the Poplar Street Bridge, and he fell to his death. And when I saw this news story, I have to admit I did not feel sorry for him. I did not wish for this to happen to him, as James and John wished to destroy the people of the Samaritan town. Nonetheless that same spirit dwells in me.

And unless you are without sin, it dwells in you as well. We’re not the hardened path, you and I. We don’t tell Jesus to scram. We’re here today. We’re listening to the seed of the Word of God. We’re good soil. Unlike some others we know...or hear about in the news. Oh we would never tell someone to go to hell. James and John do that in our text. But we’re better soil than that. In fact, we don’t come to church so much for ourselves as for others. Others need to see what really good soil looks like.

Now maybe I’m exaggerating a bit. We may not actually think this way. But this attitude is in us. It lives in the hearts of good soil. And today, through this text before us, God confronts us. He shows us what really is in our hearts. There’s a Pharisee in there. And he wants desperately to take control of us. But if he can’t do that, he’s content to at least be a back-seat driver.

There’s something really wrong with James and John. And it’s the same thing that’s wrong with us. We judge others...a lot. But look at Jesus. If anyone has a right to judge that Samaritan

village, it's Him. But He doesn't. Just the opposite. He sets His face toward Jerusalem to hang from a cross and die for the people of that village. That's not judging them. It's loving them. They refused Him, but He would not refuse to bear their sin and punishment. "*Shall we call down fire from heaven upon them?*" ask James and John. No. Jesus will stand in the way of that fire. He will let the fire from heaven consume Him.

So let's talk about you. Everything Jesus did for the people of that Samaritan village, He did for you. Maybe at one time in your life you were like a hardened path. But no more. Jesus' love for you broke through your hardened heart. He has made good soil of you.

And as good soil, you are often judgmental, as I am. This is not what Jesus wants for us. He wants us to love, not judge. And this begins with Him. We deserve to have fire from heaven come down and consume us. Seriously. One sin in our heart and life does that. But that's not what's coming to you. Jesus took what we deserve. He suffered and died for you, my friend. This means that God forgives you. For all your judging of others. For all your bad days. For all those chunks in your soil. He forgives everything. He forgives you...each and every one of you. You see, Jesus set His face toward the cross also for you. Nothing could prevent Him from being your Savior.

There's a little story which illustrates this. It's a true story. And I know I've shared it before, but I'm not sure where and with whom, so I'll share it again now. A little boy was told by his doctor that he could save his sister's life by giving her some blood. The six-year-old girl was near death, a victim of disease from which the boy had made a remarkable recovery just two years earlier. Her only chance for restoration was a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the illness. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor. "Johnny, would you like to give your blood for Mary?" the doctor asked. The boy hesitated. His lower lip trembled. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, Doc, I'll give my blood for my sister." Soon the two children were wheeled into the operating room; Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and the picture of health. Neither spoke, but Johnny turned his face toward his sister and when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As his blood siphoned into Mary's veins, one could almost see new life come into her tired body. The ordeal was almost over when Johnny's brave little voice broke the silence. "Say, Doc, when do I die?" It was only then that the doctor realized what the moment of hesitation, the trembling of the lip, had meant earlier. Little Johnny actually thought that in giving his blood to his sister, he was giving up his life. And in that brief moment, he had made his great decision.

This is exactly what Jesus did for you. Only He did die. As Johnny set his face in love for his sister, willing to give his all for her, so Jesus in love set His face toward Mt. Calvary. No hesitation. No turning back. He gave all He had for you. Amen.