

Stedfastly Set toward Jerusalem

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A passage which the Spirit has been quickening to us lately, and one which is very timely in it's application, is recorded in Luke 9:51. Here, it says, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that He (Jesus) should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem". Allow us to briefly recreate the setting for you, that you might see it's pertinence.

A simple background check reveals that in the chronological order of events, our text fits right into the midst of the 7th chapter of John's gospel, between verses 10 and 11. Reading from the beginning of this chapter, we see that the Feast of Tabernacles was nigh at hand; but because certain of the Jews had sought to kill Him, our Lord was directed by the Spirit to take His abode in Galilee. This is where we find Him, at the time during which this verse is referring. Those of you who are familiar with the narrative will remember that some of His brethren had urged Him to take this opportunity to manifest His works in the holy city, if He wanted to quell any doubts concerning His Messianic claims. "Let the matter be settled once and for all," they said. "Do Your works in plain sight of the respected leaders of Israel, so that they can judge for themselves whether these things be of God, or not. If You can persuade them that You are Who You say You are, then all men everywhere will accept You". But Jesus, never being One Who needed to prove Himself, responded to them by saying, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready... Go ye up to this feast: I go not yet up unto this feast; for My time is not yet full come" (verses 6 & 8). It was after they had made their departure that directions changed for Him; and the instant that they did, He immediately responded to the Spirit by setting His face toward Jerusalem.

In the ensuing verses of Dr. Luke's account, we are told that the route Jesus was directed to take was through Samaria. Now, if you recall, there was a considerable amount of hatred and animosity between the Jews and Samaritans of that day. The fires of prejudice burned greatly, always threatening to erupt in violence at any moment. Therefore, the Jews went to great lengths to avoid making even an accidental encounter with their neighbors. They wanted as little to do with them as was possible; and the Samaritans felt likewise about them. This is why it probably seemed strange to His disciples that He should go in this direction. Perhaps He did so, they reasoned, because the more popular road to Jerusalem would have been clogged with festive companies of pilgrims during this time of year. Since He did desire that His arrival to the Feast be somewhat secretive (Jn. 7:10), taking this course would have made the possibility of that more probable. And

journeying through a land whose inhabitants did not observe the blessed occasion would certainly have made His arrival time quicker. After all, it was the more direct route for Him to take (howbeit, we know that the Spirit never leads us to do anything, simply for the sake of convenience)! Nevertheless, when He sent an entourage into one of the villages of the Samaritans to make preparations for Him and His traveling party, the citizens of that village would not receive Him there. The reason given was not because He was a Jew, but because "His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:53). They rejected Him, primarily because His interests were focused beyond their borders!

What exactly did it mean for Jesus to go up to Jerusalem? We could approach this from several angles. Among them, we could say that for Him, Jerusalem was the place of purpose. It was there that He had an appointment with destiny, where all things spoken of Him in the Law and the Prophets would be fulfilled. The redemptive work for which He had come, and which had been purposed long before the foundation of the world was ever even established, could only have taken place in this locale. Furthermore, given what we know now about this particular visit, and the role which He played in the post-Mosaic ceremony of "the Pouring Out of Water" (which ceremony, incidentally, prefigured in part the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost), we can certainly imagine that an overwhelming sense of urgency must have compelled Him in His journey.

Furthermore, we could say that Jerusalem was the place where He had established some very vivid and precious memories during His childhood. To go up to Jerusalem, and to experience afresh the sights and sounds thereof, would be like returning to those days, when life was much simpler, where powerful lessons were first learned, and during which He "grew, and waxed strong in the Spirit, [and was] filled with wisdom: and the grace of the Lord was upon Him" (Lk. 2:40). Such memories would certainly have given incentive for Him to return!

Jerusalem, by definition, means, "founded peaceful" (Strong's # 3389). That is its meaning, when taken at face value. However, when we look into its roots and core composition, it becomes much more specific in detail. It comes from two primary root words, the first (#3384) meaning, "to flow as water; to lay, or point out (as if by aiming the finger), to teach", while the second word means, "to be safe, to be (make) completed, to reciprocate, make amends, to be at peace, make an end, finish, or to perfect". Paraphrasing this, we could say that spiritually speaking, Jerusalem represents that tranquil state of mind, whose foundation is peace...that safe and secure place in the Spirit where teachings flow as water, pointing out the way to that desired end which He has purposed. It speaks of that place which leads to perfection, fulfillment, completion, and rest. Now, that's plain enough, isn't it? More than a geographical place on a map, it speaks of a condition of being, a frame of mind, a posture and position which is conducive to spiritual maturity.

