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Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Luke 9:43b - 62

43b While the entire crowd was amazed at everything Jesus was doing, he said to his disciples, **44** "Take these words to heart, for the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men." **45** But they did not understand this statement; its meaning had been concealed from them, so that they could not grasp it. Yet they were afraid to ask him about this statement.

46 Now an argument started among the disciples as to which of them might be the greatest. **47** But when Jesus discerned their innermost thoughts, he took a child, had him stand by his side, **48** & said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, & whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me, for the one who is least among you all is the one who is great."

49 John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, & we tried to stop him because he is not a disciple along with us." **50** But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you."

51 When the days were coming to a close for him to be taken up, he determined to journey to Jerusalem. **52** He sent messengers ahead of himself, & on the way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him. **53** But they did not welcome him, because he determined to journey to Jerusalem. **54** When the disciples James & John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" **55** But he turned & rebuked them, **56** & they went to another village.

57 As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." **58** Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, & birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

59 Then he said to another, "Follow me." "Lord," he said, "first let me go bury my father." **60** But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go & spread the news of the kingdom of God."

61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go & say good-bye to those at my house." **62** But Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow & looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

1. Background

a. Travel

- a. "As recently as the 19th century, only the idle rich...could afford the time & money to visit the sights of Europe ...For most of human history, most people didn't travel at all. Those rich enough to afford horses could go some distance, but often wouldn't, because of all sorts of dangers. They stayed in their local neighborhood all their lives. **This was true for most people in Jesus' world, too, with one major exception. Jews in Galilee regularly made one journey: the pilgrimage to Jerusalem .** And all Jews, wherever they were, would tell the story of the great journey of the Exodus... **Luke has all this in mind as he tells us about Jesus' plans to go to Jerusalem, where he was to fulfill his 'exodus'** (vv. 31, 51)" (N. T. Wright, *Luke For Everyone* , p. 87)

b. The Journey to Jerusalem

- a. "The Galilean section [4:14-9:50]... **underscores ... Jesus' ministry as one of 'release'** (Luke 4:18-19; 7:21-22; Isa 61:1-2). **Luke's narrative of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem...foregrounds five interrelated narrative needs** in his recounting of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem: 1) the coming of salvation in all of its fullness to all people (19:10), 2) the expectation that Mary's son would be the cause of division in Israel (2:34; 9:22), 3) closely related is the developing portrait of Jesus as one who, in order to fulfill God's purpose, must suffer rejection & be killed (12:49-50; 13:31-33; 17:25; 18:31-34), 4) the character of [the disciples'] discipleship, 5) Jesus' 'exodus.'" (Joel B. Green, *NICNT: Luke* , pp. 447-50)

c. Samaritans

- a. "[T]he Samaritans [in] **2 Kings 17 ... are not to be equated with the Samaritans of the New Testament ...The Samaritans whom we encounter in the New Testament are people whose identity was formed through a long process of interaction & conflict with the Judeans .** It is in this light that the Samaritans' refusal to receive Jesus in Luke 9:52-53 is to be understood. **The reason for such refusal is 'because his face was set toward Jerusalem.'** The issue centers on the existence of competing cultic centers, & this would explain the Samaritans' resentment of Jewish pilgrims who passed through their land on the way to the Jerusalem temple." (G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT* , p. 315)

d. Jewish Burials

- a. "Family members would not be outside talking with rabbis during **the mourning period** , the week immediately following the death. **The initial burial** took place shortly after a person's [death], & would have already occurred by the time this man would be speaking with Jesus. But **a year after the first burial** , after the flesh had rotted off the bones, **the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb wall .**" (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* , p. 205)

2. The Key Section & Major Turning Point in Luke's Gospel (Lk. 9:51-19:44)

- a. "The key central section of Luke's Gospel (9:51-19:44) shows how Jesus experiences rejection & prepares his disciples for his departure. Two topics dominate the unit. (1) Luke carefully traces the opposition to Jesus that grows & the deep hostility that emerges from the Jewish leadership. Much in chapters 9-14 painfully recounts this schism. (2) An extensive teaching on discipleship dominates this section, especially in chapters 14-19. Jesus stresses the total commitment that effective discipleship demands...Where miracles dominated the previous section, parables & teaching are the key narrative elements in this section." (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, p. 282)
- b. "The Gospel of Luke comes to a major turning point in 9:18-22 as Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ. It opens the door for a full discussion of discipleship in 9:23-50." (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit*, p. 260)
- c. "9:51-62 highlights failure...The disciples fail to respond appropriately to their rejection (51-56), while prospective followers have much to learn about [total] commitment (57-62)." (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit*, p. 283)

