

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, April 3, 2011 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

The Road to Jerusalem – Luke 9:51; Hebrews 12:2

Introduction: Easter season is almost upon us. I'm glad it is because that means springtime and warmer weather, but I also know that this is the time of the year for allergies and finals at school. So I guess you have to take the bad with the good, right?

With that in mind, let's turn to **Luke 9:51 (NIV)** as the basis for today's message. It reads, "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*"

Now keep a bookmark there because I want us to look quickly at another verse, **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)**. Here, the writer encourages us to "*fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" A phrase in this verse that really grabbed my attention is one that sounds rather peculiar - "*who for the joy set before him endured the cross.*" Now put that phrase on the back burner of your mind as we "*fix our eyes on Jesus*" and go back to Luke 9:51. As we take a closer look at the situation about which this verse was written, we see some things about Jesus' determination as He was on the road to Jerusalem. First:

1. Jesus Was Determined in Spite of Inconveniences

For nearly three years Jesus has been involved in public ministry--- travelling around teaching, healing, and performing miracles---and now the time is approaching for Him to make His final trip into Jerusalem. He's been there before, on several occasions when He had great crowds following Him. But even then He was subject to ridicule, questioning, and even having people want to kill him. But this time, He knows it's going to be different. This time the crowds would turn on Him. This time He will allow Himself to be arrested and taken prisoner. This time, He knows that He's going to be mocked, beaten and crucified. This trip to Jerusalem would be a major transition in Jesus' ministry. In a way it would be the beginning of the end of His earthly life and ministry. Jesus knows all this---and yet we find in Luke 9:51 that "*Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*" He's determined to go.

Jesus set His heart upon going to Jerusalem not because He looked forward to the idea of being beaten and crucified---but because His love for us made Him determined to do whatever it took to make it possible for us to be forgiven. Jesus was intent upon enduring God's wrath against sins so we wouldn't have to. So with an amazing determination He started out for Jerusalem.

Almost immediately Jesus had to go to battle against inconvenience and rejection. The first thing we read about after vs. 51 is a roadblock of prejudice that added some unnecessary hardships to the journey.

Luke 9:52-56 (NIV) tell us that Jesus...."*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 fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.*"

Here's what's going on---at this point in Jesus' ministry, wherever He goes, He has crowds following Him. He's going from Galilee to Jerusalem, and the shortest distance is to go through Samaria. So, thinking of the people, Jesus sends some messengers ahead of the crowds to Samaria to "*get things ready for him*" Much the same way an important dignitary would send people ahead today to prepare the way for the person to travel without worry. But the word comes back... "*Stay away!*"

What we're talking about is a matter of prejudice. An old hatred was rearing its ugly head. For centuries because of the Samaritans having intermarried with their Assyrian conquerors, the Jews had rejected and badmouthed the Samaritans. And the Samaritans returned the favor. They didn't like each other because of their cultural and historical differences.

So, these Samaritans made it clear that Jesus and His entourage weren't welcome there. So James and John, the ones known as the Sons of Thunder, with equal prejudice speak up and say "*Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?*" Now, they probably thought they could do it because they knew how Elijah had called for fire from heaven centuries earlier, and they looked to Jesus as a modern-day Elijah---so they probably meant it, and probably even hoped it would happen. But Jesus rebuked them, making it clear that

He meant what He'd said earlier when He talked about loving your enemies and praying for them. In fact, not long after this (ch. 10) Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

But what I want us to see is that facing inconveniences and rejection didn't keep Jesus from moving forward. He had made up His mind; He was not backing down, giving up or turning back--- He was going to Jerusalem. Next, let's also notice:

2. Jesus Was Determined in Spite of Opposition

Now, rejection and opposition aren't the same. For example, a university may reject a student's application for admission to their school but that doesn't mean they're opposed to that student attending elsewhere. At the start of this journey, Jesus was rejected by the Samaritans. But not long after this, He was opposed by the Pharisees and religious leaders.