Most certainly, everything that Jesus did, He did with a purpose behind it. Every detail provided us in holy Writ was given, primarily, as an example for us to follow. Going up to Jerusalem at this time of the year definitely has its significance to those of us who are

walking in His steps. But why did He purpose to go through Samaria, in order to get there? What was this meant to suggest to us? Interestingly enough, the name, "Samaria", means, "the mountain of watching" (Strong's # 8111). And the high place of the Samaritans, "Shechem", means, "the place of burdens; the shoulder, or the back". Taking all these things into account, it should not be difficult for anyone to see the implications of this.

It is an undeniable fact that just as it was with Jesus, we, too, have come to a critical turning point in history. We are about to make a long-awaited ascension into a new dimension, typified by the Feast of Tabernacles. Praise God for it! We are on the verge of being "received up" into a realm of glory, the likes of which we have never experienced before! Therefore, it is necessary for us to prepare for our ascension by steadfastly, determinately, and very resolutely setting our faces toward Jerusalem. This, dear friends, is where it all takes place for us; the place where He has chosen for us to appear before Him, and where He shall appear to us (Deut. 16:16)! However, as you well know, getting from here to there, and remaining there, can easier be said than done!

While there is a general sense throughout the Body that something major is about to happen in the Spirit, there is also an awareness that we, as a whole, are passing through a time of increasingly difficult challenges. This should naturally have been expected, as we approached the end of the age. However, there does seem to be a difficulty among more than a few these days in discerning just what should be occupying their time, and what should not. With so many needs, and so many issues presented to us from every side, we oft times find ourselves in a bit of a quandary, don't we!

Ah, there are just so many things with which people are troubled! The list could stretch out for miles! Phobias and paranoias, suspicions and doubts, ailments and infirmities, dilemmas and enigmas, abuses and offenses, sorrows and griefs...on and on we could go, with no end in sight!

We could talk about this at length; and we could talk about how God is supernaturally enabling His people to reach out to an ever-increasing audience, both by means of intercession, and by the ministration of the Word. He really is, you know! He is "expanding our borders", so to speak, and using us to help more and more people in some remarkable ways! But let us state our primary concern today. Never have we seen those who have been called to be firstfruits as burdened and as heavy laden as we have seen them over the past couple of years. Perhaps, you have witnessed this for yourselves. Many with whom we have spoken are stressed and pressed beyond measure, overloaded with things heaped upon them, not so much by the Lord, but by those around them. Not only have they been inundated with the mental, emotional, and spiritual struggles of others, who seem totally disinterested in seeking God for themselves, but also with the natural burdens of many of those same people, as well: errand running, bill paying,

grocery shopping, babysitting, etc. Those caught in this predicament have come to feel like it is their lot in life to tend to every problem or seeming "emergency" presented to them by their families, friends, etc., without any question or hesitation on their parts whatsoever. This is one of the problems at hand, as we see it; and this is what we'd like to address.

Let us say up front that this is not intended to be the "play book" on spiritual discernment. We would not attempt to "play God", by telling you things with which you should, or should not become involved. That is strictly His business; so only He can tell you that. The point that we would like to get across to you, however, is that **GOD IS NOT EXPECTING YOU TO "FIX" EVERYONE'S PROBLEMS... AND NEITHER SHOULD YOU!**

Reaching that conclusion is a liberating thing, to say the least. It is one to which the Lord has been bringing Tykie and me for a number of years, in spite of our many setbacks. But you will not reach that conclusion through any help from the "Samaritans", we can tell you right now!

Allow us to describe to you one version of what a Samaritan is like. Those who dwell in Samaria are always watching their mountains of burdens and woes. They are preoccupied with their innumerable problems, whether they be real or imagined, natural or spiritual. They cannot see beyond them... and think that as long as you are "within their borders", so to speak, neither should you! They believe that they should have your undivided attention, your unbroken concentration, your total and undistracted commitment to whatever it is they have brought before you. And if they do not get it, if they do not get the kind of response they are looking for, or if they do not get the kind of help they are expecting from you (monetary or other), they will accuse you of being cold, calloused, hard-hearted, uncaring, insensitive, compassion-less, and un-Christian-like! (Let us say here that not everyone who has a burden, and who shares that burden with others, should be considered a "Samaritan". If that were the case, we would all meet the criteria, now, wouldn't we! No, what we are speaking of is something entirely different...and if you have ever met a "Samaritan", as the one described above, then you understand exactly what we mean. We need not elaborate further). Samaritans come in all shapes and sizes. Some are more easily recognizable than others. Not all leave the same impression, have the same demands, or share the same motives. But they all have the same potential. They can preoccupy large and valuable portions of your time, leaving you feeling empty, drained and dry!