3. Jesus Sets His Face Toward Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51)

- a. "In verse 51 Luke reports that Jesus 'set his face to go to Jerusalem.' This geographical notice marks off the long section that follows, so that from this point until Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem in 19:28 Jesus is on the way,

traveling to his 'exodus' (9:31), the cross & the resurrection." (Allan Culpepper, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Luke, p. 177)

- b. "No sooner has Jesus 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' than he meets opposition. As Jesus & his followers start out on their journey, a Samaritan village refuses to receive them. The overtone of this section is set up by its...allusion to Elijah." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 177)
- c. "This section opens with the remark that Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem. The idiom 'to set one's face' is an Old Testament expression for 'to resolve' (Gen. 31:21; Jer. 21:10; 44:12). He embarked on this journey as the days drew near for him to be received up. The journey is not a straight line trip...Luke described a journey of destiny, which has as its destination Israel's capital...where God's plan & the rejection of the prophet are realized (13:31-35)." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 283)
- d. "The most immediate cue for understanding the designation of 'Jerusalem' as the final destination of the impending journey is found in 9:31, where Luke summarizes the conversation between Jesus, Moses, & Elijah as having to do with the exodus Jesus was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. In light of the adjacent prediction of Jesus' death at the hands of Jewish leaders associated with Jerusalem & the temple, Jesus' 'exodus' or departure clearly includes his path through suffering & death, even if it also includes his being raised from the dead by God. Hence, this resolve on Jesus' part to go to Jerusalem comes in spite of the fate that awaits him there – or perhaps one might better say, because of the fate that awaits him there, since it is through his execution & vindication that he will fulfill God's salvific purpose." (Joel B. Green, Op Cit, p. 455)

4. Adjusting The Understanding Of Those Currently Following Jesus (Lk. 9:43b-56)

a. Potential dangers for disciples

- a. "[Luke 9:46-62]...illustrates the disciples' lack of understanding: a quarrel over greatness (9:46-48), an unnecessary rebuke of unauthorized exorcists (vv. 49-50), calling fire down on the Samaritan village (vv. 52-56), & the false starts of three would-be disciples (vv. 57-62). Taken together, these four scenes offer a showcase of potential dangers for aspiring disciples...Every one of us is susceptible to these obstacles..." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 180)
- b. "The disciples' petty quarreling over which of them is the greatest reveals not only that they apparently thought Jesus had come to establish an earthly kingdom in which they would enjoy positions of power but also that they viewed their discipleship as a means of attaining their own aspirations. They had set the agenda for their goals & viewed following Jesus as a convenient or effective means attaining those goals. Their commitment to Jesus had not changed their underlying aims & ambitions, however. This scene, therefore, demonstrates that discipleship to Jesus means giving up one's own ambitions & taking on in their place the demands of faithfulness to Jesus & aims of the kingdom of God." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 175)

b. Jesus sends messengers out before his arrival

- a. "As was the pattern in the earlier mission of the Twelve (Lk 9-6), Jesus sends messengers ahead to prepare the way for him. But what both they & he meet is rejection. Luke clearly states the reason is because Jesus is 'heading for Jerusalem.' In other words, as far as Luke is concerned, rejection of Jesus will extend beyond Jerusalem." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 283)
- b. "[In verse 52], Jesus 'sends messengers ahead of him.' Luke [draws upon the original] Exodus journey: in the book of Exodus God sends his angel before [the Israelites] to guide them into the land...All of this is built into Jesus' strange new journey." (N. T. Wright, Op Cit, p. 88)

c. The Samaritans reject Jesus

- a. "The disciples are not pleased with the lack of response in Samaria & ask Jesus if fiery judgment should be called down from heaven, as Elijah did in 2 Kings 1. Surely to reject the coming of God deserves instant eradication & vengeance." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 283)

d. Clear allusions to Elijah (2 Kgs. 1:1-17)

