



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 29<sup>th</sup> June 2025

*"What Spirit is influencing us?"*

### **Main Point:**

Following Jesus means choosing mercy over retaliation, even when we're misunderstood, mistreated, or rejected. True discipleship calls us to love those who are different from us and to walk the narrow road with grace, no matter the cost.

### **Intro |**

A few years ago, I was driving through peak-hour traffic – in Sydney no less - when someone cut me off—recklessly, dangerously—and then had the nerve to wind down his window and shout at *me* as if it were my fault. Everything in me wanted to respond with a snarky comment, a honk, even just a glare.

But something stopped me. It was like the Holy Spirit whispered, "*Melinda, smile and breathe.*"

It's funny how quickly something as small as a rude driver can stir up something so un-Christlike in us. And it's not just traffic, is it?

It might be a hard-to-deal-with customer in the boutique or bazaar, who carries with them an air of entitlement. A neighbour who mocks our faith. A family member who refuses to understand. A stranger online who attacks what we believe. Our natural instinct is to push back. Fight fire with fire. Prove a point.

But then Jesus gently steps in and says, "*That's not how I want my followers to respond.*"

Today we're going to look at a moment when Jesus' own disciples wanted to fight back. But Jesus taught them, and also us, about the true cost of following Him, especially when the people around us are hard to love.

The passage opens with a significant shift taking place amongst Jesus' motley band of followers, when Jesus announces He wants to head to Jerusalem (v51) Jesus knew – and to some degree his followers knew also - what the road to Jerusalem meant – it led straight to the hornet's nest of hostility of the religious establishment. Jesus knew Jerusalem meant the cross. However, Jesus knew what His mission was, and nothing was going to deter Him.

He sent messengers into a particular Samaritan village, **“but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.”** (v53)

The deep-rooted conflict between Jews and Samaritans flared up again. And when James and John saw how Jesus was treated by these particular Samaritans, they lost it.

Now, if we're able to *see* a biblical moment brought to life, it helps us really grasp what's going on. A few weeks ago, we watched this scene depicted in *The Chosen*. Before we watch it, however, we need to realise that it is showing us what happened after Jesus visited another Samaritan village. On the outskirts of this particular Samaritan village he had had an intimate conversation with a certain woman at the village well. The fruit of that one conversation, brought many of the Samaritans to beg Jesus to stay with them, and the whole village began believing in Jesus. (This story is recorded in John 4:1-42).

So, while the people from this Samaritan village rejected Jesus, not every Samaritan village rejected Jesus. However, we know that Jesus and his disciples would have often received insults from Samaritans. OK, Let's watch how things unfolded.

*[Play 3-minute scene from The Chosen]*

### **Point 1 | Christ calls his followers to respond differently to how people in the world respond**

Now, James and John's reaction sounds extreme to us, “calling down fire from heaven!” But if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit we've all felt like this.

However, we'd have probably said, (under our breathe of course), “I wish they were run over by a bus.” When someone mocks our beliefs... When a neighbour disrespects us... When someone posts something cruel online... We might call it “defending truth,” but sometimes it's just pride, hurt, or fear talking. We're all vulnerable of retaliating out of anger.

While preparing this message, I discovered that some early manuscripts include exactly how Jesus responded when James and John expressed their desire to call down God's judgement on the Samaritans. Apparently, Jesus rebuked them by saying, **‘You do not know what spirit is influencing you.’** (Luke 9:55 – see NKJV, EHV, DARBY, GNV, MEV, NLV, WYC)

That line caused me to ask, ‘What kind of spirit was influencing James and John that day?’

It was the same spirit that stirred me to want to lash out when I was cut off in my car. It was a spirit of anger, or retaliation, or tribalism; an *us* versus *them* spirit.

Then Jesus added, **“The Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives, but to save them.”** (v 56)

When we watch Jesus minister, and look at the path he often chose, we see that Jesus constantly crossed boundaries—religious boundaries, societal boundaries, gender boundaries. He mingled with tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles, and Samaritans.

