The Journey to Jerusalem Week 1

1) “Resolutely setting out”

Read Luke 9:51-62

So far Luke’s Gospel has largely followed Mark but now Luke begins a long section with much material recorded only by him. He frames that as Jesus “resolutely” journeying towards Jerusalem, where he will be “taken up to heaven” (51; cf. 2 Kgs.2:1,11) – a reference to his death and resurrection that's already been mentioned several times in this chapter and which would be the fulfilment of his work (Lk.9:22, 31, 44).

The hostility between Jews and Samaritans meant that pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem via Samaria often experienced ill-treatment (53). James and John’s fiery response shows that they still had much to learn about the Christian way of responding to opposition (54; Mt.5:38-45). John, the apostle of love, had started out as a hot-headed “son of thunder” (Mk.3:17; 1 Jn.4:7-11, 19-21).

So following Jesus is a life-long process of learning from him and becoming like him. But what is required from the outset is wholeheartedness. It’s easy to say we’ll go with him anywhere (57) but if we’ve not counted the cost we’ll soon give up (Lk.8:13-14). Even with reasonable requests and duties Jesus challenges us to follow him resolutely (59,61; Mt.10:37-39).

2) “He who listens to you listens to me”

Read Luke 10:1-16

Many of the instructions given here are included by Matthew in the earlier account of Jesus sending out the Twelve (Lk.9:2-6; Mt.10:5-16). They are just as relevant for this further mission training activity which involved other disciples. Both incidents illustrate that ”the harvest is plentiful” and that more workers are needed (2; Mt.9:37-38; Jn.4:35).

Mission is risky – we are sent out “like lambs among wolves”, needing to rely on our shepherd for leading and protection (3; Jn.10:12-15) whilst being careful to maintain both prudence and purity (Mt.10:16). The message of God’s kingdom is a message of peace (Rom.14:17) and we are to look out for “people of peace” who are ready to respond with interest, gladly accepting their welcome and support (5-9; e.g. Acts 16:13-15).

Where that message is unwelcome, it’s right to move on to those whose hearts are open (10-11; Acts 13:51). But by rejecting the good news of God’s kingdom there can be no excuse on the day of judgement (10-11; Jn.3:19-21). That was so for the Galilean towns where Jesus worked (12-15; Mt.11:20-24) and it remains true for all his messengers, because “he who listens to you listens to me” (16).
3) “Your names are written in heaven”

Read Luke 10:17-24

Those who’d been sent out on mission “returned with joy” because of their authority over evil spirits (17; 9:1). Their victories were a part of God’s great victory over Satan, which had seen Satan cast out of heaven and which was now being completed through the coming of God’s kingdom in Jesus (18; 11:20; Jn.12:31; Rev.12:7-9; Is.14:12-15).

So they needed to beware of any proud boasting (the cause of Satan’s fall), remembering that any power that they’d had was only because it had been “given” (19; 1 Cor.1:31). Even better, the greatest gift of all – and therefore their greatest joy – is that their “names are written in heaven”, the assurance that they belong to God for ever (20; Heb.12:23; Rev.3:5; Dan.12:1).

Such things can only be known by divine revelation (21-22). Themes common in John’s Gospel are affirmed here by Jesus, particularly the relationship between him, the Son, and the Father, which enables him alone to reveal the Father to us (Jn.1:14,18; 3:35; 13:3; 14:9; 17:6,26). Understanding God’s mystery is hidden from the wise but revealed to those with child-like openness and trust. There can be no greater privilege than that (23-24; 1 Cor.2:9-10).

4) “Love God... love your neighbour”

Read Luke 10:25-28

The commands to “love God with all your heart” and to “love your neighbour as yourself” sum up and embrace our whole duty towards God and people (27; Mt.22:34-40; Dt.6:5; Lev.19:18). This “expert in the law” knew this truth in principle but his primary interest was to try and catch Jesus out with a legal question (25-26).