In **Luke 11:53-54 (NIV)** we read how *"the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say."* And as you read on in Luke you find that when these Religious leaders figured out that they're weren't going to be able to use Jesus' words against Him, they turned to scare tactics. Look at **Luke 13:31 (NIV)**: *"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'"*

The Pharisees, even though they opposed Jesus, tried to get Him to leave because they thought King Herod would kill Him. Of course, they probably just wanted to have that opportunity to kill Jesus for themselves, but the point is, either way, Jesus was facing opposition by going to Jerusalem.

But look at Jesus' response. (32-33): *"He replied, '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.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!'"*

Jesus is saying. *"You guys aren't going to keep me out of Jerusalem and neither is Herod. I must press on. I've got something of eternal significance I have to do in Jerusalem!"*

So inconvenience, rejection, and opposition were not enough to stop Jesus. But look at what else He faced on this road:

3. Jesus Was Determined in Spite of Misunderstanding

At one point along the way, Jesus cast a demon out of a man. But some who witnessed this display of spiritual power misunderstood and they said *"By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons."*

Luke 11:15 (NIV)

How many of you have ever done something good for someone only to have your efforts misunderstood or worse been accused of having an ulterior or selfish motive? If you have, you know how discouraging that can be. Then think about how Jesus felt to have His pure motives and His good and kind actions misinterpreted as people even had the audacity to accuse Him of being Satanic when in fact He was at war with Satan.

And then there was that time when Jesus was about to enter a village and ten lepers called out to Him, *"Master, have pity on us!"* Jesus healed all ten of them of their leprosy, yet only one of them ever thanked Him for it. Maybe you can relate to being misunderstood and unappreciated. Maybe you've felt this way and you've thrown in the towel and given up. But notice, Jesus was often misunderstood and unappreciated but He never threw in the towel. Thank God He never called it quits. He just kept on keeping on.

Jesus kept on going in spite of inconveniences, opposition, and misunderstandings because for every one of those, there were many more positive highlights and special moments of joy like the time He healed blind Bartimaeus; and the times little children would run to Him and He'd take them up in His lap to hug them. I imagine He was filled with joy when He got reports of success from the seventy-two He'd sent out. He was moved by the widow who put everything she had in the offering.

What I'm saying is that when we set out on our road to Jerusalem to follow the will of God, it's not always going to be a bed of roses along a hallelujah highway. There will be some thorns, some potholes and detours to navigate through. There will always be something out there that has the potential to knock you off course or even bring you down. This leads us to the last point

4. Jesus Was Determined in Spite of Stumbling Blocks

One of these stumbling blocks came after Jesus had made it clear to His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem to be put to death. In **Matthew 16:22-23 (NIV)** we read, *"Peter took him aside and began to rebuke*

him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

You all know what a "stumbling block" is don't you? It's something that can increase your chance of falling. It can trip you up. I think Jesus was telling Peter--- "Stop it, Peter. You're one of my closest friends and you don't know what you're saying! You have no idea of what would happen to you if I don't go there and die. You're tempting Me to turn aside from my mission. Peter, knowing what I know about what lies ahead---it's hard enough to keep on going. The last thing I want from you is for you to go on and on about how I shouldn't do it. I can't do this man's way; I've got to do it God's way...so stop it!"

Have you ever had a close friend or a family member try to get you to compromise your faith? Have you ever had someone to tell you not to follow God's will, or call you crazy for doing it? I have. And it seems that the closer we are to a person who does this, the more we love them, the greater our desire is not to disappoint them. We don't like to tell them "no." And that's why sometimes when we know we should say "no," we're tempted to say "yes." That's why Jesus was so tough on Peter when Peter suggested that He not go through with it. You see, the temptation to stop, the stumbling block if you will, was stronger coming from Peter than it was coming from the Pharisees.

All that being said, can you see the pattern here? Jesus has resolutely set out for Jerusalem because He has the things of God in mind. And He refuses to allow anything outside of Him or inside of Him to deter Him. No inconvenience, no rejection, no opposition, no misunderstanding, no being unappreciated, no temptation, no power, no person, no stumbling block would change His mind or redirect His course. At the Father's request He had began this journey. It had taken Him from heaven to earth. And now it was taking Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. Soon it would take Him to the cross. And not long after the triumphant cry would be heard from Calvary. "It is finished!"

