

Rejection

A question as we begin our consideration of the scriptures here before us today given in Luke chapter 9, "How do you deal with the episodes of rejection that take place in the matters of your daily life? And what is your usual response?"

For myself, rejection is never a comfortable thing. And I, of course, wish and hope it would never take place, but it does. And almost without exception, that rejection is painful and sometimes offensive to me, provoking responses within me that I ought not to have.

But I know that if I am ever to hope to have and to enjoy the kind of peaceful Christian life that God intends for me, then I really must learn to deal rightly with those episodes of rejection that I encounter.

And yes, while it may often be that it was some behavior on my part that has caused that other person to reject me, just as often, that other person's anger, their resentment, their bitterness, out of which their rejection is borne has far less to do with me personally and far more to do with some hidden matters within that other person's heart and soul.

Here in these words of Luke chapter 9 that we'll read in a moment, we're told that Jesus knew the time had come for Him to go to Jerusalem where He would suffer and die. And He began to make His way in that direction. And as He did, He sent some of His disciples on ahead to the next town to find lodging and food. But the people of that town refused to receive them. Listen to these words here in Luke chapter 9 beginning in verse 51.

⁵¹ Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

⁵⁵But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*." And they went to another village. (Luke 9:51-56)

We're not given the details of the conversation that the disciples had with the townspeople except to say,

⁵² . . . as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:52)

Though it's not explicitly stated here, verse 53 gives us the probable reason behind the rejection from the townspeople. Implied within these words is the understanding that the disciples had told the townspeople that Jesus had His face set towards Jerusalem, meaning that His purposes and intents were not with them but were with matters that could only be accomplished in Jerusalem. And that was offensive to those people.

Why would that be so? Why would those simple words arouse such anger and resentment?

As with so many of the things said to us each day, we take offense not only from the words that are spoken aloud to us, but also from the words that are left unspoken. And hidden within these words is one of the deeply ingrained ongoing points of bitterness that existed at that time between the Samaritans and the Jews.

For the most part, the Samaritans were half-bred Jews, who for centuries had intermarried with local gentile residents and had co-mingled the local culture and pagan worship into their Jewish religion and traditions. But even so, many of them had still remained faithful believers in the one true God.

But with prejudice, being what it is, it did not matter to most of the Jews that some of those Samaritans were true believers, they still held them in low esteem and refused to associate with them in social or religious matters. And on those occasions when the Samaritans dared to come to Jerusalem to worship, they were usually treated as being of a lower class or even as outcasts. For those reasons and many others, the Samaritans most often chose to remain in Samaria and to provide their own places and forms of worship.

But folks, no matter how sincere those Samaritans were, there really was a problem with their efforts. A person or a group of people is not allowed to devise their own form and place of worship and think that God will automatically

approve of them, just because they are sincere in their efforts. True worship of God does not take place in that way.

Recall in the Book of Genesis how Cain brought God some of the produce of his hands as an offering, but God rejected that offering, because it was not what He had told Cain to bring. God truly does have very specific requirements that must be met before worship can be called true worship.

But sincerity in beliefs is often very strong and it prompted these Samaritan townspeople to respond strongly to the implication that Jerusalem was more important than their own places and manner of worship. And they were offended that Jesus would just use their hospitality and lodging and then quickly pass them by.

Unfortunately, these dear people seemed to be caught up in a quick response that we also sometimes find ourselves caught up within. In those moments, they became filled with their own self-centered interests, so much so that they did not stop to consider that Jesus might have other, far more important and eternal purposes for going to Jerusalem.

And Jesus did most certainly have! Jesus' reason for having His face set upon Jerusalem had to do with the foreordained plan of God for His crucifixion and for the salvation of all mankind, a plan that He and God the Father and God the Holy Ghost had devised before time began, a plan that would bring the sons of men back into the fold as "true sons of God".

The Samaritans had no idea that Jesus needed to "pass them by" in order that He might go on to Jerusalem and fulfill the plan that would save even their very own souls. If they had of known that they would have gladly provided for Him, blessed Him and then sent Him on His way satisfied.

But again, personal agendas and self-centered desires and purposes seem always to get in the way and drown out the "still small voice" of God. And the townspeople did what their angry hearts told them to do and they rejected Jesus and refused to receive Him and His disciples.

But folks, as I have reminded us so often on other occasions, before we cast stones at others, like these Samaritans, we need to understand that the very same kind of thing takes place within us and around us every day. Like the

Samaritans, we have our self-centered forms of Christianity, sometimes a half right, half wrong form of belief, adopted out of self-centered and self-absorbed plans and purposes.

And yes, like the Samaritans, we really do want Jesus to stop and tarry with us for a while, even for a long while, perhaps bringing a revival with great crowds to our church.

But as was needed with the Samaritans, we also need to realize that there is much more at stake in the plans and the purposes of God than just us and our small-minded forms of worship.

As strange as it might sound for me to say, while we do need Jesus and His presence in and around us every moment of every day, His work among us is far greater than just us personally and our individual needs. He had then, and He has now, many other far greater plans and purposes in mind. He has plans that need to go on forward, plans that require us to join with Him rather than demand that He join with us.