He didn't avoid tough places or hard conversations. He intentionally walked *into* them with grace and truth—and expected His disciples to do the same. So what about us?

Are we willing to follow Jesus not just into safe places, but into conversations and relationships that stretch us? Do we only befriend those who think like us?

The call to follow Jesus always reshapes how we see and treat others.

## **Point 2 | Our thoughts and behaviours are to be inspired by the Spirit of God not the spirit of the world**

To follow Jesus is to be formed by *His* Spirit, not the spirit of the world. That changes how we respond to difference and even hostility. The world in which we live tries to push us into living in echo chambers—in fact it is now well known that social media filters out people who disagree with us. We can subconsciously do the same - we can unintentionally create Christian bubbles where we only see and hear people who are exactly like us.

But Jesus challenges that. Who are we tempted to avoid?

- Someone who comes from a different nation from us?
- Someone who is living a life we don't understand?
- Someone who dresses differently to how we would dress?
- Someone who's hurt us or has been rude to us?

Jesus didn't write people off. He loved them. And He asks us to do the same.

That's why Jesus gave us His Spirit, so that we too would: Love our enemies, Forgive those who insult us, Weep for the lost

## **Point 3 | The cost of following Jesus is to put Jesus first above all else.**

Right after this incident, Jesus met three would-be disciples.

1. One says, *"I'll follow you anywhere."* Jesus replies, **"Foxes have holes... but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."**  
→ Are you willing to follow Jesus into discomfort?
2. Another says, *"Let me bury my father first."* Jesus replies, **"Let the dead bury their dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God."**  
→ Will you put Jesus before cultural expectations?
3. A third says, *"I'll follow, but let me say goodbye at home."* Jesus replies, **"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom."**  
→ Will you keep your focus, even when the path is hard?

These aren't just random sayings—they follow a moment of rejection. Jesus is saying: "If you follow me, you'll be misunderstood. You'll be uncomfortable. You'll be insulted. But don't turn back." Following Jesus isn't about ease. It's about endurance. It will cost you pride, control, comfort—and it may cost you relationships or your reputation. But He's worth it.

History tells us James and John eventually learned this lesson. James died for his faith and John became known as the apostle of love. They were changed over time by being close to Jesus. And so are we.

So let's ask:

- When someone is rude to us, do we pray for them or gossip about them?
- When we feel misunderstood, do we lash out or lean into grace?
- When we're rejected, do we cling to our pride—or onto Christ?

The world is watching how we respond.

### **Application |**

Jesus “resolutely set out toward Jerusalem”—toward suffering, rejection, and ultimately, the cross. He didn't take the easy road. He didn't retaliate when mocked. He loved all the way to the end.

And now He says to us: **“Follow Me.”** May we always operate from the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Let's follow Him. With grace in our hearts, mercy in our hands, and eyes fixed on the Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

### *Closing Prayer:*

Lord Jesus,

You set your face toward Jerusalem, knowing the road would be hard—and yet you went, for love of us. Thank you for showing us the way of mercy, humility, and grace. Forgive us when we want to fight back, when pride rises up, or when we walk around those you're calling us to walk toward. Fill us with your Spirit—the Spirit of peace, patience, kindness, and courage.

Help us to love those who are different, to respond with compassion when insulted, and to follow you with whole hearts, no matter the cost.

We pray this in your powerful name, **Amen.**

### *Reflection Questions:*

Here are some questions to help you engage more deeply with the cost of following Jesus:

1. When have I been tempted to respond with anger or pride instead of grace and mercy?
2. Are there people in my life I tend to avoid or “write off” because they are different or difficult?
3. What might it look like for me to follow Jesus through “Samaria” rather than around it?
4. How have I experienced the cost of following Jesus—and how has He met me in that cost?
5. Am I being shaped more by the Spirit of Jesus or by the spirit of the world in how I treat others?