

The Saviour's Mission

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Date: 07 April 2019

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[0 : 00] so Luke chapter 9 starting at verse 51 as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem and he 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 down fire from heaven to destroy them but Jesus turned and rebuked them then he and his disciples went to another village as they were walking along the road a man said to him I will follow you wherever you go Jesus replied foxes have dens and birds have nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head he said to another man follow me but he replied Lord first let me go and bury my father

Jesus said to him let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God still another said I will follow you Lord but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family Jesus replied no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God this is the word of the Lord good evening St Silas my name is Martin as I'm the senior minister here and we're just going to be looking together at this bit of Luke 9 thanks Graham for reading that for us especially warm welcome if you're here because it's our tri-church service first Sunday of the month where we're particularly although we always hope that guests will feel welcome and St Silas is a helpful place to come and look into the Christian faith we're particularly trying to engage people with a service that's as accessible as we can make it on the first Sunday of each month so that's what we're doing here and as well as keeping your Bible open you can find an outline on the back of the notice sheet if you find that helpful to follow what we're doing and it's my custom to pray because whenever we think about God what we're asking him to do is to make himself more clearly known to each one of us as we turn to his word and it's important that everything that I say is just coming out of and exposing what's there in the Bible so let's ask for God's help

Heavenly Father we thank you that you've brought us here to this place we thank you for the time now with Luke's Gospel open and the chance to read it together and so we pray that whatever each of us thinks of you tonight whatever doubts we have wherever we stand with you that in your goodness and mercy you'll make yourself clearly known to each one of us and you'll help us to respond rightly to you we pray in Jesus name Amen Your mission should you choose to accept it is to penetrate the highly secured archive inside the Kremlin this message will self-destruct in five seconds that's how the action takes off in Ghost Protocol don't know whether you've seen it one of the latest of the Mission Impossible franchise movies and I love the Mission Impossible franchise the thrills, the action the struggle of the good guys against the bad I remember as a child when it was a cassette they put in a machine they were old things with tape in them and they spread the message and then it would destroy in five seconds after they'd heard it and they were sent on a mission and now it happens wherever it happens and phone boxes explode or computers explode after the message has been delivered but it always begins your mission should you choose to accept it and the truth is we all love the idea of a good mission and we need a mission for our lives we heard the potter there, Vinnie talking about how he felt coming to God and being re-centred around God had given him a mission had given him purpose to his life and we want our lives to be meaningful we want to make a difference we want to have a purpose and in fact if anything people are saying this has got stronger in recent years so the millennial generation which are people 25 to 35 years old that makes you a millennial businesses are being told that millennials value having a purpose to their working life much more than their paycheck what matters is is my job meaningful not how much am I getting paid for it and apparently that's now felt even more strongly by generation Z if you're generation Z you're aged 15 to 25

I don't know what the 15 year olds quite are doing maybe it's the paper round or something but they need it to be meaningful to have purpose now there's a journalist Taylor Dennis who actually argues that the whole thing is just a myth and this idea that the younger generations are uniquely desiring purpose and meaning is probably disguising that that's something that is a basic human need we all long for purpose and meaning in our lives it may just be that older people found it more readily or in some way disguised that that's what we're looking for but it's probably a basic human need that we want a mission we want our lives to be meaningful well we get to Jesus here in Luke's gospel and we find here is a man who invites us to follow him he even commands it with authority follow me and if we do that he offers to send us on a mission a mission that we were made for we're looking at Jesus here through the eyes of Luke

Luke was a doctor and a first century writer who says at the start of his gospel account his account of Jesus' life that he's writing an orderly account because he's carefully investigated everything from the beginning so that we can know with certainty what has happened so here we have a reliable source about Jesus you can imagine Luke like an investigative journalist if he was alive today it would probably have been this incredible documentary series as he pieces together scenes from Jesus' life on the basis of the interviews that he's conducted and the documents that he has found and tonight we're actually starting a new big section in Luke we look at this we're just working through it successively month by month at Tri-Church but here we start a new section Luke's divided into three sections very carefully and this is the start of section two as Jesus starts a journey on the way to Jerusalem where he'll die on the cross before rising again so what is this mission that he invites you to be part of as he calls you to follow him well we're going to see four things what the mission is not what the mission is what the mission demands and then why the mission is worth it so first of all what the mission is not if you look down at verse 51