- a. "Clear allusions to...Elijah...can be detected in this verse. In 2 Kings 1:1-17 fire came down twice at Elijah's request to kill the messengers of Ahaziah, king of Samaria, who rejected the God of Israel by turning to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron." (G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, Op Cit, pp. 315-6)

e. Jesus rebukes the disciples to their great surprise

- a. "Jesus' rebuke of the disciples' request to destroy the Samaritans who reject Jesus is...unexpected in the light of the scriptural precedent." (G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, Op Cit, p. 316)

f. It's not time for judgment, but grace

- a. "Jesus rebuked them. Why? Luke does not record the words Jesus uses. The company just moves on, & no execution of judgment comes. Obviously, now is not the time for judgment. Rather, it is a time to offer grace & to warn about accountability." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 284)
- b. "Jesus' rebuke...point[s] to the arrival of a new era, when God will act in a new way." (Beale & Carson, Op Cit, p. 316)

- c. "Earlier, Jesus had instructed his disciples regarding the appropriate response when faced with inhospitality (9:5). Skirting that directive, they instead act as persons intoxicated with their own sense of power (9:46-50). They thus indicate their misunderstanding of Jesus' mission & their misappropriation of his authority (1) by replicating John's error in thinking that messianic authority would be incarnated in a mission of judgment, (2) by assuming that their own exercise of power would include the capacity to command fire & dole out judgment, &, thus, (3) by making too easy an equation between Elijah & Jesus." (Joel B. Green, Op Cit, pp. 456-7)
- g. The temptation to be violent when we think we are in the right
- a. "This episode allows us to study the temptation to use violence to achieve right. Does insult entitle one to injury? Does being right or having a holy cause justify the use of force or violence? Elijah had called down fire on the Samaritans; could not Jesus followers do the same? Misunderstanding the identity of the one they followed, the disciples mistakenly thought they could achieve his ends by violence. How often have those who claimed to be following Christ repeated the mistake of these early disciples? They had yet to learn that violence begets violence, & that Jesus had come to break the cycle of violence by dying & forgiving rather than by killing & exacting vengeance." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 178)
5. Jesus Sets Clear Expectations For All Who Consider Following Him (Lk. 9:57-62)
- a. The radical demands of discipleship need to be understood
- a. "Luke's introduction to the journey to Jerusalem continues with the warning of the radical demands of discipleship. The responses of three would-be followers of Jesus show that they have not understood the demands of discipleship & are not prepared to give it the priority that Jesus demands." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 179)
- b. "Discipleship is not a casual affair to Jesus, as 9:57-62 certify. In a series of three encounters, Jesus shows the high priority he places on discipleship. It is no accident that this text follows a passage that centered on rejection. Part of what makes discipleship so demanding is the fact that some type of rejection is a given for the believer. Discipleship takes focused commitment." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 284)
- c. "The three [responses] function to set the call to discipleship above every other duty, whether care for self, care for the dead, or care for family." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 179)
- b. Disciples are called to 'follow'
- a. "The essential term in this section is 'follow' (vv. 57, 59, 61)...The point in each case is the same: In life, discipleship must come first." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 284)
- c. The three would-be-disciples want to follow, but they want to
- a. Care for their self first
- a. "The first [would-be follower] came with the lofty, & enthusiastic promise, 'I will follow you wherever you go'...Would this enthusiastic volunteer really follow him in the face of...rejection?...Does [he] realize what he has promised?" (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 179)
- b. "The first exchange begins with a confident statement by a man that he will follow Jesus wherever he goes. This remark requires reflection, so Jesus warns the man precisely what that will require. The man probably has in view...students following a rabbi, where they learn from the teacher. Following a rabbi meant nothing other than walking behind him, & it also suggested the student's submission to the teacher. But to follow Jesus means a different form of discipleship. It is more like following a prophet. The prophet was an itinerant teacher, not part of an established community. He had an uncertain existence & lived on the donations of those who responded to the ministry." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 284)
- c. "It seems many who see Jesus think it would be a fine thing to follow him. The people who speak to Jesus on the road are like the seed sown on rocky ground, or among thorns, in Luke 8. They want to follow, but have conditions attached. Are they ready to drop what they're doing & come right away?" (N. T. Wright, Op Cit, p. 88)
- d. "To follow Jesus is to follow a prophet who calls one to faithfulness to God. The priority is to turn one's attention to the presence & arrival of God's Kingdom. It requires viewing this journey with total dedication...Unlike foxes & birds, which have holes & nests, the Son of Man has no home. He is an alien sojourning for a time in a foreign land. Rejection will be a given, & finding a home may be difficult. Jesus is preparing his prospective follower for those times that lie ahead." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 284)
- b. Care for the dead first
- a. The most holy & binding duty on a devout Jew
- a. "The obligation to bury one's father was regarded by many Jews of the time as the most holy & binding duty of a son; but Jesus says that that, too, is secondary to the call to follow him & announce God's kingdom." (N. T. Wright, Op Cit, p. 88)
- b. "Jesus then calls another to follow him. This would-be follower asks for permission to 'go & bury my father.' The duty to bury the dead with binding on all devout Jews...From the sparse context it is not clear whether the father has already died." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 179)
- c. "The son here could be asking for as much as a year's delay. Others note that in some Semitic languages, 'wait until I bury my father' is a way of asking for delay until one may complete one's filial obligations, even if the father is not yet dead...One of an eldest son's most important responsibilities was his father's burial. Jesus' demand that the son place Jesus above this responsibility could thus sound subversive: in Jewish tradition, honoring father & mother was one of the greatest commandments, & to follow Jesus in such a radical way would seem to break this commandment. Some sages might demand greater honor than parents in principle, but neglecting a father's burial in practice would make this son a reproach in his village, perhaps for the rest of his life." (Craig S. Keener, Op Cit, p. 205)

