

CROSSROADS “CHRIST RESOLVED”

(Luke 9:51)

3.29.20

INTRODUCTION

To be resolved means: “To decide firmly on a course of action.” We have seen this often, especially in the area of athletics, often under the phrase “refuse to lose”; A hockey goalie resolves to allow no more goals; a pitcher resolves to allow no more runs; a football defensive unit resolves to allow no more points it represents a firmness of character that determines that, by a course of action, something that has been happening will be happening no more, or that something that absolutely needs to happen is absolutely going to happen – and nothing is going to stop it.

Certainly, our Bible is filled with examples of people who in the face of difficulty resolved to follow God’s direction above all else. David resolved to defeat the giant Goliath by the strength of Almighty God Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego resolved to refuse King Nebuchadnezzar’s order to bow down to his golden image, even as a fiery furnace awaited them. Daniel resolved to continue his habit of praying to the one true God, even as a den of lions prowled about, waiting for something to eat.

Jesus likewise showed that kind of resolve many times during his life on earth. In the wilderness temptations, he showed that kind of resolve against Satan: “No, Satan; you are not going to get me to give in – to anything you’re saying.” Facing the constant ridicule from the religious leadership for associating with people they would never dream of connecting with, he responded with a resolute: “These are the people who need me, and the people who need me are the people I came for.” Even in the midst of the missteps and disbelief of his own disciples, guys who followed him and lived with him for some three years, he resolutely continued to teach them, be an example to them, and love them. Regardless of their response to him, he never quit on them.

But it is as he began approaching the ultimate reason for his being here in the first place that he showed his greatest resolve. Let’s look at a verse from Luke’s gospel that reflects this.

TEXT

As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem – Luke 9:51

Jesus is near Capernaum at this time, on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee – meaning that He is just under 80 miles north of Jerusalem. This area has essentially been His home base for ministry, separated from all the animosity existing in Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was nevertheless the destination for His greatest, most impacting ministry. In a nutshell, Jerusalem was the place for which Jesus came into this world. Paul said it this way in his first letter to Timothy: ***Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – Paul, 1 Timothy 1:15b***. Jesus himself said: ***“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” – Jesus Christ, Luke 19:10***. Jerusalem was “ground zero” where Christ’s act of saving sinners, saving the lost, would occur.

But it is not just the terrible ordeal of Christ’s crucifixion that is being pointed out in Luke’s report. Notice what the front part of this verse is telling us: It’s getting to be time for Jesus to go home. His days on earth, planned ***before the creation of the world – 1 Peter 1:20a***, are coming to an end. But

the writer of Hebrews saw the full scope of this moment when he wrote: ***For the joy set before [Jesus] He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God – Hebrews 12:2b.*** So it is not just what sinful men plan to do to Him that is His focus but more completely, the salvation He will be purchasing, the resurrection He will be experiencing, and the homecoming He will be claiming. An entire Messianic mission, and the days required to accomplish all He was anointed to do, are very quickly concluding.

Now this verse is NOT saying that Jesus went directly to Jerusalem. We know that because there are miracles and teaching lessons still to come. but what it does mean is that, in Jesus' mind, His increasingly singular focus is going to be on Jerusalem – on everything that He knows is going to occur there. Many facets of His ministry have in fact been completed. And, in that context, Jerusalem, and all it represents, is the last thing, the final piece, of His ministry agenda.

Now the Greek gives us some insight into Jesus' mindset at this time; this verse reads like this: ***And it happened in the fulfilling of the days of His taking up, even He set His face to go to Jerusalem.*** To "set one's face" was Hebrew expression for firmness of purpose, but firmness of purpose specifically in spite of danger; we see the same idea expressed by the prophet Isaiah; he writes: ***I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting – Isaiah 50:6.*** It sounds like the Lord has "set him up" for a ministry of great difficulty. But, as Isaiah says so well in the very next verse, there was something so far beyond the moments of hurtful response: ***Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame – Isaiah 50:7.*** Notice the confidence: ***I know I will not be put to shame.*** That confidence is not in Isaiah himself, but rather is found in his dependence on the Lord; he says so himself: ***The Sovereign Lord helps me.*** The Lord provided the same steadfast strength and fortitude to the prophet Ezekiel, commissioning him with these words: ***"Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says,' whether they listen or fail to listen – God speaking, Ezekiel 3:10-11,*** But before sending him into that ministry, God had promised: ***[T]he people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate" – God speaking, Ezekiel 3:7.*** I'd probably be thinking, "Oh swell! I get to preach but nobody's gonna be paying attention. Thanks, Lord." The attitude God says that Ezekiel would be confronting sounds very much like what Jesus Himself found when He came to minister according to some of the opening words in the gospel of John: ***He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him – John 1:11.*** But God had a counter to that attitude by bringing some interesting capability to Ezekiel: ***"I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people" – God speaking, Ezekiel 3:8-9.*** Christ's ability to continue to move forward with the purpose of His life, knowing the inevitability of the cross, was founded in those same promises of God. Therefore, because of Who Jesus knew was with Him, He could do what, decades later, Simon Peter had observed: ***[Jesus] entrusted Himself to [God] – 1 Peter 2:23b.*** And it was in that spirit, in that frame of heart and mind, with which He resolutely turned His attention to Jerusalem.

