

## SET YOUR FACE TO JERUSALEM

Luke describes the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem at the beginning of that last week of His earthly life and as He was drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of His disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, ***"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*** (Luke 19:37-38) There is no doubt what was in the disciples' minds. This was the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy given centuries earlier: ***"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is He, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and He shall command peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth"*** (Zechariah 9:9-10).

The long-awaited Messiah had come, the king of Israel (and of all the earth) was here! Jerusalem would be His capital city. From there He would rule the world in peace and righteousness. What a day this was! How their hearts must have pounded in their chests! How would He do it? Would He gather together the enthusiastic crowds and storm the Roman defence? Is this the people's revolution? Or would He call down fire from heaven to consume the enemies of God? The tension of the moment must have been tremendous! But their understanding of Jesus' last journey was flawed. They saw Him as a king moving in to take control by force. They could not grasp that the victory Jesus would soon win over sin, satan, death and all the enemies of righteousness; and that this victory would be won through His own dreadful suffering and death on the cross.

The Pharisees had a double reason for wanting this kind of welcome silenced. On the one hand, this Jesus was a threat to their authority, and they were jealous the Lord's popularity. On the other hand, they feared a Roman backlash to all this inciting talk of another king of Israel. So they say to Jesus, **"Teacher, rebuke your disciples.' But He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!'"** (Luke 19:39-40). No, Jesus would not rebuke them for this. For the hour has come. The authority of the Pharisees is done for, and if the Romans come, let them come! He will not silence the truth any longer. Sure, the disciples' understanding of Jesus' kingship at this point is flawed. But impending events will correct that. For in essence they are correct. Jesus is the king of Israel, and the kingdom He is inaugurating will bring peace to all the nations and spread from sea to sea.

Had Jesus taken His throne on that first day of palms, things would be very different. We would have been unable to receive true salvation! There had to be the cross, and that is what the disciples had not yet understood. Back in Luke 9, as Jesus prepared to set out for Jerusalem from Galilee, He tried to explain this to his disciples. In verse 22 He said, **"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."** And in verse 44 He told them, **"Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men."** But verse 45 tells us, **"They did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them that they should not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying."** Their misunderstanding of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem results in a misunderstanding of their responsibilities as followers of Christ. This is why this is important for us to understand, lest we make the same mistake.

In Luke 9:51-56 we learn how not to understand Palm Sunday. Let's look at it together. ***"When the days drew near for Him to be received up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem."*** To set His face towards Jerusalem meant something very different for Jesus than it did for the disciples. Here what Jerusalem meant for Jesus was, ***"I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem"*** (Luke 13:33). Jerusalem meant one thing for Jesus - certain death. Nor was He under any illusions of a quick and heroic death. In Luke 18:31 He predicted, ***"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge Him and kill Him."*** When Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem, He set His face to die.

If we were to look at Jesus' death merely as a result of a betrayer's deceit and the Sanhedrin's envy and Pilate's cowardliness, it might seem very involuntary. And the benefit of the salvation that has come to us might be viewed as God's way of making a virtue out of a necessity. But Jesus had a nature like ours. He shrunk back from pain like we do. He had a mother and brothers and sisters. He had close friends. To turn His back on all this and set His face towards a vicious whipping and beating and spitting and mocking and a crucifixion was not easy. It must have been excruciatingly difficult. But once you read Luke 9:51-56 all such thoughts vanish. Jesus was not accidentally entangled in a web of injustice. The saving benefits of His death were not an afterthought. God planned it all out of infinite love for us, and He appointed a time. Jesus, who was the very embodiment of His Father's love, saw that the time had come and **set His face** to fulfil His mission: to die in Jerusalem for our sake.

**"No one takes My life from Me (He said), but I lay it down of My own accord"** (John 10:18). **"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"** (John 15:13).

What the disciples had to learn is what we must all learn, and that is, that Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is our journey, and if He set His face to go there and die, we must set our face to die with Him (**"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him"** - Romans 6:8). However, one might be tempted to reason in just the opposite way: that since Jesus suffered so much and died in our place, therefore, we are free to go straight to the top of the class, as it were, and skip all the exams. He suffered so we could experience comfort. He died so we could have a storm-free life. He bore abuse so we could be greatly esteemed. He gave up the treasures of heaven so we could lay up treasures for ourselves on earth. He brought the kingdom to our doorstep and paid for our entrance and now we live in it with all its earthly privileges.

However, all this is not exactly biblical reasoning. It goes against the Lord's teaching in this very context. Luke 9:23-24 reads: **"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save His life will lose it; and whoever loses His life for my sake, He will save it."** When Jesus set His face to walk the road to Calvary, He was not merely taking our place; He was setting a pattern for life. If you seek to secure your life through surrounding yourself with luxury in the face of human need, you will lose your life. You can only save your life if you set your face to the cross and follow Christ on the Calvary road. Jesus died to save you from the power and punishment of sin, not from the sacrifices you ought to make for love's sake. You should dream of breaking loose from the shackles of this self-serving, consumer culture in which we live. You should dream of doing radical things for a great cause - the cause of Jesus Christ!

You should set your face toward Jerusalem every day, the place where the ultimate sacrifice was made. You should be doing something radically loving with your house, something radically loving with your income, something radically loving with your free time, something radically loving with your job or your school. The more secure you are in God, rather than material things, the more open you are to nitty-gritty involvement with those people who are least lovely and most needy. The more this happens, the more striking and fruitful will be the witness of this church for Jesus Christ in our community. The church is here to equip you to go out into the market place and meet the needs of others. This is not a bless-me-club! Each of us must set his/her face toward Jerusalem and pick up his/her cross and follow Christ. This means doing the very things that Jesus did - and even greater things because we now have the blessed Holy Spirit working in and through us!

If Christ our Lord set His face to go to Jerusalem, we ought to help one another week after week to set our faces like flint against the allurements of modern society and follow the King of Kings on the road to Calvary. It is on this road that you will fulfil your destiny and bring most glory to God. It is on this road that you can draw near to God and discover exactly what He intends for your life. It is on this road that you will encounter the supernatural power of God. Come let us walk together, ***“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”*** (Hebrews 12:2).