b. Harkening again to the old covenant/era

- a. "In the second case, a [would-be] follower wishes to bury his father before joining the group. The request seems reasonable, since burying a family member was a priority in Judaism (1 Kings 19:19-21). In fact, Jesus' request would strike a Jewish ear as almost outrageous. But what was tolerated in the old era needs to be left behind in the more urgent new era. Strikingly, Jesus says to the man, 'Let the dead bury their own dead.' The seemingly harsh reply is rhetorical, but it makes a point that discipleship & one's commitment to the kingdom take priority even over family consideration...If a choice is to be made, God must have first place...More important than caring for the dead is preaching the offer of life. Disciples must move forward to share that need, not memorialize what is past." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 285)
- b. "Verse 59 echoes the story of 1 Kings 19:19-21, where Elijah allowed Elisha to bid farewell to his family before following him...The contrast between Jesus & Elijah not only highlights the unique authority of Jesus but also points to the eschatological urgency present in Jesus' ministry." (G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, Op Cit, p. 316)

c. Jesus' harsh response points to a new reality

- a. "Jesus' response is harsh. It demands that the priority of service to the kingdom be set above every other priority. The saying should probably be understood to mean 'Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead'...Those who have not responded to the call to the kingdom are like the dead, thus let the dead bury the dead. Those who have responded to the call to discipleship are no longer dead. Their concern should be with life & the living: 'Go & proclaim the kingdom of God' (9:60)." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 179)

c. Care for family first

- a. "The third would-be disciple offers to follow Jesus but asks to bid farewell to his family first. Both Jesus' call, 'Follow me,' & the disciples' response echo 1 Kings 19:19-21, which records Elijah's call to Elisha. Elisha, who was plowing at the time, responded, 'Let me kiss my father & mother, & then I will follow you' (1 Kings 19:20)... Unlike Elijah, however, Jesus will not let the would-be disciple turn aside from the call to follow him even to bid farewell to his family. If one looks back while plowing, the furrow will be crooked...Jesus emphasizes again the unconditional demand of the call to discipleship." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, pp. 179-80)
- b. "[I]n the third encounter...a man wants to tell his family farewell (1 Kings 19:19-20). Again Jesus issues what on the surface seems a harsh warning: 'Those who look back are not fit for the kingdom.' Jesus' remarks have Old Testament precedent. Lot's wife preferred Sodom & looked back. The Israelites longed for Egypt & complained because God brought them deliverance & a journey through the desert. Those who cling to life on earth as it is are not ready for the reformation that salvation brings. Jesus saves not just to grant us a place in heaven but to transform us here & now into new people, separated from the world (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Titus 2:11-14). The disciple cannot hang on to the old life & be prepared for the rigors of discipleship. Jesus wants to make this truth clear from the start. Salvation is not a road paved with ease, for true spirituality takes discipline." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 285)
- c. "The act of looking back may be an illusion to the story of Lot's wife (Gen. 19:26)." (Beale & Carson, Op Cit, p. 316)
- d. "The picture of looking back while plowing is apt, since in Palestine the terrain is rugged. To look back while plowing was asking to make mistakes in preparing the field. The task required a focused eye on what lay ahead." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 285)
- e. "When Elijah found Elisha plowing, he called him to follow but allowed him first to bid farewell to his family (1 Kings 19:19-21). Jesus' call here is more radical than that of a radical prophet." (Craig S. Keener, Op Cit, p. 205)
- f. "The challenge to move forward, to journey on with Jesus, comes over loud & clear in [verse 62]. Many today don't work the land, & perhaps don't appreciate what happens if you're trying to plow a straight furrow & then look back to see how you did. Even if what you see is a straight line, the act of looking back will mean that the next bit will be crooked...Are we ready to follow him wherever he goes?" (N. T. Wright, Op Cit, p. 88)

