

“So many things clamor for our attention during this season when we really do want to put our focus on Christ. Sinclair Ferguson helps us to turn our gaze toward Jesus day by day so that we can take in the wonder of his grace toward sinners.”

NANCY GUTHRIE, Bible teacher and Author

“If, like me, you have been guilty of largely ignoring the 40 days of Lent, prepare to be redirected, challenged and stirred by Sinclair Ferguson’s focus, not on the process but on the person and work of the Lord Jesus.”

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“I’ve peppered Sinclair with questions over a lunch table. I’ve read his books. I listen to his sermons. All because he is a precious guide to understanding our Savior’s life and work. And that’s the glorious effect of reading this devotional. Read it during Lent. Read it before Lent. Read it after Lent. It doesn’t matter. Just be sure to read it.”

TONY REINKE, Author

“Sinclair Ferguson’s Lent book is both wonderfully accessible and theologically rich. The daily comments are not too long to intimidate nor too short to be unsatisfying. Both younger and older believers will find much to encourage, challenge and stimulate them in their faith in our Lord Jesus. Some of the insights moved me to tears in deepening my own appreciation of Christ. What a precious resource for God’s people.”

**ANGUS MACLEAY, Rector, St Nicholas Church,
Sevenoaks, UK**

“We enter holy ground when we follow our Lord’s road to the cross. There could be no more reliable guide than Sinclair Ferguson. These readings provide warm encouragement and also a challenge to ongoing, daily repentance—helpful for any time of the year.”

**DR SHARON JAMES, Social Policy Analyst,
The Christian Institute**

“These superb reflections on the journey of Jesus to the cross, as recorded by Luke, are the ideal preparation for Easter. Warm, clear and illuminating, they show us ourselves as we see how Jesus dealt with people on the way. But most of all they show us Jesus, the wonder of his love and his call to follow him as his disciples. Read, enjoy and benefit.”

RT REV. WALLACE BENN, Former Bishop of Lewes

“These Lent devotions describe familiar encounters with Jesus in a fresh and challenging way. The reader is encouraged throughout to ask themselves, ‘How will I respond to Jesus’ words?’ Each day’s read is short enough to be manageable but deep enough to get to the heart of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.”

**CELIA REYNOLDS, Women’s Ministry Co-ordinator,
Christchurch Market Harborough**



SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON



TO SEEK
AND
TO SAVE



DAILY REFLECTIONS ON THE
ROAD TO THE CROSS



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INTRODUCTION



We read a lot of poetry at school, but among my favourites were the vivid narratives in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*.

There was something fascinating about the characters en route to Canterbury that Chaucer portrayed—pilgrims on their way to visit the shrine of Archbishop Thomas Becket. These included such memorable individuals as the much-married Wife of Bath and the “verray, parfit gentil” Knight. But—no doubt somewhat prejudiced by a sense that I was being called to be a minister—my favourite pilgrim was the poor Parson, who preached the message of Christ but first followed it himself.

But Chaucer was by no means the first author to use a journey as the motif for introducing his readers to a variety of interesting people. He had long been preceded by Luke, the beloved physician and author of the New Testament’s third Gospel. From chapter 9 verse 51 onwards, Luke records all the events in Jesus’ life in the form of a journey to Jerusalem. This travelogue eventually brings us to Calvary and to the empty tomb.

The narrative begins against the background of a major turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Simon Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah (9:18-20). In response

Jesus explains that he is going to suffer and be rejected and yet rise again (9:21-22).¹ A week later he is gloriously transfigured in the presence of three of his disciples: Peter, James and John (9:28-36). Again, he tells them about his impending suffering (9:43-45). From virtually that point on, until he enters Jerusalem with the shouts of the people ringing in his ears, everything we learn about Jesus takes place on a journey whose destination is Calvary.

In his travelogue, Luke describes Jesus' encounters with a wide variety of individuals and groups of people. Each of them is described within the scope of only a few verses; but all of them come alive to us through Luke's pen.

In this series of reflections for Lent, we will listen in on most of these conversations.

Each encounter will build up a picture of the journey's real purpose; for, as he tells one man he meets along the way, Jesus is "the Son of Man [who] came to seek and to save the lost" (19:10). We will see Jesus "seeking" out people as he reveals their hearts, perceives their needs and tests their motives. We will see him throwing wide the offer of salvation to those he meets—Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, men and women, all similarly lost. And finally, at the journey's end, we will see him secure that salvation once and for all, at the cost of his life.