It has been our observation that some are not so interested in hearing from God, and receiving the answer to their problems, as they are in just having someone in which to "talk out" their tensions. They spend their lives telling their "Samaritan soap operas", carefully dictating every detail of the drama as it unfolds, and hoping to attract as many sympathizers as possible. This is one reason why they expect you to sit and listen to endless hours of useless and unprofitable conversation, without so much as a break or an interruption. They want you to feel like you are somehow helping them. Oh, occasionally, they may say that they want you to pray about the matter; and they may

present it to you in the form of a prayer request. But should you hear from heaven, and attempt to share with them what you have heard, they will let you know right quick that they are not at all interested in your "opinions"! (Have you ever heard this?) Your primary purpose to them is to be a "sounding board", or to be a silent listener, while they vent their frustrations. Anything beyond that would make you a "meddler" in their business!

It seems obvious that some have chosen to dwell in the realm of perpetual problems. They have no intention on being delivered, or of being set at liberty from their never-ending predicaments (else, they would take the oftentimes minor steps required to change their situation). They simply want a "quick fix", in order to get them through the immediate situation! That's just the truth, now, isn't it? Even after you've done all that you're able to do for them, it still seems never to be enough. And they're rarely ever satisfied with what you do! As the old saying goes, it's like pouring time and money down a rat's hole! It's an absolutely useless exercise! In cases like these, sometimes the best you can do is to pray for them, commit them into the Lord's hands, and to move on. As Phil. 4:6 says, "Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus...".

We realize, of course, that not every case is so easily discernable. Some seem genuinely interested in receiving what they need, if only you can provide it for them (this explains why they cling so desperately to you). But this condition can pose a problem of another sort. God, having an agenda to fulfill in each individual's life, takes all things into account. Whereas we oft times see only the appearance of things, and are thus moved by what we see, He considers the status of the heart. As you know, when the heart is in need of correction, the Lord may very well delay an answer, until the processing has accomplished it's full work. Therefore, as long as the work is ongoing, there is nothing you can do to change it, though you might devote long and wearisome hours toward that effect. (Besides, the Lord might not have chosen you to be the means by which He answers them, anyway. He may have chosen someone else just for that purpose. Have you taken that into consideration?)

We need not expect those who dwell in the regions of conflict and turmoil to understand why we are so adamant to get to Jerusalem... and why we cannot abide with them in their wearied states of mind. We may make contact with them, and we may hear their sorrowful plights. We may (and should) be touched with the feeling of their infirmities; and we may be sympathetic to their fears (that is, if they are legitimate ones). But if we are truly responding to the Father's voice, they will come to realize that we are just passing through. We cannot afford to become bogged down, or bound up in the spirit of fear, frustration, or fretting. Neither can we afford to get "hooked" on "soaps", waiting for the next episode to be told to us (don't laugh; and don't fool yourselves. It can happen to anyone!) How can we possibly help folks, if we allow ourselves to get caught up in the same realm of natural worries with them?

The questions might be asked: was Jesus indifferent to the Samaritans? Did He turn a deaf ear to their cries? Were they unimportant to Him? And did He view them as particularly "bad" people? Though it might have appeared that way to some, we would answer those questions by saying, not at all. He rebuked His disciples for their vindictiveness toward them (Lk. 9:55-56). He healed a Samaritan leper in Lk. 17:16. He acknowledged the Samaritans for their kindness and their generosity in His parable in Lk. 10:30-37. And He praised a Samaritan for his heartfelt gratitude (Lk. 17:11-18). He ministered prophetically to the woman at the well in Sychar (Jn. 4:7), which, in turn, led to His ministering to the general population of that region (Lk. 4:40-42). Also, in the apostolic commission recorded in Acts 1:8, Jesus charged His disciples to be witnesses unto Him "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth". These were the last words He spoke, just before He was received up into the cloud. So it was clear that He was genuinely concerned for their needs, and sought to minister to their afflictions. He was not influenced by the prejudicial attitudes commonly held by the Jews of that day, the "pious bias" which kept them at a distance from their neighbors. The Samaritans were among those specifically mentioned by name for whom He came! But He would not, yea, could not afford to be delayed, whenever the time was come that He should be received up. He had to meet His appointment, in order that the higher purpose for His coming might be fulfilled!