[7:17] Jesus resolutely sets out for Jerusalem but he heads through this place first called Samaria it's on the way and he sends messengers ahead of him to a village to say Jesus is coming and they don't welcome him now what would the messengers have been saying we know what they'd have been saying because just earlier in this chapter in verse 20 his followers recognised for the first time quite who Jesus is it's just back over a page and Jesus said to them what about you who do you say I am and Peter who's one of his closest followers said God's Messiah and that's Bible language for your God's promised one his promised rescuing king who was to come into the world the one we've been waiting for on a rescue mission from heaven so how do the Samaritans respond to the news this message oh Jesus is coming to your village they're not interested they don't welcome him verse 53 they don't welcome him because he's heading for

Jerusalem that is likely the message just seemed too alien to them the Samaritans were not Jewish people they wouldn't have been going to Jerusalem themselves to worship God they worshipped God in their own way they had their own place Mount Gerizim Jesus is too strange for them he's unfamiliar he's unacceptable for them because of their own plausibility structures we might call them their own kind of understanding of what they would expect God to be like and we might face the same kind of barriers today when it comes to looking at Jesus if you're someone who's grown up giving Jesus virtually no thought or very little thought or at one time you gave him a lot of thought but you don't think about him much anymore then the news that we could know him today and that he might have the offer of everything our hearts need and long for might sound too implausible to us the unfamiliarity puts us off and the challenge

I guess from seeing the Samaritans is at least would you welcome Jesus would you take a fresh look at him with an open mind that's what Luke's gospel allows us to do the Samaritans are not interested they've made their mind up already they've closed it down but then James and John two of Jesus' followers they get the whole thing wrong so in verse 54 they suggest to Jesus do you want us do you want to love it do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them but the point is they think when they see someone rejecting Jesus unreasonably God's got to judge them for that should we do it now and that's what the mission is not verse 55 Jesus turned and rebuked them then he and his disciples went to another village in other words these are not the days for God to bring judgment on people for rejecting

Jesus rather these are the days of opportunity where the door is wide open to respond rightly to him it's good to remember that if you're here and you're already a Christian when perhaps we see people rejecting Jesus even mocking Jesus I remember bringing some friends to a Christmas carol service where the message about Jesus was faithfully explained and going to the pub with them afterwards and one of them just really mocking the whole thing the temptation can be to feel self-righteous and even to get angry about that to want God to make them pay for speaking about Jesus like that but Jesus responds to people not seeing who he is is compassion he just moves on to another village to give more people the opportunity to respond to him and the key point is Jesus' work in the world then and his work in the world today is not the work of judgment but we do have to make the most of that window of opportunity for what

James and John have realized here is that one day God is going to hold us to account for how we've responded to Jesus thankfully that's not yet today I'm so glad that God has waited that he waited until 2001 when I became a Christian before sending Jesus to judge the world for then it will be too late but today is an opportunity to get it right it's a bit like if you imagine a football match and the 90 minutes are up and you think oh the final whistle's going to go time's up the results in but the fourth official at the tunnel what do they do they hold up a number and it's how many minutes are left how many minutes of added time there's going to be so the clock is still running down it's not over yet there's still time and sometimes when you see that the losing team strives to make a difference in the last few minutes well it's not a perfect analogy but today is a day of God being patient with us there is still time to look at Jesus to respond rightly to him but it won't last forever so we've heard what the mission of

[12 : 41] Jesus is not it's not for his followers to go around condemning people and bringing down a judgment when Jesus is not responded to correctly but secondly let's see what the mission of Jesus is just notice where Jesus was going through Samaria he sent messengers ahead of him to give people the chance to hear about him and when he's rejected in one village he goes on to another and then in verse 60 he calls a man to follow him and he says to him verse 60 go and proclaim the kingdom of God now the kingdom of God is the saving reign of God it's the momentous news that Jesus is God's rescuing rightful king and that even though we've been living as rebels in God's world any of us can turn back to God through him we just acknowledge him as king we turn back to him and we can be part of his saving kingdom right at the end of Luke's gospel he says the risen Jesus says to his disciples repentance for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in

Jesus name to all nations and we get a snapshot of that here in that verse 60 go and proclaim the kingdom of God that's the mission of Jesus people it's the essence of the mission he calls every one of his followers to be part of that we're called to proclaim that in the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God is among us and we call people to repent that just means to turn back to God and anyone who does that is given the forgiveness of sins so this verse these few little words are really important partly because lots of Christians today forget or miss that this is the mission Jesus calls us to people think proclaiming the kingdom of God oh well that's that's what the church minister does or that's what confident speakers do but some of us are gifted in different ways in other ways now it's absolutely true we're all gifted in different ways but if you're a follower of Jesus