But Jesus also issues a challenge to anyone who would follow him along the road to Jerusalem. At the great turning point he says:

*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself
and take up his cross daily and follow me. For*

¹ *Note:* References in Luke's Gospel give chapter and verse only, but full references are given for other books of the Bible. All emphases are the author's own.

whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (9:23-25)

The key issues for all of those who encounter Jesus in Luke's Gospel are these: Do they know why he is on the road in the first place? And, will they follow him as his disciple?

This Lent, Jesus asks those same questions of us.

ASH WEDNESDAY

THE DISCIPLES WHO NOTICED THE MARK

Luke 9:51

I must have “seen” Ash Wednesday before having any idea of what it was. In my childhood, sometime in February or occasionally in March, I would notice someone with a dirty mark on their forehead—and then another person, and then another. It must have meant something, surely? (We were Scottish Presbyterians. Lent was not something we observed!)

Ash Wednesday was originally the day in the church year when people who were ordered to show public penitence for their sins began forty days of penance—outward displays of inward repentance. Sometime around the end of the first millennium the practice became more general. The symbol of this was marking the forehead with ashes. It was the sign that a person had begun a multi-week fast, with forty weekdays included. They were now setting out on an internal journey of the spirit that would end only with the celebration of Christ’s resurrection at Easter. The message was visible on their faces.

Luke tells us that shortly after Jesus had told his disciples about his forthcoming suffering, they began to notice

a mark on his face too. It was not a physical *mark*, but a different *look*—as though something within was manifesting itself in his demeanour:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (9:51)

Jerusalem had always been in his sights. At the beginning of his ministry he had been baptised with water from the River Jordan, which was already symbolically saturated with the sins of the people (3:1-22). But now he was heading towards the real baptism which his water baptism had signified: “I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished” (12:50). Now the mark of death was beginning to become visible on his forehead. Now, for Jesus, the prolonged “Lent” that would lead to Calvary and Easter had begun.

On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus encountered a wide variety of people. There was something they all had in common: they were either drawn to him in their need or repelled from him by their pride. No one was neutral. The first of them were those disciples who had been told, but had not immediately taken in, the meaning of the look on his face (9:21-27). It was the outward expression of his inner “distress”. The question was, would it repel them or would they follow him?

But perhaps, before we travel any further along this road, we need a word of caution. The people we will meet, not least the disciples, are indeed endlessly interesting. But they are not the focus of the story. In watching them, we must never lose sight of Jesus; for if we do, all we are doing is meeting some fascinating people, and even seeing ourselves reflected in them (good things in themselves). But if that is all we see, we have missed the point. The real point is to see who Jesus is.

So, just as Jesus kept his sights fixed on his destination all the way along the road to Jerusalem, make sure you keep your eyes on him; for this is the key not only to this journey but to understanding the whole gospel message.

REFLECT

- When you read the Gospels, do you tend to look for Jesus or only for a reflection of yourself? What do you see of Jesus in this verse that moves you to praise him?

RESPOND



THURSDAY

THE SONS OF THUNDER

Luke 9:51-55

We were sitting this morning in a coffee shop when some teachers with a whole group of pupils in tow arrived unannounced. The look of mild horror on the face of the one barista on duty was quite a picture! A warning phone call would have helped prepare the way! It would have been a courtesy.

Jesus promoted a courtesy culture. His lifestyle was full of grace. That partly explains why he sent ahead some of the disciples to a Samaritan village with an advance request to receive him and his friends. There were at least thirteen of them; but Luke has already given his readers hints that a larger group usually travelled with him (e.g. in 8:1-3).

When the advance party made their request, the answer was a decided “Not welcome here!”

The problem was not simply a matter of numbers. It was proverbial in Jesus’ day that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9). Were the Samaritans just similarly racist towards Jesus? It looks as though one of the apostles had let slip, *We are on our way to Jerusalem*. Did one of the villagers spit out the words another Samaritan had used:

“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you [Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship” (John 4:20)? *On your way! Not welcome here!*

Luke passes over the Samaritan villagers’ response. His camera is focused on the encounter between the brothers James and John and the Lord Jesus. The two brothers were indignant. They responded, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (9:54). James and John were not given the nickname “Sons of Thunder” for nothing (Mark 3:17). This outrage was their natural—if massively extreme—reaction.

Who did they think they were—Elijah? (The story is told in 2 Kings 1:1-16.) They couldn’t control their fire-filled tempers, let alone direct heavenly fire to a village on earth! And more than that, they obviously had miscalculated, for Jesus “turned and rebuked them” (9:55).