ANALYSIS

So when we say that Jesus “set His face,” when we read that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem, what exactly is that telling us about Him? Two amazing things:

- 1) It tells us that Jesus was obedient to His Father. Jesus always proclaimed the Author of both His words and His deeds and, ALWAYS, that acknowledgement went back to God. In the same way, the Author of the plan of salvation was God as well, and Jesus, in that same Spirit of obedience, was determined to accomplish that plan. We see that obedience, was determined to accomplish that plan. We see that obedience when we read the gospels, particularly the gospel of John:
 - a) ***“The one who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what pleases Him” – Jesus Christ, John 8:29***
 - b) ***Jesus answered, “The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me... Do not believe Me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” – Jesus Christ, John 10:25b, 37-38.***
 - c) ***“I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say” – Jesus Christ, John 12:49-50.***
 - d) And, in perhaps the clearest display of Jesus being completely obedient to the Father, when in the Garden of Gethsemane, confronting the unspeakable agony of His impending death, nevertheless spoke perhaps the greatest words of commitment to the Father ever spoken: ***“Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done” – Jesus Christ, the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22:42.*** What needs to be remembered about Gethsemane is not only is Jesus agonizing about the horrific death that is just hours away but, even worse, in taking upon Himself all the sins of all the world, He will be excommunicating Himself from the intimacy of relationship with His Father – a relationship unbroken through infinity. But in a moment on the cross, because of His unyielding obedience to His Father’s plan of salvation, that fellowship, that incredible, eternal relationship, will be broken. I doubt we will ever even begin to understand the depths of that pain.
- 2) It tells us that Jesus loves us. Back in the OT, when God, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, said: ***“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” – God speaking, Jeremiah 31:3b,*** that was the entire Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – speaking as one concerning their ongoing, never-ending affection for mankind. So Jesus, when walking the planet during His earthly ministry and speaking of His love for His disciples and for us, He was echoing literally an eternal message: We are loved. That’s why He said to the disciples in the Upper Room: ***“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you” – Jesus Christ, John 15:9.*** And it was that love that caused Him to follow through on His Father’s plan of salvation.
 - a) The words are so well known that we have almost made them casual, but stop to think what these words are truly saying (and I love how the NKJV expresses it): ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not***

perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” – Jesus Christ, John 3:16-17 (NKJV).

- b) ***“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” – Jesus Christ, John 15:13.*** Jesus showed this “no greater love,” intentionally laying down His life, offering His life, for the sake of all who would become His “friends.” Jesus didn’t lose a bet; He chose to path. And all who surrender to Him get to experience that love from here right on into eternity.
- c) And one of the greatest testaments to His love? His promise of what He has in store for us (reading from the NKJV): ***“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you will be also” – John 14:2-3 (NKJV).*** What an amazing truth to think about: Not only does Jesus want to provide us relationship with His Father in the now, in this life, but also into the next life, completely through eternity. Now that’s a love with staying power!

APPLICATION

So what does that mean for us as we contemplate another Easter season? Many of us have heard the stories of Holy Week many times. So what can we focus on this year that may bring it fresh and renewed back into our hearts? Or, to ask it another what does Christ’s resolve provide for us? Some ideas:

- 1) We can claim the same strength of resolution that Christ showed. We can be the same uncompromising ambassadors for God that Isaiah and Ezekiel were. How Remember that, as Christians, we have been graced with the presence of Jesus in our lives by means of His deposit of the person of the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit in place, according to Paul, ***[T]he Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ – Paul, Romans 8:15b-17a.*** Being a “co-heir” with Jesus means that everything that God granted Him will also be granted to us. Paul celebrated this in his wonderful words: ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me – Paul, Philippians 4:13 (NKJV).*** How can he make that claim? Because of God’s promise a few verses later: ***[M]y God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus – Paul, Philippians 4:19.*** Jesus’ resolve to fulfill His Father’s plans gives us access to all those “riches in glory.” Jesus’ resolve to fulfill His Father’s plans gives us access to becoming a child of the King, “co-heirs with Christ.”
- 2) We can revel and meditate on the enormity of living in the presence of Christ Himself. That being who so sacrificed Himself on our behalf is just as alive and present tense for us as He was for the disciples some 2,000 years ago. That should filter literally every moment through which we live. We are not living by ourselves; we are absolutely in no way being left to our own devices, our own cleverness, our own strength. Remember what Jesus said to the disciples in the Upper Room? ***“I will not leave you as orphans” – Jesus Christ, John 14:18a.*** And as He was preparing to leave the disciples to return to His Father, He promised