6. The Church Dealing With Rejection Today

"[Luke 9:51-56] allows us to study the temptation to use violence to achieve right. Does insult entitle one to do injury? Does being right or having a holy cause justify the use of force or violence? Elijah had called down fire on the Samaritans; could not Jesus' followers do the same? Misunderstanding the identity of the one they followed, the disciples mistakenly thought they could achieve his ends by violence. How often have those who claim to be following Christ repeated the mistake of these early disciples? They have yet to learn that violence begets violence, & that Jesus has come to break the cycle of violence by dying & forgiving rather than killing & exacting revenge." (Allan Culpepper, Op Cit, p. 178)

a. We are in an era of opportunity & invitation

- a. "Clearly there is rejection of the gospel today as there was in Jesus' day. Such rejection is hard to take. But Jesus' refusal to execute judgment is a consistent pattern for ministry. Jesus is highlighting that the current era of his ministry is a period of opportunity & invitation. Jesus does speak openly of judgment, but it will occur in the era to come, when the Son of Man returns to show his authority (9:26; 12:8-10; 17:26-37; 21:25)...The opportunity to respond to the offer of the gospel remains open until judgment comes. As long as the age of grace, the church should continue to minister & offer her message of hope. To be a servant of the gospel is not to highlight judgment or long for execution, but to seek to save lives as long as God allows." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 286)
- b. "The church must deal with the world's rejection. The world often sees our commitment to Jesus as blind, arrogant exclusivism, when in reality it represents an invitation to share in the rich blessings of God. How should the church respond to such hostility? Many people in the world react strongly against the church's concern for the moral character of our culture & see it as a dogmatic attempt to control other people. That reading could not be more wrong.

In warning against immoral behaviour, the church is warning against that which is ultimately self-destructive not only to the individual who engages in it, but also to the society at large. But how do we respond to such rejection? The disciples respond...with natural instinct: 'Let's wipe those foolish people off the face of the earth.' But the way of Jesus is not the way of power exercised capriciously. What he calls for is continued outreach of ministry." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 287)

b. What kind of servant does Jesus want?

- a. "In the military, as a soldier trains for service, he or she is often required to leave home for a long time. Whether in boot camp or on call somewhere in the world, there is no time to stop & bury the dead or have contact with the family. Like a commitment to serve one's nation, discipleship is a call to serve God." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 288)
- b. "During a sport's training camp...the players are pulled away from family & friends as they forge a unit together. Two strenuous workouts a day show just how dedicated the athletes must be to getting into shape. Nothing may get in the way of that preparation for a season. Discipleship is the same as this, but with one difference. Here the camp is the church, & training camp never ceases. Disciples must always stay in shape." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 288)
- c. "Until I get married, I am subject to my parents. But the establishment of a new home leads to a new set of relationships that have priority. To do justice to my new family requires an all-consuming availability. Discipleship is like that." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, p. 288)

c. Disciples Today Need to Be Prepared

- a. "God may call us to a place where comfort is uncertain...Discipleship has an urgency to it that should have first place. And once we go, we should not look back. God does not issue his call for a season but for a lifetime. Service for the kingdom begins the moment we receive Jesus & continues until the Father calls us home. What does this look like? In detail, it is different for each person. Some are called to serve where they grew up; others are called to journey thousands of miles away. Some live in hardship & lose their life for the faith...while others live a long life...What is the same for all is the call that discipleship should have priority over everything else." (Darrell L. Bock, Op Cit, pp. 288-9)