

Luke 9:51-62: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 9 verses 51 to 62 And they went on to another village As they were going along the road Someone said to him I will follow you wherever you go And Jesus said to him Foxes have holes And birds of the air have nests But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head To another he said Follow me But he said 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

Yet another said I will follow you Lord But let me first say farewell to those at my home Jesus said to him No one who puts his hand to the plough And looks back Is fit for the kingdom of God At the end of Luke chapter 9 We enter a new phase of the gospel The gospel of Luke Can be divided into three sections There is the section up to Luke chapter 9 verse 50 Which concerns the ministry in Galilee Which sets the scene for the beginning of Christ's vocation In chapters 9 verse 51 to 19 verse 28 There is the travel and the journey towards Jerusalem And then from chapter 19 verse 28 onwards There is the final week in Jerusalem And the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection The journey narrative in Luke is greatly drawn out At many points we might forget that we are on a journey But the journey is very important for understanding what is taking place Jesus is on the way He is on the way towards his destiny

He has set his face towards Jerusalem And he is about to arrive there And all these things that are taking place Are taking place in the shadow of that destination Travel is a theme within the work of Luke and Acts more generally There are larger journey narratives And smaller journey narratives Some of the smaller journey narratives include the Emmaus Road The story of the Ethiopian eunuch Saul on the road to Damascus And these journey narratives serve a purpose narratively In each of those stories A physical journey is accompanied by a movement in understanding That ultimately leads to eyes being opened It leads to the celebration of baptism or the Lord's Supper These are movements in understanding That Luke is using a travel narrative to frame There are also larger journey narratives Paul's missionary journeys The journey to Jerusalem of Christ But then also of Paul in the book of Acts Paul also journeys towards Rome And the shipwreck narrative is a very important part Of the structure of the book of Acts Jesus in the Gospel of Luke

To a far greater extent than the other Gospels Is presented as a travelling prophet Luke is one of the synoptic Gospels So there are lots of commonalities with Matthew and Mark But there are some very arresting differences in this section Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in this section Takes 35% of Luke's Gospel narrative In contrast to Matthew where it only has 6% And Mark where it only has 8% If Matthew accents Jesus as the teacher The one who's teaching the law The new Moses perhaps And Mark represents Jesus as the new David The king, the one who does everything straightway Who's the man of action The man who defeats the demons Luke presents Jesus as the prophet The man of prayer The man who wanders from place to place Like the prophets did The days drew near for him to be taken up Jesus is looking beyond the cross To the ascension The cross is facing him But there's something beyond the cross He's going to accomplish his exodus in Jerusalem As he spoke about on the Mount of Transfiguration With Elijah and Moses The description of looking forward to that time When he's going to be taken up Also draws our mind back to 2 Kings chapter 2 perhaps And the description of Elijah on the way to be taken up In the chariots of fire into heaven Jesus makes a determined move towards Jerusalem There is a decisive shift here He sets his face and he is not going to be turned aside He also sends disciples ahead of him Messengers ahead of him In Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 Behold I send my messenger And he will prepare the way before me And the Lord whom you seek Will suddenly come to his temple And the messenger of the covenant In whom you delight Behold he is coming Says the Lord of hosts Earlier on in the gospel These words are applied to John the Baptist And here we see the disciples Playing a similar role to John the Baptist As Jesus moves towards Jerusalem James and John ask whether they

should call

[5 : 05] For fire to come down from heaven As Christ is rejected on the way In this they imagine themselves to be like The prophet Elijah Elijah called down fire from heaven To judge people in 2 Kings chapter 1 Elsewhere in the gospels James and John are described as the sons of thunder And it seems this is a fitting request For the sons of thunder to make For fire to come down from heaven Peter's failure Is that of being a stumbling stone Peter is the rock But he can turn into a stumbling stone If he is not careful In the same way James and John's calling The way in which they have been set apart By the Lord And renamed by him Is one that comes with dangers Their very strength Holds possibilities of weakness Like John the Baptist They seem to be wondering Where the promised fire Is going to come from He is going to baptise you With the Holy Spirit And with fire When is the judgement coming?

What we should be beginning to recognise here though Is that Jesus Though he has similarities to Elijah Is not Elijah The travel material of this gospel Is interspersed with discipleship material Which is quite fitting Others must join Jesus on the way The movement towards Jerusalem Is connected with taking up the cross And following Christ Christ makes a number of statements here To different people Who want to join along the way Foxes have holes And the birds of the air have nests But the Son of Man Has nowhere to lay his head Foxes have holes May be a reference Perhaps to people like Herod The birds of the air To the Gentiles within the land Herod is referred to as a fox In Luke chapter 13 verse 32 And he said to them Go and tell that fox Behold I cast out demons And perform cures Today and tomorrow And on the third day I finish my course Jesus uses the term Son of Man of himself This terminology is used From time to time For people outside Of the immediate discipleship group It would draw people's mind

Back to Daniel It would reference suffering It would also suggest Heavenly authority It's an enigmatic term And maybe it's a challenge Not to slot Jesus Into an existing category Jesus' statement To the man who wants To bury his father first Is a surprising and arresting one Let the dead bury their own dead It's a very radical statement We need not presume That the man's father Has just died However He might want to Do his filial duty first And then follow Jesus At a later point Waiting around For a few years perhaps However Jesus speaks of that situation As one That is like Serving an ongoing cycle of death Let the dead bury their own dead If you're just going to Bury your father And then your son's Going to bury you Nothing's going to change He's going to bring Resurrection A change A bringing of life Into a cycle of death And those who will follow him Will be part of breaking That cycle of the dead Bury their dead The final statement Is from someone Who wants to go back And say farewell

To the people at his home Once again Jesus' response Is radical That The man who has put His hand to the plough Should not look back The story of Elijah Is once more In the background In 1 Kings chapter 19 Verses 19 to 21 So he departed from there And found Elisha The son of Shaphat Who was ploughing With twelve yoke of oxen In front of him And he was with the twelve Elijah passed by him And cast his cloak upon him And he left the oxen And ran after Elijah And said Let me kiss my father And my mother And then I will follow you And he said to him Go back again For what have I done to you And he returned From following him And took the yoke of oxen And sacrificed them And boiled their flesh With the yokes of oxen And gave it to the people And they ate Then he arose And went after Elijah And assisted him Once again There is a distinction Being drawn Between Jesus and Elijah Jesus' ministry Has a much greater urgency Than the ministry of Elijah A question to consider How does the sending on

Of people ahead And the calling of people To follow behind Help us to better understand The character of Jesus' Movement to Jerusalem here