These are interesting words, don’t you think?

Luke tells us that Jesus “*turned*”. What does that suggest? Had they been talking at Jesus’ back as he quietly resumed his journey without fuss? If so, then James and John were not only irritated by the Samaritans; they were rude to Jesus—under the guise of a question, they were telling their Master what they thought he should be doing.

Look at Jesus. Unlike James and John, he accepted rejection as part of God’s sovereign providence in his life. He responded with meekness. The sons of thunder wanted to destroy Samaritans; but the Son of Man had come to save Samaritans as well as Jews.

We tend to think of John as the “apostle of love”, not as a “son of thunder”. But it was only by grace that he learned to love like his Saviour. The John we meet in Luke’s Gospel didn’t suffer gladly those he regarded as fools and perhaps thought this was a virtue. Some Christians today make the same mistake. But “love ... does not insist on its own way;

it is not irritable” (1 Corinthians 13:4). For Jesus did not insist on his own way (Romans 15:3), either then in Samaria or later in Gethsemane (22:42).

Has it ever dawned on you what Jesus was really like? And has that made you want to be like him?

REFLECT

- Think back to a recent incident when you experienced rejection. If the great test of love is how we handle rejection, what did your response reveal about you? How does John’s story give you hope?

RESPOND



FRIDAY

THREE MEN ON THE ROAD

Luke 9:57-62

My father coined an expression that he often used to make it clear to me that I was not thinking clearly: “Your head is full of broken glass!”

This (admittedly unusual) expression makes an important point. Wrong thinking means something is broken inside your mind; and wrong thinking can have painful consequences. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to suffer and die. He encounters three men, apparently in quick succession. In each case he questions whether they are thinking straight about what it means to be his disciple (the dominant term for a Christian in the Gospels and Acts).

The first man offers to follow Jesus without being invited. His enthusiasm knows no bounds. He confidently asserts that he will follow Jesus wherever he lays his head. *But what if there is no bed?* asks Jesus.

Three young men once arrived at a mission I was leading and announced, “The Lord has told us to join you”. I said that since the Lord had not given me advance warning, no sleeping arrangements had been made for them, and so they would have to sleep on the floor. They were nowhere to be

found the next morning. It seems they had not reckoned on the fact that those who follow Jesus may have no pillow on which to lay their heads!

Unlike the first man, who volunteers, the second man is called by Jesus to follow him. However, he wants to wait until after his father's funeral. Was it just about to take place? Judging by Jesus' response, the man's father was still alive. He was saying, *Yes, I will follow you... but later.* The Lord gives a famous, somewhat enigmatic, and possibly proverbial response: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." In essence, when it comes to following Jesus, nothing else, not even family ties, can be allowed to take priority. Nothing and nobody—period—must take priority over Jesus.

The third man, like the first, also volunteers, but with a little more caution. (Had he overheard the first two conversations?) Wisdom dictates that he state a minor qualification up front. He would like to say his goodbyes at home—a modest request surely. And perhaps a carefully thought-out one, since it echoes Elisha's words when Elijah called him for future service (1 Kings 19:19-21). Jesus responds in kind when he says that no one who puts his hand to the plough and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. His reference to a plough reminds this man of what Elisha actually did when he asked, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you"—exactly that! Elisha immediately kissed his past life goodbye. He took the twelve yoke of oxen with which he had been ploughing (he must have come from a wealthy family), sacrificed them, cooked the meat on a fire kindled by burning the wood of the yokes, and held a becoming-a-trainee-prophet party for his friends. It was the farming equivalent of burning his boats.

Earlier in the Gospel, Luke had recorded Jesus' parable of the Sower (8:4-8). The same seed (God's word) falls on three kinds of soil which bear no lasting fruit. The seed sometimes

falls on the hard pathway and is snatched away; it sometimes falls on shallow soil with a rocky substratum, where there is immediate joy but no repentance; and sometimes the seed falls on thorny ground, where “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” choke it. These men were simply test cases for that parable. As far as we know, they turned out just as the parable suggested.

Jesus does not call every disciple to leave home. Earlier in this Gospel, he told a man who wanted to follow him to go home and serve him there (8:38-39). But what this passage teaches us is that Jesus wants “I am willing to give up everything, go anywhere, do anything for you” disciples.

REFLECT

- What reservations do you have about Christ’s lordship over your life? What gives you confidence that he is worth following?

RESPOND

