

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and rebuked them,⁵⁶ and they went to another village.

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹ He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”

⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:51-62)

Does Our Heart Reflect Jesus’ Heart?

I saw a picture the other day of a protester holding up a sign that said, “Jesus doesn’t build walls.” As I recall, the picture went with an article about whether conservative Christians will embrace Donald Trump in the election this fall. However you feel about him or his opponent, whatever your political preferences are, we live in a society that has traditionally thought of itself as being Christian. Even though today many people reject that label, both sides of the political divide still like to claim that Jesus would agree with their politics. It shows, I think, just how powerful the gospel really is. But Jesus’ view of our lives is not a political issue, it’s a moral one. Certainly, our morality ought to play a huge role in how we vote and what we think of issues in our society, but when it comes down to it, Jesus is interested in us not just as voters, but as people. He pays attention not just to what we do and say, but to how we think and feel. He cares deeply about our attitudes. In the end, he cares about our hearts. What does your heart and what does my heart say about us and our faith? My friends, **does our heart reflect Jesus’ heart?**

There are really two incidents in the gospel lesson for today, but we’re going to focus just on the first one. Jesus and his disciples were on the way to Jerusalem for the last time. It was going to take a while to get there, but Luke says, “**He set out resolutely for Jerusalem.**” He knew where he was going and why. In fact, all along the way, he would tell his disciples again and again that when he got there, he would be arrested and tortured and killed. But he was determined to go. In fact, he was so focused on that goal that he passed through Samaria to get there. During the New Testament period, Israel was divided into three parts. The northern part was Galilee and the southern part was Judea. Both of those parts were Jewish. But the middle part was called Samaria. A different people lived there. They were the descendants of settlers that the Persians had imported hundreds of years before who had mixed with the Israelites who were already there. They had come up with a kind of blended religion. The Jews avoided them. Usually, when they traveled between the northern and southern parts of the country, they went around Samaria. But Jesus was in a hurry, so he went right through.

Because he was so focused on the goal, Jesus sent messengers – most likely some of the disciples – ahead of him to the villages along the way to make preparations, presumably, so that Jesus could an early start the next day. Well, the people of one of those Samaritan villages were hoping to get to see the famous miracle worker from Galilee. They maybe even had heard of all his healings and were planning to bring their sick. At the very least, they probably wanted to hear him preach. But Jesus wasn’t going to take time for any of that. So they didn’t welcome him. What does that mean? I think it means more than just that they weren’t friendly. There were no Holiday Inns in the ancient world. The few “inns” that did exist were sketchy places. The people there were not willing to offer any suitable place for Jesus and his disciples to stay – which was a big insult in that time and place.

That’s when James and John asked a surprising question: “**Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?**” Why did they ask that? Because they thought the people of this village were

being disrespectful to the Lord. They wanted to defend Jesus' honor. I think we need to admit that we would've felt the same way. Maybe we wouldn't have thought of calling fire down from heaven on them, but wouldn't we be offended if someone showed disrespect to our Lord? Wouldn't we think they deserved some kind of consequences?

My friends, don't we often feel that way today? Lately, I've been reading more and more articles indicating that people who are openly opposed to Christianity believe that they have won the battle in our society. But they're not content with that. They seem to be determined to drive Christianity from any participation in the public life of our country. That's to be expected. Jesus didn't promise us a world in which people will respect our right to believe in him. He promised us persecution. He told us that all men will hate us because of him. But here in America, in this Christian country, how do we feel when our faith is attacked? How do we feel when values that Christians have held to for thousands of years are treated like hate speech? How do we feel when members of our own congregation and even of our own families argue for things God's word condemns? Isn't there a part of us that would like to call just a little bit of fire and brimstone down on those people?

It's hard not to feel that way when people so openly attack our faith. Now, God's not likely to let us call down fire from heaven. But does that stop us from wanting to find other ways to enforce true respect for God and his word? Can we put forth a political candidate who will win the presidency and appoint Supreme Court justices that will protect our values? Can we reverse *Roe v. Wade*? Can we undo the Supreme Court decisions outlawing our ability to stand up against gay marriage? Can we mobilize a political movement that will check the spread of Islam in our country and silence those people who try to put a muzzle on us? Can we at least pray for them to get the judgment they deserve? Do you ever feel that way? Is that so very different from James' and John's desire to call down fire from heaven on people who didn't welcome Jesus?

Did you notice how Jesus responded to their request? Luke says, "**But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.**" Why did Jesus rebuke them? Because their hearts were not on the same page as his heart. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die and pay for all the sins of all the world. He was going to Jerusalem to pay for those Samaritans who refused to welcome him, to pay for the sin they were committing at that very moment when they treated him with contempt. But the disciples wanted to roast them alive for that same sin. What a contrast!

