

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;

