

Journey 3

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Luke 9⁵¹⁻⁶² / 1 Cor 9¹⁹⁻²⁷

I've been speaking about the importance of the idea of 'journey' for our Christian life recently and I want to finish this little mini-series here this morning by recalling some fundamentals in the Christian life which have to do with this idea. If I were to summarise this whole series I would simply say this – 'The Christian Faith is a travelling faith – it cannot stay still – that is – it cannot rest on its laurels. We travel because God does and we are to be where God is. Now please, don't get the idea that I'm advocating some kind of incessant restless activism. I'm not. There are times, often times, when we must be still to discover God in our lives. But the reason we are still is so that we can re-orientate ourselves to the God who is, as Jesus said, 'always at work.' So Jesus called and calls us on to journey with Him and if we examine this we discover that journey provides three things which are...

1. A place to go?
2. A reason to go?
3. A place to leave?

Jesus majored in journeys from the time He was an infant to the time he was killed – He was on a journey. (The Son of Man has no place to lay his head! – indicative of being on a journey.)

Journey to Egypt – then home again – but not to home – journey to another place – Nazareth.

To Jerusalem for the census when 12

Journey out to the Jordan to be baptised/ journey into the wilderness to face the devil/ journey into Galilee to begin His ministry/Journey back and forth to Jerusalem/ journey across the Lake/ journey back to Jerusalem/ journey to the Cross. Over the last month I've spoken about how important the notion of journey is for us as Christians and if you want you can find those sermons on our website. Today want to revisit it for one last time.

Today I want to go back a few steps and look at the basic structure of the journeying I am speaking about. You see there are some fundamental principles in regard to journey which are crucial if we are to live with Jesus and the first is this, 'Jesus is travelling and so we need to get used to travelling.' What is Jesus' primary command to us? The key word He uses isn't 'stay,' or 'build' or 'settle,' or even 'grow!' Rather the primary command is to **'Follow!'** Indeed, it's **'Follow me!'** What does **'follow'** mean except 'We are going somewhere!' Jesus doesn't say to you and I 'Settle down with me!' or 'Take a holiday with

me!’ or ‘Let’s hide away together!’ No Jesus says **‘Follow... Me... because... I am going somewhere!’**

If this sounds too hard then we must think again about our context because context is everything. The difference between a person dressed lightly and a person with 5 layers on and a raincoat has mostly to do with context. One prepares for sunshine – the other for a rain soaked and cold day. So what’s our context? The Bible suggests our context is desperate. It suggest we live in a world that is urgently in need of the redemptive Presence of Christ. It suggests this world and we who live in it are in big trouble and it suggests we are in big trouble if we choose to live **apart from Christ**. And that trouble reaches right down to New Zealand. Now we may have been able to say at one time from the comfort of our regional place in the world – way down here in the Pacific – away from all the world’s trouble spots and war and famine and inhumanity – that’s over there God but here, here in New Zealand we’re OK – **nothing will happen to us if we just stay here!**

We just can’t do that today. Today we know that the influence of the behaviour of everyone else in the world touches us. Global climate change is the clear poster boy for this principle but frankly that’s just the latest in a long line of human tragedies elsewhere in the world that have had a huge influence on us.

New Zealand hasn't been able to avoid becoming involved and losing large numbers of people killed in action in Europe or the Middle East. We've tried protecting our borders from pests and diseases but still many have arrived with devastating consequences. We suffer daily from a large hole in the ozone layer produced largely by the influence of gases used around the world in refrigeration. Who knows how many cancer deaths that's been responsible for **here in New Zealand!** And nothing has had greater consequence than the financial meltdowns in America and Europe we experienced in the latter part of last century and the beginning of this one. I could go on but I'm sure you get the point. The attitude that we can somehow avoid the chaos of the world here in New Zealand or in Dunedin for that matter is just silly friends. We can't. We're involved. We're part of it.

And there's a spiritual corollary to the idea that we can avoid the problems of the world and it goes something like this... **'If I just live a good life and take care of what I do and what I can manage then surely God will be good to me and keep me safe!'** I won't have to deal with the tragedy of human existence – I won't have to deal with other people's sin; I won't have to deal with the foolish behaviour of people around me. **I can be safe with God.**

No friends. The last thing we should believe is that we can build a nice life around us here in Dunedin or New Zealand for that

matter and live safe lives and the simple reason for this is that we are actually living in a war zone – a spiritual war zone. We are living in a place where we have an enemy who is desperate to take our true life away from us and to occupy the space we now have in this life. We have a mortal enemy who has some right to this world and who is bent on bringing harm and hopelessness into our lives.