What should our attitude be toward the enemies of the gospel? First and foremost, our prayer should not be that they be humiliated, that they get what they deserve. If God wills our courts or our elections to produce outcomes that protect our right to confess our faith in this sinful society, glory to the name of the one who always protects his Church! We certainly can pray for such outcomes. But our first prayer should be that those enemies of the gospel repent and learn to know Jesus as their Savior. Our Lord laid down his life for the people who are determined to drive us out of public life in America today. Our Lord died and paid for the sins of people who hate the gospel and love sinful lifestyles and accuse us of hate speech when we uphold the truth of God's Word. Our Savior would welcome every single one of them into his Church and into heaven. And our prayer should be that they hear the law and the gospel and that the Holy Spirit convicts them of their sin and then assures them that Jesus died and rose for them, too.

And we should do more than just pray for that. We should commit ourselves to announcing that message clearly and in a way that applies to the very questions that stand before our society today. That does include calling sin what it is. We should commit ourselves to educating our own members who are blindly following our enemies down the road to hell. We need to do everything in our power to share God's Word – and that includes living lives that give the lie to the idea that upholding God's word is somehow "hate speech." Then we need to trust in the Holy Spirit to bless that proclamation.

Is that what we do? I have to be honest here. I hate the godless direction our country has taken in my lifetime. There are times when I wish that God would rain down fire on those enemies of the gospel. I'd like to see their bacon sizzle. But that just isn't a Christian attitude. It's sinful and I deserve the same rebuke that Jesus gave to James and John. How about you? Our sin is just as serious as the sin of Jesus' enemies is. The only difference between them and us is that we know the solution. We can avoid that solution. We can justify our sinful hearts and embrace the attitude Jesus rebuked and destroy our faith in the process. But it doesn't have to be that way. Jesus wasn't going to Jerusalem to die just for Samaritans who rejected him and for modern day enemies of the cross. He was going there to die for the whole world. Thankfully, that includes us.

All his life long, Jesus lived the perfect attitude that we Christians can never achieve. His heart and his mind, his life and his words were all perfect in our place. Today, God calls you and me perfect because Jesus was. God treats us as if we never showed anything but love for the enemies of the cross. God rules that our hearts have never hated those people because Jesus' heart never did. And Jesus finished that long trip to Jerusalem. He let himself be arrested and tortured and nailed to a cross. He didn't flinch when God the Father poured hell out on him while he was there. Then he gave up his spirit and died. He paid all that we sinners owe. He paid even for the times when our hearts don't reflect his love. Then he rose to tell us that God doesn't see our sinful words or actions, or our sinful thoughts or feelings anymore. We are forgiven. He rose to tell us that in God's sight we are holy and perfect, so we will live with him forever.

That gospel message renews us. It fills us with love, because we needed to be forgiven just as much as the most dedicated enemy of the cross. We can pray that those enemies repent and trust in their Savior. We can pray that they live with us in heaven, even after years of trying to drive the gospel away.

Conversely, we can also pray for God's justice. The same Jesus who rebuked the disciples also taught them to pray, "Thy will be done." Luther tells us every time we pray that prayer, we're asking God to judge the impenitent. On Judgment Day, God is going to vindicate us. He's going to hold us up to the whole world as the people who knew the truth and were right. He's going to make all the enemies of the cross praise Jesus and say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." That praise will be part of their punishment as they go to hell. You know what? Most of us know people who will wind up in hell. And we are all going to agree with God's judgment on that day and even rejoice in it.

So there is a paradox here. On the one hand, we pray every day for the conversion of the enemies of Christ. But we also pray that our Lord would return. We pray that he would confound his enemies' attack on us. We pray that all those who refuse to repent would ultimately face their judgment. But always, we hope for their conversion. And we do not seek to be agents of God's justice. Never is there a role for violence or even insults against the enemies of the truth. We entrust judgment to God and pray for him to do his will, and to do it swiftly and completely

How do we balance those things? It all comes down to reflecting the heart of Christ. Jesus came to this world to die and rise for us sinners. In our hearts, we need to have the fervent desire that all people be saved. If that love for sinners is there, then we will dedicate our lives to sharing the good news. Our attitude even towards the enemies of the cross will reflect Jesus' love. But Jesus did not hesitate to proclaim the law. He drove the moneychangers out of the temple with a whip. It's not our job to take up the whip or to call down fire from heaven. But we do testify to the truth. We pray for protection from the devil and his forces here. We pray that God's will be done and that the gospel triumph. We even pray that God's judgment come on those he condemns, but always we place that in his hands, and trust in him to know when and how and on whom that judgment should fall. Do our hearts reflect Jesus' heart? The key to saying yes is growing in faith and love, growing in his word, growing in the gospel so that Jesus' goals are always our goals. Hear that gospel message so that your heart reflects Jesus' heart. Amen.