Jesus is happy here to summarize his mission statement go and proclaim the kingdom of God whoever we are so we shape our ministry our church activities around that whether it's inviting people come and hear come and hear about Jesus whether it's running a course and that people can come on to look into the claims of Jesus or the real lives evenings that we ran recently or it's going to tell people maybe just one to one with friends sharing that we're a Christian inviting people to think more about what we believe and we've got these resources we've been people in the church family using this resource the word one to one where you can meet a friend where it's convenient for them at a time that's convenient for them and it just takes you through the pages of John's gospel one to one so that you can proclaim the kingdom of God not in a way that requires you to be a bible teacher but in a way that just says let me just share with you

God's word let me share with you the news about God's king any of us can do that we're all called to do that it's the essence of the mission of Jesus does following him involve acts of love and kindness yes are we called to be concerned for people's material well-being their emotional well-being their mental well-being of course yes should we be concerned about global inequality injustice being good stewards of God's creation absolutely yes and Colin led us didn't he earlier on in praying for some of those things but what is the essence of the mission Jesus calls his people to God's saving king has died for sins and risen to rule go and proclaim him go and make him known to people who haven't heard that's what the mission is thirdly then what the mission demands and this is where we get to this extremely challenging section Luke tells us about three men who seem to be all on the verge of becoming followers of Jesus and each time

Jesus really challenges them the first one is too quick to commit he says he'll follow Jesus and Jesus goes through with him just how hard that might be the son of man that's Jesus has nowhere to lay his head so he's too quick to commit the second one seems to be too slow to perform he wants to go and bury his father first and Jesus says let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the third one is too divided to serve he asks if he can say goodbye to his family first and Jesus says you're not fit for service if you put your hand to the plough and you look back now before we look at each of those three in turn let's just think about them together because for many of us Jesus sounds a bit harsh here with these guys is he really saying that this man is not allowed to go to his dad's funeral and that this other man he can't even kiss his family goodbye there there might be there might be more going on here when the man asks if he can bury his father it might be that his dad isn't actually dead that it's an idiom a local phrase in that culture meaning will you let me just see my dad out serve him while he's still alive or it might be that he's dead but there was a custom that the funeral was maybe a year later when he'd be buried so there might be going on that we can quite see with our kind of 21st century glasses but that doesn't really help us with the third story

[18:36] I think we need to just think about a few things about the stories together first of all we need to remember Jesus knows what's going on in people's hearts so the man who says he wants to say goodbye to his family could it be that Jesus can see in the man's heart that he loves his family more than Jesus and Jesus isn't prohibiting him from going but he's just warning him about the danger of having a divided heart not being as committed as he could be so Jesus might be aware of things going on in the hearts of the people he's addressing here that we can't really see because we just get the words that they say to Jesus a second thing to be aware of is that Jesus is often using a method that we might call hyperbole that he as a rabbi as a teacher of his time would sometimes exaggerate to make a point he would speak in extremes to make a point powerfully so it's no accident

I don't think that Jesus takes perhaps two of the most important duties that God places on all of us to care for our parents and to care for our families and Jesus uses those things to teach us how relatively important it is to follow him so he's making a point where we wouldn't necessarily take him too literally rather we think he's using controlled exaggeration to challenge us and to drive home the point he's making it's hyperbole but having said that I don't want us to use that as an excuse to blunt the sharpness of what Jesus is saying here to take away the challenge because it is really challenging and it may be that in our Christian cultures or if you're not a Christian what you've seen of Christians we have massively underplayed how costly it really is to follow Jesus judging by what he says here so yes it's hyperbole it may be an exaggeration and yet let's not use that as an excuse just to wriggle away from how confronting

Jesus words are the last thing I just wanted to say before we look at each individually is although we might find these statements from Jesus confronting can you see how brilliant it is to follow a savior who is completely up front about what that would involve that there's no spin when it comes to Jesus there's no small print that you sort of you find out about later and think oh I wish someone had told me that I wouldn't have jumped in there's no kind of try it just try it for 30 days for free and then you'll start having to pay it's not like Spotify premium or Netflix where they get you in and they get you hooked and then you're like oh I'm trapped now he's not like a politician making manifesto promises that he'll never keep or the door to door salesman will say anything to get his foot in the door he is urging us to follow him but he wants each of us to understand what we're getting ourselves into as we commit so let's look at each statement in turn

