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THE SAVIOR'S TEACHINGS ON Discipleship

In Luke's account of Jesus Christ's final journey to Jerusalem, we see the Savior giving us a clear pattern for how to follow Him.

By Casey W. Olson

Seminaries and Institutes

Just four months before the Savior's death, "when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly [or resolutely] set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).¹ In the preceding weeks, Jesus Christ had carefully prepared His disciples for the difficulties and transcendent spiritual events that lay ahead.

For example, immediately after Peter testified of Jesus Christ's divinity at Caesarea Philippi, the Savior spoke to His disciples about His approaching death and Resurrection for the first time in plain, unmistakable terms (see Matthew 16:13–21; Mark 8:27–31; Luke 9:18–22).² Jesus also brought Peter, James, and John with Him "up into an high mountain," where He "was transfigured before them" (Matthew 17:1–2). There, the Savior, Moses, and Elijah bestowed priesthood keys upon Peter, James, and John. Moses and Elijah also offered comfort and support to Jesus as they "spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31).³ Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles referred to this experience on the mount as "the beginning of the end" of Jesus Christ's mortal ministry.⁴

These events show that when Jesus Christ “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,” He clearly knew He was commencing the journey that would culminate in His death. The book of Luke, which provides the most detail regarding this journey, records that as the Savior “went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22), a company of disciples—both men and women—traveled with Him (see Luke 11:27).⁵ While walking together, Jesus tutored His followers on the demands of discipleship. As we study the Savior’s teachings in context of this journey, we can gain a greater appreciation of how He reinforced His instructions on discipleship with the power of His own example.

Three Responses to Jesus Christ’s Instruction to “Follow Me”

Shortly before the Savior began His final trek to Jerusalem, He declared: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Later, as Jesus and His disciples traveled toward Jerusalem, “a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest” (Luke 9:57). The Savior responded that “the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58), perhaps indicating that “life was very inconvenient for him,” as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once observed, and that “it will often be so” for those who choose to follow Him.⁶

Next, the Lord “said unto another, Follow me,” (Luke 9:59), but the man requested that he be permitted to first go and bury his father. Jesus replied, “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60).⁷ The Savior’s words do not mean it is wrong to mourn the loss of a loved one (see D&C 42:45). Rather, they emphasize that devotion to the Lord is a disciple’s highest priority.

A third individual remarked, “Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house” (Luke 9:61). Jesus responded with an analogy of a plowman, whose task requires him to focus on what

is ahead rather than what lay behind (see Luke 9:62). The lesson for this man was simply to follow the example of the Savior, who “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) and did not look back.

The Road through Samaria

As Jesus and His disciples passed through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, some of the Samaritans “did not receive him” (Luke 9:53)—likely because they recognized Jesus and His disciples as Jews.⁸ In response, James and John sought permission to call down fire from heaven to consume their offenders (see Luke 9:52–54). In this volatile

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setting, the Savior demonstrated patience and forbearance while admonishing His disciples to do the same (see Luke 9:55–56).

Shortly after this episode, the Savior told the parable of the good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25–37). In addition to satisfying the questions of a disingenuous lawyer, this parable may have reminded the Savior’s disciples that there are no exceptions to the commandment to “love . . . thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27; see also verses 25–29).

In addition, the Savior’s disciples may have recognized similarities between the actions of the good Samaritan and those of Jesus. The love the good Samaritan demonstrated for a Jew mirrored the charity Jesus had recently displayed toward hostile Samaritans. Also, in the coming weeks, the Savior’s disciples would witness Jesus encountering many wounded souls on the road to Jerusalem (see Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 17:11–19; 19:1–10). Like the good Samaritan,



who paused on a dangerous, thief-infested highway and placed the welfare of another ahead of his own, Jesus would minister to each wounded soul He encountered, thinking not of Himself even as He drew closer to His own death.

The Savior Teaches Mary and Martha

During His journey to Jerusalem, Jesus stopped at the home of Martha (see Luke 10:38). While Martha “was cumbered about much serving” (Luke 10:40), her sister, Mary, “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (verse 39). Hospitality was very important in Jewish society, and it seems Martha was diligently seeking to fulfill cultural expectations regarding her role as hostess.⁹

Although Martha demonstrated marvelous devotion and faith in the Savior in another setting (see John 11:19–29), here she complained, “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10:40). To help Church members learn an important lesson from this episode, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once cited a Brigham Young University devotional address by Professor Catherine Corman Parry:

“The Lord did not go into the kitchen and tell Martha to stop cooking and come listen. Apparently he was content to let her serve him however she cared to, until she judged another person’s service. . . . Martha’s *self-importance* . . . occasioned the Lord’s rebuke, not her busyness with the meal.”¹⁰

Martha’s primary mistake on this occasion seems to have been focusing on herself—even as she was serving others. The Savior helped

Martha understand that it is not enough to simply serve the Lord and our fellowman. We must learn to lose ourselves in the process of serving and seek the Lord's will to guide our desires and motives as well as our actions (see Luke 9:24; D&C 137:9). Disciples must overcome the tendency to think first of themselves and learn to serve Heavenly Father and His children with an eye "single to [His] glory" (D&C 88:67). Later, after her brother's death, Martha showed her focused faith by setting aside temporal concerns and immediately going out to meet the Savior when she heard He was coming (see John 11:19–20).

