

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The days were drawing near that Jesus would be “*taken up*,” a reference to His passion and death. Still, Jesus had a lot to preach and teach and do before that day, but the great “day of the Lord” was drawing near. And it would do no good to try to ignore it or avoid it. That day was coming soon. Jesus knew it. He was prepared for it. He had talked with Moses and Elijah about it on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke records that shortly before this text. They had talked about the rescue that Jesus was going to “*accomplish at Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:31). It was the reason for His incarnation and birth, for His ministry and life. And so with that in mind, Jesus “*set his face to go to Jerusalem.*”

He was resolute, and yet the going was not easy for our Savior as He trod the sorrowful way to the cross. Indeed, things “went south” right way as He headed south from Galilee to Jerusalem. He had to pass through Samaria, and Jesus sent some messengers ahead of Him to a Samaritan town to prepare for Him (much like politicians and celebrities do when they come to Fort Wayne).

But the people didn’t receive Him. Why not? Because He was not the kind of Messiah that they were looking for. Because they were looking for a Messiah that would affirm them in their ways, with their worship on Mount Gerazim rather than worshipping “*the Father in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23). To be sure, Jesus was headed to another mount, Mount Zion on which Jerusalem was built, but He was going there, not so that people would say, “we can worship rightly only in Jerusalem,” but so that He might be taken to another mountain, Mount Calvary, to be lifted up unto death for the sins of the world, that by His death all the world might know that, “*Truly this was the Son of God!*” (Matt. 27:54); that by being “*lifted up from the earth*” there, He might “*draw all people*” unto Himself (John 12:32).

Friends, the same is true today. People do not receive Jesus, and they reject Him for the same reason: because He is not the Messiah that they want. For some, it is the scandal of His cross, weak and foolish, that they reject. The Messiah, for them, is to be found in “*great and strong winds*” that tear mountains to pieces, in powerful earthquakes and destructive fires. And, to be sure, God’s “*eternal power and divine nature [can be] clearly perceived ... in the things that have been made*” (Rom. 1:20). Indeed, He fills all things (Eph. 4:10). And yet, He is not there for you in these powerful things, but in the “*low whisper*” of “*the word of the cross.*” And that seems like folly. But we confess that the seemingly nonsensical preaching of “*Christ crucified [is both] the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Cor. 23-24), and by this preaching are we being saved as we believe in it.

For others, it is the scandal of Jesus’ own preaching that people reject. If Jesus preaches something that offends their sensibilities, they say, “*This is a hard*

saying; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60) Not that it’s hard to understand (although to be sure, some of Jesus’ parables need a bit of explanation); rather Jesus’ words offend. We don’t want to hear that we sin with our hearts and minds, with our tongues and eyes, our hands and feet; we want to hear that Jesus affirms us in our sinful choices. Repent!

We don’t like to hear Jesus’ words of exclusivity— *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6); *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day”* (John 6:53-54). These words offend, and even as *“many of [Jesus’] disciples turned back and no longer walked with him”* (John 6:66), when He talked this way, many still walk away from Jesus.

Still others want to retain just a bit of the law for themselves to do, that they might take some pride in their own salvation. Their salvation was not accomplished monergistically by Jesus alone in Jerusalem, they claim, but is effected by the synergistic work of man with God on the twin peaks of Mount Zion and Mount Sinai—Jesus, of course, on Mount Zion and they themselves on Mount Sinai.

But this is wrong. Paul tells us in the verses that we skipped over in the Epistle from Galatians: *“if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you”* (Gal. 5:2). More generally we would say, if you yoke yourself to the law, to a salvation that is by the law, even in the smallest way, then *“Christ [is] of no advantage to you.”* For Paul goes on to say, *“I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision—or more generally who says ‘I must keep this law or that for my salvation’— that he is obligated to keep the whole law”* (Gal. 5:3). And we know that *“With man this is impossible ...”* (Matt. 19:26).

Therefore, St. Paul says, *“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”* Look only to Christ for your salvation; *“there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Cling only to Jesus’ cross for your salvation, as foolish as it can sometimes seem. Trust in Christ’s perfect atoning work alone; not your own imperfect striving, for you cannot be justified by the works of the law (Rom. 3:20), which you fail to keep.

Follow Jesus, though the road may be treacherous and narrow. Follow Jesus. Entrust yourselves wholly to Him, and don’t look back. *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”* (Matt. 6:33). *“In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths”* (Prov. 3:6).

The straight path for Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem took Him into Samaria. Your path, likewise, may take you through Samaritan lands, figuratively speaking, where what you do or say may not be well-received, even though what you are doing serves the cause of love, even though you are seeking to love and serve your neighbor as you ought as a Christian. But don't call down curses upon those who reject your love — Jesus said no to James and John, for that's not who Jesus' disciples are, for "*the Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives, but to save them*" (variant insertion at v. 55).

Moreover, that you are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ alone gives you no license to live debauched lives following the desires of the flesh. That would be following a different spirit. No Christians are called to "*live by the Spirit*" with Christ crucified at the center, and to "*keep in step with the Spirit,*" and to produce "*the fruit of the Spirit*" — you know them: "*love, joy, peace,*" And in the Spirit, then, we pray that others "*may see [these] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). We pray that the Spirit would work in them discernment and faith, even as He has in us, for this is God's will for all people (1 Cor. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:3-4). And we pray that God would keep us steadfast in the true faith as we look not to Mount Gerazim, or to Mount Sinai, or even to Mount Zion, but to Jesus whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit we worship in spirit and truth. God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.