Jesus knows what it is like to be thronged about by the masses, each one of them having their own special needs and requests. You can believe that He understood every one of their hurts, their pains, the reasons for their tears. There was not a one of them that escaped His attention, or in which His heart was disinterested. This is why Isaiah described Him as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief". He could identify with those in such a state. There were times when He healed every one of them, making no exceptions whatsoever. Then, there were other times in which He selectively ministered to two or three out of a sea of desperate voices. And there were also those times during which He left the multitudes altogether, with all of their multitudinous needs, in order to spend some much needed time alone in prayer. In each of these times, He was directed by the Spirit to do what He did. And we would dare say that He felt no guilt in doing so.

Listen, dear ones! We needn't feel guilty, nor allow folks to put us on a "guilt trip", just because we cannot attend to every one of their problems! We must not let people dictate to us what the will of God is for us; nor must we allow them to take advantage of us, by manipulating and controlling us through our emotions. We must let God be God in our lives, to order and direct our time and energies in the things which He has ordained, and let the rest take care of itself! (Suppose Jesus would have responded to the rejection of the Samaritans the way they would have wanted Him to. Suppose He would have developed a "guilt complex" over not taking up the amount of time with them that they had expected. Can you imagine the complications that would have resulted? Had He been a day late in His arrival to Jerusalem, everything connected with it would have been thrown off it's timing! Think about it.)

We must set our priorities in order, and carefully acknowledge Him in all our ways. If we will but do that, He will see to it that we have the discernment necessary to make the

distinctions. On balance, there are some things wherewith we should make allowances; things, which may very well seem like a waste of time to many of our peers. We do find Jesus taking up time with people and issues which would have seemed absolutely impertinent to most of us, and totally unrelated to anything on a spiritual plain. But He did so, with a total peace and assurance, that everything that He did was completely by the direction and auspices of the Father. This is the key. He never did anything, just because He thought it was a good thing to do, or because it was expected of Him. **He only did that which He saw with the Father;** and the peace of God served as His confirmation. However, there are other things which we may think demand our attention, and which we may imagine can only be straightened out by our direct mediation or personal involvement, which would better be left alone. Believe us, taking a dog up by the ears certainly has it's consequences (Prov. 26:17)!

It is not egotistical to believe that God has a plan for every moment of our lives. And it is not pretentious for us to believe that if we will but hear His voice, He has a very precise and orderly agenda for us to fulfill day by day. I believe that we have been somewhat hesitant at times to obey the leading of the Spirit in all things, for fear that someone would get the wrong impression. Considering the appalling impression left by those in the present-day "Nicolaitan" movement (who think they do God's people a service, by "allowing" the "lay people" and "ordinary folk" to wait on them hand and foot), we can certainly understand this concern. That's enough to make anyone cautious. Nevertheless, we must develop a sacred sense of importance concerning our time, without developing a sense of arrogance or "holier-than-thou untouchableness" in the process. We need to know that we are not too important to minister to the needs of others, as directed of the Lord. And none of us should be above "rolling up our sleeves", so to speak, and doing natural service for others, either. But at the same time, we are not to become "chore-boys" and errand-runners for those who value their time more than ours. THE LORD HATH NEED OF THEE!

Well, beloved, we believe you get the gist of what we are saying. We must needs go through Samaria. It is an inevitable fact of life. While we must not go out in search of things with which to become encumbered, we cannot avoid the varied burdens and responsibilities that may come our way from the Lord. Understand that those things which He sends will never interfere with His overall purpose for our lives; instead, they are divinely designed to further it. Nevertheless, we must ever be looking beyond even these things to that place where God has ordained for us to reach, in order that we might learn of Him, and find rest for our souls (Matt. 11:29). This, dear friends, is of monumental importance! For it is in our taking HIS yoke upon us, and not the taking on of our own (or of someone else's), that we experience that rest which remaineth for the people of God. And it is in that rest that we are able to "keep the Feast", which should be the ultimate goal of every true son.

Since it ties in so well with our subject, may we toss in one more scripture, just for good measure? Isa. 48:17 says, "I am the Lord your God Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go". The word "profit" literally means in the Hebrew, "to ascend". Of a truth, the Lord is teaching us how to ascend in the Spirit, and how He

expects us to appear before Him during the Great Feast; and the lessons which He is offering are being taught in Jerusalem. Therefore, you can see why it is imperative that we set our faces toward that hallowed place. For it is there that we are prepared for the next level!

We would encourage every one of you to remain focused in the coming days. Things may very well intensify, and seemingly insurmountable problems may loom before us in ways we would never have imagined. ONE THING IS NEEDFUL, however; and we must press through the hardships, through the trials, and through the distractions which constantly vie for our attention, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high call of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Beloved, **HE IS OUR PEACE**; and as we live, and move, and have our being in Him, He will enable us to cope with whatever responsibilities He sends, without making us feel "stressed out" over them. Remember, He will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on HIM!

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