Now the Good News is that we also have a Saviour who died for us and who lives now again in heaven and who can guide us in this war zone but the fact remains that it is still a war zone. It is still a place where the enemy exists and longs to wound us. So what are we to do?

The first thing we must do is to resist the idea that we can be safe by doing nothing – by staying in the harbour, by staying home. **We need to follow Jesus!** We need to be prepared to get up and move! If Jesus truly is our captain then he will want to get our boat underway – he will want us to move with him. And if that's the case then He will have somewhere for us to go.

There is no such thing as a visionless faith. Faith, by its very nature, calls us forward, calls us to grow, calls us to **go somewhere!** Jesus was always going **somewhere** in His ministry. He didn't just wander aimlessly, with no target, no reason, no place to go. When he began His ministry He went out into the desert to be tested – He went somewhere. When He first became publicly known in Capernaum he had great success in

the town but in the morning it was time to go – for he wanted to go to all the towns in Galilee and minister there. And we too need to sense God’s calling us forward this year and particularly at the beginning of the year. God has a place for you to go – God has a will for your life – a good will, a blessed will but we will need to be prepared to move if we are not to miss it.

As Thomas Edison used to say, ‘Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work!’

Secondly Jesus’s journey’s had a reason. Jesus didn’t just aimlessly walk off into the desert or into Galilee. He didn’t just thoughtlessly decide to go back to Jerusalem. Every journey was related to the central thing in His life – **the will of God**. He went to the desert to meet the devil. He left the desert because the devil was a disappointment. He went to Capernaum to find some disciples. He left Capernaum to go to all the scattered towns of Galilee and bring them the Good News of the Kingdom. He went back to Jerusalem to preach to the poor and dispossessed there who came to the Temple to find God and he went back to Galilee again to continue His ministry. He returned finally to Jerusalem to face His trial and eventual death. Every journey had a reason.

But there is a deeper reason than simply a calling to go somewhere. Jesus certainly will call us on as we commit to following Him but the call itself is not the reason. Rather, Jesus calls us on so that we might **come to know God**. In other words

there's revelation in the journey. Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus came to understand so much more as they spoke with the stranger so we as we commit to the road, to the journey with Christ will we come to understand God. I first heard this bet explained in a sermon from Andy Stanley who has a wonderful way of making scripture memorable. In one of the first sermons he ever felt good about giving which was to a High School audience he said he tried to find one thing which would be memorable – one thing they'd walk away with that would give them insight into the faith. And so he did a small study of Naaman the General who became a leper and how he went to Elijah to be healed and Elijah told him to jump into the rather muddy Jordan river which turned out to be somewhat offensive to Naaman since the rivers of his own country were cleaner and clearer than the Jordan and so in terms of cleansing his condition he couldn't understand why God would want him to jump into the muddy Jordan. Eventually however, his servant convinces him to obey and to go and jump seven times into the Jordan and when he comes out the condition is healed. And Andy derived a little saying which he left with those high School students which went like this – now I've changed this slightly but the gist of it is still there...

'To understand and know – obey and go' [repeat]

Years later one of those students saw Andy at an airport or something and came up to him and said to him that that

packaging of the Word still helped him follow Christ. **‘To understand and know – obey and go’**

Journey brings revelation! Journey is what facilitates understanding. Journey helps us to reason and to know the reason.

The journey God takes us on has a reason, it is rational and God uses it to shape us and to bring the healing power of God into our lives and into this dark world. When we choose to serve the Gospel, to go with Jesus, in any way we will find reason and logic to our life. Base it on anything else and we will discover the emptiness that lies behind all that is unredeemed.

Finally the journey God’s takes us on almost requires that we leave some place. When I was very young we’d visit my grandparents in Invercargill and we’d have lots of fun and then it came time to leave and I hated it. I couldn’t bear leaving because it made me so sad so I cried for some time.

Saying goodbye is often not fun. In fact some people avoid saying hello because it will eventually mean they’ll have to say goodbye. But the Christian life requires we say goodbye, and to some very important people. Are we prepared to leave some place or some person for the sake of obedience to Christ because if we’re not then journeying with Him becomes a ‘non-starter.’ We simply cannot get going.

And we may well have to choose to leave behind something we hold dear. Some activity, some hobby, some possession which possesses us.

And this is not a once and for deal. God continually calls us forward which means we continually need to be saying goodbye to something.

So are we prepared to be 'on the road with Jesus?' Are we prepared to travel? Are we prepared to accept God's reasoning over and above our own and are we prepared to say 'Goodbye' to the things and people which we must leave behind?

This will be our lot this year and every year we chose to follow Christ. I'm going. I'd love as many as possible of you to come with me!