them: ***“I am with you always, to the very end of the age” – Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.*** Why is that so important? We live in strange days, to say the least. But how the days show themselves doesn’t have to matter, not in the least. We live in the presence of Somebody bigger than the days because He knows the days before one of them comes to pass. And the presence of the Somebody in our lives gives us access to all the power that fueled His resolve to set His face toward Jerusalem. That power is found in His promised presence. What can we face that is bigger than Jesus’ power? What can we face to that is more powerful than Jesus’ presence? No matter what we ever have to deal with, the power of the presence of Jesus Christ offers to overwhelm it – without exception. As you contemplate that, remember Christ’s words to the disciples while still in the Upper Room. At the end of an evening of sharing some of His final words with them, He said, ***“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” – Jesus Christ, John 16:33.*** Translation: Tough stuff may come – but I’m bigger than any of it. The apostle John, who was present that night and in fact heard those words, was inspired decades later to write these words: ***[T]he One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world – 1 John 4:4b.*** Translation: We have triumphed over Satan because, at the cross, Jesus triumphed over Satan. Claiming Christ lays claim to that victory – over Satan, over this world, over everything. Jesus’ resolve to fulfill His Father’s plans gives us access to the power of His presence.

- 3) We can wrap ourselves in the unfathomable love that underscored Christ’s resolve to go to Jerusalem. When we hear Jesus tell His disciples, ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” – Jesus Christ, John 13:34,*** we usually – and rightly – take His words to be a model for how we are to relate with each other. And while that absolutely is true, we often overlook the basis for that model: how Jesus Christ loved us. Think about all the ways that Jesus Christ displayed His love to us:
- a) He left His home in heaven to come alongside us – to live with us, to very literally become one of us.
 - b) He endured our worst behaviors – anger, opposition, slander, and conspiracies both to discredit Him and eventually to kill Him.
 - c) He lived as a man among men – meaning that He experienced life much as we do: He was hungry and thirsty. He had times of being weary and sleepy. At different times, he tried to escape the crowds that were almost constantly around Him. He wept; He was tempted. He experienced joy and exhaustion. He expressed anger and sorrow at man’s spiritual condition. He showed compassion and empathy for the suffering of others. He knew frustration. He could be indignant if somebody was blocked from being with Him. If that sounds a lot like us, it should: He was truly one of us. As the write of Hebrews so aptly put it: ***Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason He had to be made like the, fully human in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement***

for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted. ... For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our witnesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet He did not sin – Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:15.

- d) And none of this even begins to touch the agony of Gethsemane – remember His prayers to the point of sweating blood, followed by the trauma of His arrest and the indescribably brutal treatment inflicted on Him by both Jews and Romans, His crucifixion and, most of all, His becoming the single most wicked and evil person in the history of mankind – for the sole purpose of offering atonement and forgiveness for ALL our sins – and by that assuming of all our sins becoming separated and even ostracized by His own Father: ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” – Jesus Christ, Matthew 27:46b.*** None of us can imagine in our wildest dreams what kind of agony that inflicted on him. And ALL of this was chosen by Christ to endure. He didn’t lose a bet; He didn’t draw any short straw. He CHOSE to be our Savior – with anything and everything that would mean. As He had said to Peter in the Garden just as He was being arrested and Peter was attempting to defend Him: ***“Put your sword back in its place ... Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” – Jesus Christ, Matthew 26:52-54.*** No wonder Paul would be led to write about ***how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – Paul, Ephesians 3:18b-19a.*** Have you ever been loved better or more completely? I haven’t.

CONCLUSION

There is a whole lot to unwrap in that one verse, isn’t there? In one simple phrase, that Jesus “resolutely set out” for Jerusalem, so very much is encapsulated: Because of Jesus’ resolve to obey His Father and to offer rescue from sin for us, we can claim the power He showed, we can live in the presence He promised, and we can rejoice in the love He displayed. And the best part? None of that is simple history. It is also ours to know present tense – by surrendering our lives to the One who surrendered His life for us. We will never know a life better than that. Let’s pray!