

October 16, 2022

## THE NATURE OF REJECTING OR FOLLOWING JESUS

Luke 9:51-10:24

*(6 of 11 in a series through Luke 7-15)*

In Matthew 27:22 Pilate asked the crowd, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?” That really is a question that all of us must and will answer. With Jesus’ arrival, all of history has been split. Paul can acknowledge in Acts 17 that there was a time when God overlooked ignorance. Old Testament believers could believe in God’s promises while being ignorant of the particulars of how those promises would be fulfilled. They didn’t know the Christ’s name would be Jesus or speak of the details of him dying on a cross for our sins and rising from the dead on the third day. “But,” as Paul notes, “now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Now that Christ has come, everyone everywhere must deal with him, bowing the knee to him as Lord or rejecting him and awaiting his judgment. And so the question Pilate asked the crowd that day—what shall I do Jesus who is called the Christ?—is one that each of us must answer for ourselves. And in Luke 9:51-10:24, Luke shows us what it means as we either reject Christ or to accept and follow him as Lord. That’s what this chapter is about. You can take each paragraph and see that the theme of what it means to reject Jesus or what it means to follow him is present throughout.

Therefore, I want to walk through this text this morning showing us what it means if someone rejects Jesus as the Christ and refuses to bow to him as Lord, and I want to show you what it means to repent of your sins, trust in him, and follow him as your Lord as well. First, let’s start with what it means to reject Jesus. And within that, we start by seeing that rejecting Jesus may not bring the Lord’s full wrath in the present.

### **Those rejecting Jesus will not bear the Lord’s full wrath in this age**

In other words, there may be a thought that if indeed Jesus is God the Son who took on flesh, lived, died, was raised, and reigns over all as God’s promised and forever king, and you decide to reject him, you’re going to get immediate, furious judgment. And if we think that way, we’d not be the only ones. Two of Jesus’ disciples thought that way as well, as we’ll see in 9:52-56.

The text begins with Luke telling us, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51). Jerusalem was the place where Jesus would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. And from this point forward in Luke’s gospel, Jesus is directing himself toward fulfilling this mission. Jesus is heading toward the cross. And, geographically, the easiest way to get to Jerusalem was to go through the village of the Samaritans. Therefore, Jesus sent messengers ahead to make preparations for them traveling through that area, but Luke tells us that the people did not receive him. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Perhaps Jesus even heading to Jerusalem was an insult to them, since they sought to worship the Lord elsewhere, and so they denied him traveling through their town. This is rejection. Therefore, James and

John hear of this and ask Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (9:54).

Now, I know we’re probably thinking, “Good grief, guys. Someone’s a bit testy.” I mean, that escalated pretty quickly, didn’t it? But let’s put it in context. First, there’s precedent for this. In 2 Kings 1, King Ahaziah fell, hurt himself, and was worried that he was not going to recover, so he sent some messengers to go inquire of a false god whether he would recover or not. But Elijah cut them off—since the king of Israel wasn’t even consulting the God of Israel—and told them the king would surely die. So, the king was upset and sent fifty messengers to tell Elijah to come and answer to the king, but Elijah called down fire from heaven that consumed them. And so the king sent fifty more and Elijah just called down fire from heaven again, and it consumed them again. The third time the king humbled himself, and fire stopped coming down from heaven at that point. But, again, there’s precedent for this.

Second, if fire came down from heaven because a king wouldn’t acknowledge the God of Israel enough to inquire of him, how much more blasphemous is it to look at God the Son standing in front of you, reject him, and refuse to allow him to come into your village? So, in light of that background, I don’t think James and John are as crazy as it might appear to us at first glance. However, Jesus rebukes them, and so they just turn and go to another village instead.

But let’s not pass over Jesus’ response too quickly, either. What this shows us is that those who reject Jesus will not bear the Lord’s full wrath in the present. This doesn’t mean that they’ll never bear God’s full wrath. We’ll see that in a second. But they won’t see his full wrath in the present. In John 3:17 we’re told that “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” With Jesus’ first coming, he doesn’t bring the full condemnation and wrath of God. And so those who reject Jesus will not immediately bear his full wrath.

There are a few reasons this is important for us to understand. First, if you’re an unbeliever, do not comfort yourself with the fact that it feels like you’re getting away with your refusal to bow the knee to Jesus. The absence of his wrath now doesn’t mean that you’re okay. Again, we’ll look at the ultimate end of an unbeliever in a second. Second, if you’re a believer, looking at the world and feeling like those who reject Christ are getting away with everything, don’t let your knees buckle. Jesus told us that it would be this way. He showed us right here in Luke 9:51-56. Those rejecting Jesus will not bear God’s full wrath in the present. If you’re basing your obedience on those who rebel getting what they deserve in this life, then you won’t persevere because you’re going to witness all kinds of people rebel against Jesus and the fact that they’re under his wrath won’t be clear to you at all. So, recognize this truth. But this does bring us to our second point, namely, that those rejecting Jesus will ultimately face terrible judgment.