I think Jesus is pointing out here the hardness of his mission the urgency of his mission and then the greatness of his mission so firstly the hardness of his mission that it requires costly devotion the man says I'll follow you wherever you go Jesus says foxes have got dens birds have nests the son of man has no place to lay his head you will be more homeless than the animals you see around you significant because he's just set out for Jerusalem he's on his way to the cross following Jesus means following him in a world that rejects him think of a friend who became she became a Christian from a Muslim background when her family found a Bible in her room as a young adult her mum called round all the men of the family the uncles the cousins her brothers and they were all downstairs and she had to run out of the house knowing that she would never be able to go back never see a family again think of a friend who is from an agnostic wealthy family who paid for him to go to a good school and rejoiced as he went off to do a good university degree and then they got furious with him as he became a

Christian about the sacrifices he was making to follow Jesus and they said you've got too into this stuff it's hard to follow Jesus when people around you reject him what about the next man he says in verse 59 first let me go and bury my father Jesus says let the dead bury their own dead the spiritually dead perhaps may be saying let people who are still in the world and have not grasped who Jesus is be overly concerned about worldly things but there is an urgent message to bring to a lost world don't be too slow to perform that think of a guy who's an older Christian who he's an old man now and he said to me he really wishes he'd been more radical as a Christian earlier in his life he said that he feels as though as you get older you realise just how quickly life flies by and only now he's realising he wishes he had more urgency earlier in his life more passion to share

[24 : 22] Jesus with colleagues and friends then the third man the first was about difficulty the second about urgency the third is about wholeheartedness Jesus says to the third man no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God now I don't know how much first century farming you've done but apparently what you did was you went farming and you put one hand on the plough and you had one hand free to gourd the ox and so it was absolutely key that you kept looking in a straight line because if your shoulders and your head were straight forward you'll plough straight and if you look to one side the whole thing went off course and so it is in the Christian life you have to be wholehearted if you're still looking at the life your non-Christian mates are living the home they live in the holidays they go on the number of beers they drink on a night out the people they sleep with and you think that's the good life then it's like the ploughman looking over his shoulder yearning for another field and it just stops you being effective

Jesus calls us to be wholehearted so why would we do that that's our fourth point this evening why the mission is worth it I think we just see it implied in the verses the same word three times in the scenes verse 57 follow me in verse 59 follow me in verse 61 I will follow you and where is he going verse 51 casts a shadow over the hall scene Jesus set out for Jerusalem so we follow a messiah who consciously went to the cross deliberately determinedly why well in the next chapter he sends out 72 of his followers to carry out his mission and it's dramatically successful and they come back to him and they say Jesus you should have seen what happened and Jesus says in verse 20 of chapter 10 do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven in other words thanks to Jesus saving mission anyone who follows him has their name written down in

God's book of life in heaven Jesus is going to die in Jerusalem to ensure that our names are written in heaven he goes on to say in verse 22 all things have been committed to me by my father no one knows who the son is except the father and no one knows who the father is except the son and those to whom the son chooses to reveal him so these are the privileges of choosing to follow Jesus that through him we come to know God that by his death we're made right with God so that we can know him now and have our future hope secure so don't follow Jesus if you think it's not going to be hard following a savior who dies for you because he's rejected by the world will be hard don't follow him if you think his mission isn't very urgent following a savior whose only way to save us was to die on the cross for us is going to leave us with an urgent message to proclaim and don't follow him if you think you can do it and not be single minded not be whole hearted following a savior whose mission cost him his life is going to need us to be whole hearted but what could it be that

God could offer to you that would make it worth following him on this mission the answer the Bible gives is that the greatest gift God could give us is himself he made us to know him and he's not just any God he is a God who demonstrated his love when he didn't even spare his own son but sent him to die for you so that he could write your name in heaven so the same Jesus who says follow me was on his way to die for you there was a missionary Jim Elliot who went to Ecuador to proclaim the kingdom of God to a tribe there that had never heard of Jesus and he was killed by them when he was 29 years old and one of his journal entries just written a couple of years before he was killed said this he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose amen we're going to sing in response to what we've heard

I'm going to hand over to Greg and the band as they lead us along Jonathan menu as it said Mars to the story