

Fire From Heaven

"...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."

Luke 9:53-55 (NIV)

As our Lord journeyed toward Jerusalem for the last time on the way to His crucifixion, He sent messengers ahead to find lodging at a Samaritan village. As soon as the citizens found out His destination they made Him unwelcome. Such was the racial hostility that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews in our Lord's time.

The disciples angrily spoke to Jesus about destroying them with fire from heaven. Our Lord's followers were upset at the rejection of their beloved Master and also the racial hatred bred into them rose to the surface.

Jesus rebuked His followers for such a display of anger and racial hatred. Such bitterness had no place in the hearts and minds of those who follow the Saviour. Jesus' reaction to their suggestion was swift and highly negative. His words must have stung like salt in a wound.

It was James and John, the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17) who uttered such a rash comment. They were well named! They had recently been with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration and saw Elijah – the man who called fire from heaven – on Mount Carmel. Their memory of that event might have suggested the idea to them.

The suggestion was so unlike the spirit of Jesus but sadly very much like the spirit of the followers of the Prince of Peace. Jesus is not interested in swift retaliation against those who reject Him. He has a longing to see everyone repent and turn to Him for forgiveness and eternal life (2 Peter 3:9). There is no doubt that His heart wept at the rejection – just as His eyes shed tears a few days later when He looked at the impenitent city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Let us not harbour bad feelings toward those who oppose the Gospel. Resist any

idea of retaliation toward people who harbour resentment or anger at us for our Christian witness. "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." Matthew 5:44 (NIV)

Perhaps you will need to pray for grace to do as the Lord has commanded. It is all too easy to harbour resentment and bad feelings toward those who speak evil of us. We find a sinful inner urge to retaliate against people who would harm us. Instead of responding in kind toward our enemies, seek to do good to them. This is the way of the Lord. Instead of seeking fire from heaven, pray that God will rain blessings upon our enemies. As you do this Christ-like thing the Lord will come to you with blessings and pour out His love in your heart.

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