As a church with a small membership, I've often wondered why God seems to prosper other churches with greater numbers of members, why He doesn't tarry with us and bring more people to worship with us each Sunday.

Perhaps it is something that we are doing wrong. But it may not be. It may be as simple as we understand these words of this passage to be. Perhaps God simply has another plan for those other churches, a plan that requires a greater number of church members for them each week.

And we should not be offended when God draws a greater number of people to those other churches instead of to ours. Those people are not rejecting us and neither is God rejecting us. God simply has a different mission for those other churches and for their members. And we should be glad for them.

But again, and unfortunately so, too often, like those Samaritans, we can't seem to see beyond our own personal desires to grasp that Jesus can really and easily bless all of us, just in different ways. He is not only able to meet every need that we in our church will ever have, He can also reach on out and meet all the needs of all those other people in all those other churches, and even to the

uttermost parts of the earth. And His presence is no less with us than He is with those other churches. His fullness is able to be in all places at all times.

Again, it seems that our difficulty is that too often we have "small minds". We can't fathom the greatness of God, the far-reaching plans that He has for all the people of this earth. And in our smallness, we do as these Samaritans did and we "stub up" and become a stumbling block to His efforts.

But we must be warned that whenever we do that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, there will be consequences. Who knows what wonders might have taken place had Jesus been invited to come in for the night and abide with those Samaritans.

Folks, listen! This is no small thing! Jesus is God over all people and all things. And His plans and His purposes are always much, much bigger than our small minds can comprehend. I fear that those confused townspeople let small matters of prejudice intervene and prevent them from great and wonderful blessings. And I have great pity for them for their small-mindedness.

But also, look further with me in this passage. It's obvious that small-mindedness is not just a problem for these Samaritans. It seems also to be present within the disciples, especially James and John. Listen again as James and John, show their own small-minded perspective. Verse 54,

⁵⁴And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54)

You can almost hear James and John ranting and raving. These two disciples, James and John, are also known as "sons of thunder". One might imagine that responses such as this is why they were called that! Here, you can almost hear them saying, "How dare these 'Samaritan dogs' treat us this way. We ought to call down fire from heaven upon them for refusing us food and lodging."

Think about this for a moment. Yes, their words were probably spoken in anger. But had Jesus have said "go ahead", in their anger, James and John might actually have commanded fire to come down from heaven to consume those people. Was this thing those people did really deserving of death. They were unkind and inhospitable, yes, but was their offense deserving of such a harsh consequence.

On another occasion, as Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, He said in Matthew chapter 5,

²¹"You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not murder*, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' ²²But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Folks, in their hearts, these disciples had probably already killed those townspeople. Yes, those people were wrong, but not deserving of death. And besides that, killing those people was worlds away from the purpose and the mission that Jesus came to earth to accomplish.

Jesus had come to this earth to seek and to save those who are lost, not to destroy them. And so, He turned to James and John and in verse 55 rebuked them saying,

⁵⁵, . . . "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*." And they went to another village. (Luke 9:55-56)

How often is it that we respond wrongly to people who mistreat us, not to go so far as to want to kill them, but still have angry, bitter responses to their mistreatment.

But is that what we are supposed to be doing, acting in the same way that we just found offensive, rejecting another person just as they have rejected us, returning evil for evil?

As we consider the culture that we are currently living within here in America, it seems that anger has become a deeply imbedded normal behavior within many of the hearts and souls of our citizens, and our whole society and culture being set ablaze again and again by every new event that's reported within our news media.

And it seems that perceived "rejection" is at the heart of most of the strife. All sides "rejecting" each other.

And much like James and John, all sides wanting to call down fire from heaven upon anyone who opposes them.

But the response that God desires for His blessed children to have toward all of the anger and resentment being shown by each of the uncaring, self-centered, self-absorbed people is not one of revenge and retribution, but rather it is that of a generous gift of salvation and eternal life. Instead of calling down fire upon people, Jesus wants to save them!

And again, Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost. He has saved you and me, and He wants you and me to see those other people through the same eyes of love that He sees them, and to join with Him in bringing His blessed salvation to them.

And yes, again, when we are being rejected and mistreated, it's easier and sometimes more pleasing to our ego to reject and to mistreat those people right back, but that is not what God wants you and me to do. He wants you and me to minister to them, to on God's behalf, seek to save those who are lost, to give them Jesus' "Bread of Life" instead of our own angry words of death.

One last thought before we close . . . though we often don't know that He's doing it, Jesus is asking us, you and me personally, may He stop and abide with us, in our home, and within our daily life, personally. He tells us in Revelation 3, 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:20)

Through the words of our passage today, and through my words to us, Jesus is saying exactly this. He wants to come and abide with us personally, in our homes, in our habits and within our behaviors. And the question for us personally is, "Will we welcome Him to come in and abide with us?"

Yes, we believe in Him, and we are saved, but do we allow Him to truly come in and abide with us and in us, in all that we are, all that we do and in all of the words we say to each other? We should folks! And we must! Who knows what blessings He might shower upon us if we do!

Listen as we close . . .

20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:20)

Let's pray!