The Journey to Jerusalem

(1) Setting out on the journey  Luke 9:51-62 / Psalm 84


Luke begins the second third of his gospel by making clear that Jesus is heading to Jerusalem for what will be a very costly end. A Christian is someone who journeys with him (cf. “The Way” Acts 9:2). “Following Jesus is what it’s all about” (Wright). For Jesus this took great courage and resolution – he “set his face” to obey God’s call (51; Is.50:6-7). The same courage and commitment is needed by any who choose to be his followers. Taking up the cross daily is always costly (Lk.9:23).

Following Jesus means learning to think and react to opposition in a Christ-like way (54-55). In particular, it requires wholeheartedness, as Jesus makes clear in these next three conversations (57-62). It’s easy to say we’ll follow wherever he takes us (57) but if we’ve not counted the cost we’ll soon give up (cf. Lk.8:13-14). Even reasonable requests (59,61) are challenged by Jesus who insists that the demands of the kingdom are more urgent even than sacred duties. Will we follow “comfort, convention, custom – or Christ” (Wilcock)?

2. The blessings of pilgrimage (Psalm 84)

This Psalm is closely connected with the Psalms of Ascent because of its theme of pilgrimage and the similar longing to be in God’s temple (1-2; Ps.122:1; 1 Kgs.8:27-30). Out of that longing comes a dynamic faith, with the recognition that God’s strength is found by people who are on the move, with their “hearts set on pilgrimage” (5). This brings blessing to others too – even in barren desert “they make it a place of springs” (6). The source of their strength isn’t the temple but “the living God” they worship, their Almighty King and Lord (1-3,7-12).

Notice the three keys to blessing mentioned in this Psalm (4,5,12). We need to dwell in him with delight and love (4; Jn.15:4;9;12). We need to keep on journeying with him, as pilgrim people (5; Ph.3:12-14; Heb.12:1-2). And we need to trust him, knowing that we walk by faith but that he will lead us as we seek his way (12; Heb.11:8-10; Mt.6:33).

Discussion 1 – The cost of pilgrimage

Share with each other a favourite or memorable journey that you have made. What was easy or difficult about it? What made it special?

Jesus was rejected here at the start of his journey to Jerusalem (53) and again at his journey’s end. Think of a time when you have been rejected. How did you respond? How did Jesus respond to rejection? What can we learn from that about responding better to rejection?

Discussion 2 – The blessings of pilgrimage

As Christians what might it mean to “set our hearts on pilgrimage”?

What do we learn about pilgrimage from Abraham’s story in Hebrews 11:8-10? Identify the key words in that passage that have relevance for our own journey through this world to the heavenly Jerusalem?

Reflection:

What has particularly struck you out of today’s study and discussion?

How might that help you to be a better follower of Jesus?

Throughout this coming week, reflect further on these thoughts and continue the journey through Luke’s Gospel with these daily readings:

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If you have internet access, you can read a daily short blog with comment on these verses www.skeltonbrotton.wixsite.com/christians