

Given the Chance...

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village (Luke 9:51-56).

“You want us to call down fire on them!” James and John were having a bad day. After all, they just wanted some rest, perhaps a meal, a spot by the fire and they would be on their way in the morning. What they got was walking papers. James and John are ticked, but it is Jesus who does the rebuking, not to the village, but to James and John. Looking at the message of Christ we can see that the brothers’ response does seem a little extreme (even though they are called the sons of thunder in Mark 3:17). However, in their defense, I think they could feel the climate change as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem for the culmination of his ministry. Something big was about to happen.

As I thought more on this account, I realized something—why did Jesus send messengers ahead? Don’t you think he knew what the result would be? Why didn’t Jesus just say, “There is nothing for us here, let’s keep walking.” It’s not like the disciples would have minded. Jews and Samaritan villages rarely mixed. So what was the message?

Maybe the lesson is that it was not whether or not the Samaritans would welcome them, it was that they were given the chance. I think of the contrast between this village and the village of the woman at the well (John 4). Both had the opportunity to shelter the Savior, but only one was blessed by his presence. Today we are given the same chance, only now the shelter is in our hearts, and our priorities determine whether or not Christ will be given walking papers or refuge. Likewise, we should share Christ’s message. Remember, it is not up to you to convert the world, only that they be given the chance.

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