The importance of these two commands means that Jesus would have referred to them often. In every part of our life (“heart, soul, mind”) we are to love God with all our strength. And loving God means we’ll want to keep his commands about right behaviour to others, all of which are included and fully summed up by “love your neighbour as yourself”. So “all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments” (Mt.22:40; Rom.13:8-10, Gal.5:14).

Jesus says that this is the heart of true religion and the key to eternal life (25,28). Not that life can be earned by such works (which in any case are beyond our ability to do perfectly). Rather, Jesus is pointing beyond the legalistic answer which the law expert expected. “He is telling him that eternal life is not a matter of keeping rules at all. To live in love is to live the life of the kingdom of God” (Morris).
5) “Go and do likewise”

Read Luke 10:29-37

The journey to Jerusalem had begun with a reminder of the mutual disdain between Samaritans and Jews which Jesus did not share (9:52-56). Now, in this well-known parable, he makes clear that such racial prejudice is both wrong and misplaced, for it’s the Samaritan – not the two Jewish religious leaders – who behaves as a good neighbour should (30-35).

The question, “Who is my neighbour?” (29) is answered in a way that was intended both to shock the listeners out of their hatred and to instruct them about what love looks like in practice. A Samaritan was the last person they would have expected to come to the rescue. Parables usually have one main point (the story details are not allegorical) and the main point here is that it’s the Samaritan who demonstrated love “with actions” (1 Jn.3:18).

So our neighbour is anyone in need, whoever they might be and however much helping them goes against the grain (Lk.6:27-29). But more particularly still, WE are neighbours TO THEM (36), and therefore need to show “mercy” to them in acts of practical service and kindness (37; 6:36), just as we would want people to do to us (6:31). This is the “royal law” of God’s kingdom (Jas.2:8).

6) “Only one thing is needed”

Read Luke 10:38-42

This story occurs only in Luke and perhaps he intentionally included it here, linking Jesus’s teaching about the two great commandments (10:25-37) and his teaching about prayer (11:1-13). The behaviour of the two sisters touches on a conflict that we all find in our discipleship – between the need to listen attentively to Jesus (39) and the busy-ness of all our doing and serving (40).

We are called to “serve one another in love” and service is a spiritual gift – indeed serving others is the hallmark of greatness in God’s kingdom (Gal.5:13-14; Rom.12:7; Mk.9:35). But that can cause us to be “distracted” (40) from the “one thing that is needed” (42). Jesus’s rebuke to Martha is tender but clear – we can easily lavish time on things that are of limited value and in doing so fail to choose “what is better” (42).

We might feel that Martha got a raw deal as she was the one doing all the work! And, yes, it’s possible to be so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly use. Yet Jesus’s affirmation of Mary shows us that love is not only about action (10:37) but also of heart-devotion (39). Making time for loving prayer and worship is a choice Jesus wants us to make (cf. Mk.1:35; Lk.6:12).
7) “Teach us to pray”


In response to the disciples' request, “Lord, teach us to pray” (1), Jesus gave them this shorter version of the familiar “Lord’s Prayer” (Mt.6:9-13). It’s easy to think that Luke’s version is abbreviated and therefore less useful. But in fact Luke gives us the "bare bones" of the agenda for our meeting with God. It’s a pattern to guide us in our praying:

- **Father** Begin by drawing near to God your Father.
- **Hallowed be your name** Come with reverent worship because he is holy.
- **Your kingdom come** Pray each day for God’s purpose to be done in you and in society.
- **Give us each day our daily bread** Ask for what you and others need.
- **Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who sins against us** Receive his forgiveness and by that grace forgive anyone who has wronged you.
- **And lead us not into temptation** Ask for protection and victory in the daily spiritual battle.

Next comes a parable to encourage us to pray persistently (5-8), not because God is unwilling to answer but because he is a heavenly Father who gives us what we need (9-13; Mt.7:7-11). Of all his good gifts, the gift of the Holy Spirit is key to our living as God’s children and engaging with God in prayer (13; Rom.8:15-17, 26-27).