Three days later Jesus would rise from the dead---and He'd say to His disciples and to everyone past, present and future--- "Sure, it was tough. It was worse than anything you can imagine. But let me tell you something, it was worth it. You were worth it."

Remember that phase from Hebrews 12:2 which I told you to put on the back burner? Let's read it again, "who for the joy set before him endured the cross." You see,--you were the joy, I was the joy, we were the joy set before Jesus---we were the reason He endured the cross. Jesus says to the Father, we were worth it.

It's an illustration that pales in comparison, but it's one I think we all can relate to. Last year, I began to feel some pain and discomfort in my right shoulder. It finally got so bad, I told my Dr. about it and he began to treat it – first with medication, then with creams and rubs, then with cortisone injections. But when the pain persisted and became worse, the Dr. ordered an MRI which revealed a torn rotator cuff which meant surgery. So, after consulting an orthopedic surgeon, I had the surgery in January.

When it was let out that I was going to have surgery, I had many people tell me all about their similar circumstances and they gave me advice. Some said, "Don't do it! You'll never get well," or "Don't do it, you'll be laid up for a year or more." Other's said, "Get another opinion." Others said, "You better do what the Dr. says, and do the rehab afterwards." Everyone I know meant well, and I listened to all the advice. But once I had my answer and once I made my mind up, there was no stopping me. I had to get some relief or else face the rest of my life with a bum shoulder. Yes, the surgery and the pain and the six weeks in the sling, and the sleepless nights, and the rehab would all be very painful and uncomfortable. Yes, it would be an inconvenience. But the thing that is getting me through it is the joy of knowing that one day soon, I will be pain free and I'll finally get my range of motion back. To me, the surgery was worth the joy to follow.

And just like I wasn't looking forward to my surgery, Jesus, didn't look forward to the cross, but He was determined to go to Jerusalem and endure the pain and suffering and death because of the joy it would bring both He and the Father as people would be set free from the sin that weighs them down.

But that is not all. You see, the context of Hebrews 12:2 is that of believers running in this race called life, and running in such a way that they would receive a victor's crown at the finish line. But just as a runner doesn't run a race simply for the pleasure of running, we don't live for Jesus just for the pleasure it may bring us in this life. Oh no, if that were true, we might not even start it, much less finish it. No, there has to be something important to look forward to at the end of this race.

Jesus didn't run His race of faith for the pleasure of the race itself. It wasn't the satisfaction of seeing people healed, and comforted, and brought to faith, and growing spiritually that kept Him running. He didn't leave His Father's presence and His heavenly glory to come to this earth to endure temptation and opposition and suffer ridicule and agonizing torture by crucifixion just for the few pleasures and satisfactions He had while on earth. Jesus' motivation and determination was "*the joy set before him*" and for the goal of being able to sit down "*at the right hand of the throne of God.*" He ran for the joy of being exalted by God.

Jesus said in His high-priestly prayer recorded in **John 17:4-5 (NIV)** "*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*"

The prize we as Christians run for is not for heaven – it's already ours because Jesus promised us, "*Where I am, there will you be also.*" We run for the same prize Jesus ran for, and we can achieve it the same way Jesus did. We run for the joy of being exalted if we glorify God on earth as Jesus did. And how do we glorify God on earth? We glorify God as we allow Him to shine through us by being obedient to His will in all we do.

Even if that means suffering for a little while, we want to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "*But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.*" **Philippians 2:17 (NIV).**

Listen, I know it gets tough sometimes. I know it's inconvenient to sell out to Jesus and teach that class week after week, or make a hospital visit or a visit to a prospect. But you're glorifying God in those things. I understand that you're going to be opposed by family members and friends and co-workers or classmates who don't understand. But God will be glorified by your obedience to His Word. I feel for you when you're misunderstood, or when a friend throws a stumbling block in your way and they don't understand why you can't go to that party or take that pill or that drink. It's tough. But God is getting the glory from your obedience and faithfulness.

And what's the payoff, you ask? Here it is. It's worth it to be faithful to Christ, and to be able to hear Him say, "... *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*" **Matthew 25:21 (NIV).**

Be faithful to your calling Christian! Don't let the world get you off track. Stay true to Jesus as you travel on your road to Jerusalem.