The Savior Expounds on the Demands of Discipleship

Later on in the Savior's journey to Jerusalem, a man requested, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus responded by addressing the root of the man's problem: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). He then gave the parable of the rich fool (see Luke 12:16–21).

In the parable, one reason for God's characterization of the rich man as a fool may have been the man's selfishness. In Luke 12:17–19 the rich man uses the words *I* and *my* 11 times, revealing his concern with self.¹¹ Not only was the man consumed by selfishness, but he also failed to recognize the source of his riches. In no way did he acknowledge, as the Savior did, that it was "the ground" that "brought forth plentifully" (Luke 12:16), nor did he thank the Lord for creating the earth in which his crops grew.



Ultimately the man was condemned not for the wise practice of storing temporal provisions but for failing to prepare spiritually for the future. Being “not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21), the man was eventually deprived not only of the treasure he had temporarily accumulated on earth but also of “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not” (Luke 12:33). His choices in life left him impoverished in eternity.

In direct contrast to the rich fool who hoarded material possessions before unexpectedly dying, Jesus purposefully marched toward His death, deliberately giving God all that He had and was—including His life and the fullest measure of His will (see Luke 22:42; Mosiah 15:7).

Like Mary and Martha, we must learn to lose ourselves in the process of serving and seek the Lord’s will.

He declared, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). Having already been baptized with water, Jesus here was referring to His Atonement. Soon He would descend below all things and His body would be covered in blood and sweat as He suffered for our sins and experienced our pains and afflictions.¹²

Later, when some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod Antipas would seek to have Him killed, the Savior simply affirmed that He would continue to seize each opportunity to teach, bless, and heal others (see Luke 13:31–33). He would spend the last days of His mortal life—like all His days before—serving others.

While drawing closer to Jerusalem, Jesus directed His disciples to count the cost of discipleship—to put forethought into their decision to follow Him (see Luke 14:25–28). He did not seek to sugarcoat the difficult realities they would

encounter if they continued as His disciples. Rather, He firmly declared: “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). However, the Savior also promised that as we lose ourselves on the pathway of discipleship, we will gain so much more in return (see Luke 9:24). The blessings He has promised His disciples include “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (D&C 59:23).

Although we do not have the opportunity to walk with Jesus Christ to Jerusalem, we can show our willingness to replicate that journey in our own lives. Remembering the Savior’s own willingness to sacrifice and serve in accordance with Heavenly Father’s will can give us strength to “go, and do . . . likewise” (Luke 10:37). ■

NOTES

1. See A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (1971), 240.
2. Veiled references to the Savior’s suffering and death from earlier instances in His ministry include Matthew 9:15; 16:4; John 2:19; 3:14.
3. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1936), 373.
4. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 373.
5. In contrast to Mark and Matthew, who only briefly mention the Savior’s departure from Galilee for the last time in mortality and His trek to Jerusalem (see Matthew 19:1–2; Mark 10:1), Luke focuses great attention on this journey (see Luke 9:51–53; 13:22, 34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11). John’s Gospel varies significantly in content from the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and does not mention the Savior’s final departure from Galilee to Jerusalem.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1984, 68.
7. Respect for parents was very important in Jewish culture, including the responsibility to provide a proper burial for them. After preparing a body for burial and placing it in a tomb, family members typically returned a year later to place the bones in a stone box called an ossuary, which remained in the tomb as a secondary burial among the remains of other deceased family members. (See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* [2006], 78–79.) If the disciple in this case was speaking of a secondary burial rather than an urgent need to care for the body of his recently deceased father, then his request demonstrated a desire to prioritize a cultural tradition over a singular opportunity to walk to Jerusalem with the Son of God and be tutored by Him.
8. There was considerable animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time of Christ. These two groups typically avoided association with each other. In this case, the Samaritans evidently deprived Jesus and His disciples of customary elements of hospitality, such as provisions and lodging. (See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament* [2010], 140; Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* [1987], 241–42.)
9. See Gower, *New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, 244–45; Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (1953), 69–77.
10. In Dallin H. Oaks, “‘Judge Not’ and Judging,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1999, 12–13; emphasis added.
11. See Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ* (2006), 122.
12. See Luke 22:44; Alma 7:11–13; Doctrine and Covenants 19:18; 88:6.