### **Those rejecting Jesus will face terrible judgment in the age to come**

In 10:1-12 we read that Jesus sent out seventy-two of his followers into the surrounding towns in a fashion similar to what we saw him do with the twelve in 9:1-6. Interestingly, he told them to

take nothing extra with them so that they would be absolutely dependent on people taking them in and providing for them. The idea seems so be that it would force people to make the decision to receive these men who were representatives of Jesus or reject them,<sup>1</sup> (the theme of this section of Luke). Jesus also told them that if a household took them in and provided for them, they should stay there. No use in looking around to see if another household might give them a better meal or bed. Be content. And heal the sick there. But on the other hand, if a town does not receive them, they should wipe the dust off their feet, announcing to the people that they're rejecting the blessings of the kingdom of God. But then he says about those towns that reject him (because rejecting *his followers* is rejecting *Jesus*—10:16), "I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town" (10:12).

In that sentence, the phrase "on that day" refers to the day when the Lord will judge all people who have ever lived, allowing those who believe in him to come into his kingdom and inherit eternal life while those who do not believe will be cast into an eternal lake of fire where they will be tormented forever. This is a reference to the day when those who do not bow the knee to Jesus will face the full weight of his wrath. And Jesus is here telling us that it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Sodom—a notoriously wicked people—than for those who reject the message of Jesus' followers.

Also, in 10:13-14, Jesus refers to "the judgment," saying, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable *in the judgment* for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades." Thus, again, he refers to this coming day of wrath.

Jesus isn't shy about declaring the coming judgment for those who do not believe. Rejecting Jesus in this present age means that you will face his merciless, furious wrath in the age to come. This is why we plead with people to repent and believe the gospel, which is their only hope. It's why I want to plead with you today, if you're not trusting in Christ, to come to him in repentance and faith today. Flee from the wrath to come. Those who reject Christ may look like they're getting away with it in this age, but they'll face his wrath on that day of judgment.

But though there is a great focus on those who reject Jesus in this text, we also see what it means to be a follower of Jesus as well. One thing we see is that following Jesus comes with great cost.

### **Following Jesus comes with great cost in this age**

In 9:57-62 Jesus encounters three individuals who all express their supposed willingness to follow Christ, but in every situation, Jesus makes clear that to follow him brings great cost—more than they want to give. First, a man says, "I'll follow you wherever you go," (9:57), but Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> David Gooding, *According to Luke* (1987; reprint ed., Colerain, N. Ireland: Myrtlefield Trust, 2013), 204.

makes clear to him that following him means you have to forsake the comfort of holding on to your home and what is yours. He tells him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (9:58). So, if you want to follow Jesus there may well be a need to walk away from the comfortable and familiar.

Next, Luke tells us, Jesus said to another, “Follow me.” But the man answered, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (9:59-60). Now, this one is a bit confusing, so let’s dive into the details a little bit. First, when the man asks to bury his dead father, I don’t think he meant that his father had just died, and he just needed to put his recently deceased father’s body into the ground. The reality is that burial needed to happen quickly in ancient Israel, and if the man’s father had just died, he wouldn’t have been out and about where he could run into Jesus. Rather, I think, this man is saying that he wants to hold off on following Jesus until the day his father dies. Then, at that time, he’ll be good and ready to follow Jesus. Moreover, when Jesus answers, “Let the dead bury their own dead,” he is mostly likely saying that those who aren’t his followers are the dead, that is, dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1), and he is saying that those who are dead in their sins can get about all those things that they prioritize above Jesus. But, Jesus is saying, if this man wants life, he must follow Jesus and prioritize him above all else. To follow Christ means nothing can be more important to us than Jesus.

Finally, another simply wants to turn back and go back home for a bit first before following Jesus, and Jesus answers, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (v. 62). The idea here is that you can’t plow and look backward, hoping your lines will be straight. They won’t, and if you try to plow that way you’re not worthy to plow. In the same way, if we try to follow Jesus by always looking back to what we’ve walked away from to follow him, then we’re not worthy to follow him. He must be our Lord.

Therefore, in following Jesus, it may well lead you to leave your home, your family, and many things that those around you prioritize. But Jesus is not embarrassed or sheepish in calling us to this. He is the Lord of glory, and he commands us to devote ourselves to him entirely. Following Jesus comes with great cost. And we can’t ignore that or try to hide that in our preaching of the gospel. However, we also see that following Jesus brings greater blessings than we can imagine.

### **Following Jesus brings greater blessings than we can imagine—now and in the age to come**

After the seventy-two got back from preaching, healing, and casting out demons, they came to Jesus with great joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (10:17). That really is a remarkable reality if we think about it. These demonic powers yield to ordinary people like us who walk under the authority of Christ. And Jesus answers by noting two things. First, he says, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (10:18), which is a reminder to them that Satan is cast down. If we remember God’s first promise of salvation in Genesis 3:15 it was that the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman’s offspring, but that he would crush the serpent’s head. At the cross we witness the bruising of Jesus, if you will. But we also see Satan’s

head crushed. Sure, he's alive and active and seeking whom he may devour. But the fatal blow has been dealt, and he knows his time is brief, as he too will face the final judgment.

Jesus, it seems, is saying to the seventy-two that in their actions of demonstrating Jesus' authority over demons, it is a foretaste of Satan himself being cast down. Moreover, when he says that he's giving them authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and "over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you" (10:19), I don't think he's telling us not to worry about literally stepping on serpents and scorpions. Rather, he's using them as images of demonic powers, and he's telling his followers that these will not be able to ultimately harm them. In other words, as mighty as our enemy is, if we're in Christ, he does not have the power to harm our souls, even as we wage war against him and plunder his goods.

And, yet, as great as it is that the demonic world is subject to us, the thing we need to rejoice in even more is that our names are written in heaven. That is, rejoice that we belong to Christ. Heaven is our home. We have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Yes, following Christ costs in this age, but in the next, we'll know eternal life and dwell with our Lord forever.

But there's also the blessing of knowing that we know God because he chose to make himself known to us. God's sovereignty—his control over all—shows itself throughout this text, and Jesus isn't shy about acknowledging that God's sovereign choice is active in how he governs things. This is most clearly seen in 10:21-22 as Luke writes, "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'"

Here, Jesus says, it is the Father's choice who knows him and who doesn't. And Jesus rejoices that in the Father's wisdom, he's chosen not to make himself known to those who are wise of this age but to those who are of no account, like children. This is similar to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, noting that not many of the Corinthian believers were wise, wealthy, noble, and the like. And Jesus sees his Father's sovereign choice and wisdom in this as something to delight in, not shy away from proclaiming. But he doesn't stop there.

Jesus' next statement is remarkable. First, he says that all things have been handed over to him by his Father. So, this sovereignty that he has just rejoiced in the Father exercising is a sovereignty that Jesus exercises as well. And then, he demonstrates what he says. He starts by stating that no one knows the Son except the Father. And, frankly, that isn't an astounding statement. Any of us might say that no one truly knows us—inside and out—but God. But then Jesus says that no one knows the Father except the Son, and that is an astounding statement.

To those hearing Jesus' words that day, he was saying to them that only he truly knows the God who created the world and exercises control over it. Only he knows his Father. No one truly knows the Father but him. It's hard to find a text that elevates Jesus more than this one.

Unbelievers will sometimes choose to say that Jesus was just a good moral teacher, but no good moral teacher makes claims like this. Who but God the Son could say this? No one. And that's precisely what Jesus is claiming for himself. Moreover, that's not all. He then adds that anyone whom he chooses to reveal the Father to can also know him. But this means that *only* those to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father will know him. In other words, the exercise of sovereignty by his Father that he'd been rejoicing in, he exercises as well.

It seems the logic is something like: 1) the Father exercises his sovereignty in choosing to whom he reveals himself, 2) the Father has given all things into the hands of the Son, and 3) the Son likewise chooses to whom the Father is revealed. That is, we can speak of the sovereign choice of the Father in choosing who knows him, and we can speak of the sovereign choice of the Son in choosing who knows him. No man in all of history would dare speak this way about himself except Jesus because he alone is the *God*-man, and, thus, he exercises the sovereignty of God.

And this leads him to turn to his disciples and tell them that they are blessed to see and hear what they see and hear. They should rejoice that their eyes see that Jesus is the Christ and their minds understand him to be God's Messiah and their hearts are drawn to them. This is the grace of God.

And, brothers and sisters, it is the same for us. If we know the Lord, it's not because we were wiser or more deserving than those who reject him. It's not because we're better people than them. It's because God kindly and graciously chose to open our hearts, minds, and eyes to understand, see, and love him. And, therefore, we should rejoice and give thanks that we're the objects of his saving grace, beloved by him. Let that move you. It moved Paul to praise the Lord in Ephesians 1:3-14, and it moved Jesus here as he considered his followers. And it should move us as well to give thanks and praise to our God for the grace shown. But let it also provoke our hearts to want others to know the grace we've known as well as we obey Jesus' command and pray that more laborers are sent out into the harvest so that more and more might find the Son revealing himself to them through the preaching of the gospel.

Pilate asked, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" We must ask that question to ourselves today and answer it. For those who reject the Lord, they will not see the fullness of his wrath here and now, but they one day will see it. And for those who accept him as our Lord, we will not only know the blessing of eternal life with our Lord on that great day, but we get to live now, knowing that we are the objects of his love, kindness, and saving grace now. So look to him now in faith, and then let us give thanks to him as we come to the table. Amen.