

Gospel of Luke 9,10-14

Sermon: **The escape of Jesus**

2025.

written by: Danijel Dragaš



INTRODUCTION

1.1. From the previous sermon, we know that unfortunately, Herod beheaded John the Baptist. I suggested that, although Herod gave the order, it was his wife Herodias who was the criminal mastermind behind the execution of the Baptist himself.

1.2. The event before us—actually, the beginning of the event—is very likely connected to the news that John the Baptist had been killed. And why do I think so? Because I don't know how else to explain Jesus' sudden decision to leave Capernaum for a while.

2. Let's go slowly into the text. In **Luke 9,10–11** it says: *On their return, the apostles told Jesus all they had done. Then He took them with Him and withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida. But the crowds learned about it and followed Him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.*

2.1. In **Mark 6,30–33** it says: *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all they had done and taught. Then He said to them, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have a chance to eat. So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.*

2.2. In **Matthew 14,13–14** it says: *When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

JESUS' DECISION TO LEAVE HIS REGION

2.3. Let's start with a question: In Matthew, it says, *When Jesus heard this*. What exactly did Jesus hear? I believe He heard that His relative John had been killed by Herod.

At the same time as Jesus heard this, the apostles were returning from their journey where they had been healing the people and preaching to them about the coming of the kingdom of God. They must have been very excited to tell Jesus everything that had happened during their missionary journey. So here we have the apostles present, the news about John the Baptist has arrived, and on top of that, we add the huge crowd that will not allow Jesus to rest or even have a bite to eat.

2.4. The verses sound chaotic, to be honest. No wonder Jesus at one point might have thought: *“Let’s get out of here—they’re going to eat us alive!”* I mean... He didn’t actually say that, but was that perhaps what He meant when He said, *“Let’s go by boat to a solitary place”*? So, what was the real reason for Jesus’ sudden decision to leave the people and cross to the other side of the lake? I don’t believe it was simply the crowd that would not give Him peace. We see in the following verses that those same people beat Him to His destination, and when He stepped out of the boat—what did Jesus do?—He still spoke to them about the kingdom of God, only in a different location.

2.5. JOHN, my dear friends—as I mentioned at the start of this sermon—JOHN is the reason Jesus decided to leave His home region. Jesus knew Herod wanted to see Him, but He also knew that this same Herod had killed His relative. I imagine Jesus’ inner conversation with Himself went something like this: “My relative has been killed; I am heartbroken because of it. On top of that, that madman Herod most likely wants to kill me too. My disciples are also in danger because of me. I need to take action regarding this. Even though my main mission is to preach to the people about the kingdom of God, I need time to recover. The first thing I will do is leave my home region, which is under the rule of King Herod, and go to a solitary place to mourn my relative, to pray to my Father, to be encouraged, to be renewed... because... I am exhausted, and so are my disciples.” In other words, Jesus knew that the time for Him to go to the cross had not yet come, and so He took the necessary steps to avoid a premature death.

On the map, we see that the purple area is under the authority of King Antipas. The Decapolis is southeast of Capernaum—let’s remember, Jesus had been there before returning to heal Jairus’ daughter. Now He chose to go to Bethsaida, which is east of Capernaum—it lies in the orange area under the rule of King Philip, the brother of King Antipas.



2.6. Now then, why does Jesus choose Bethsaida¹ as His next destination? As I mentioned in the footnote, Bethsaida was under the rule of King Philip, which means it was outside the jurisdiction of King Antipas, the one who wanted to see Jesus.

2.6.1. Okay, now that we know a little more about Bethsaida, let's look at the event where Jesus decided to set out with His small fleet² toward the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. When they set off in their boats toward Bethsaida, the crowd figured out Jesus' plan and followed Him. My question is: Why did they do this? I ask because we know that these same people usually waited for Jesus to return home from His missionary journeys³. I believe the answer again lies in what happened to John the Baptist. By this point, news of his death was already well known among the people, and they assumed Jesus was leaving to save His own life and would not return to His home region. So they decided to follow Him to hear about the kingdom of God. But from this perspective—knowing John 6—I now understand that, sadly, it was mostly because of the miracles He performed, not because of His teaching.

2.7. Either way, the crowd went after Him and even got there ahead of Him. How did they manage to arrive on foot before Jesus and His apostles reached the other side of the lake? My conclusion is that Jesus and the apostles took the time on the lake to rest a little and eat something—to recover, in short.

2.8. That didn't last long. Their pace on the water may have been slower than usual, but their plan to get some rest on the way to Bethsaida was ruined by the very same people who, just a few hours earlier, had been pressing in on them on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

THE HEART OF CHRIST COMPARED TO OUR HEARTS

3. In **Luke 9,11** it says: **He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.**

3.1. In **Mark 6,34** it says: **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.**

3.2. In **Matthew 14,14** it says: **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick.**

3.3. A Bible teacher once said this: *"When I see Jesus' reaction to certain situations, I realize how great a sinner I am!"* My dear brother in Christ also said: *"Although Jesus Christ was not a sinner like us—meaning He didn't have to carry the burden of inner sinfulness screaming: think of yourself, be selfish, you have the right to this now—He still had to fight against the external pressures that weighed on Him: fatigue, hunger, emotions, fear for His life and the lives of His*

¹ **Bethsaida** – A fishing village on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The name means "house of fishing." It was part of the tetrarchy of Philip, not Herod Antipas.

² My assumption is that, at this moment, because of the large number of Jesus' disciples, there were several boats setting out together with Him on the voyage toward Bethsaida.

³ (Luke 8:40) is one such example.

disciples, and finally, the relentless crowds who constantly wanted to influence His present and future decisions.”

3.4. All these were external pressures that Jesus had to learn to overcome in order to fulfill the mission for which His heavenly Father had sent Him. Of course, because of His perfectly good heart, Jesus always managed to overcome the temptation before Him—but that doesn’t mean He didn’t struggle with Himself.

3.5. On the other hand, our heart—and here I’m talking about those of us who have received a new heart from God—is the same as Christ’s, but unlike Jesus, our inner burden is our flesh⁴. It distracts us so that we will not do what is right before God. But if we have a new heart, Jesus’ selfless act of always thinking of the good of others makes us feel sorrow⁵—and that is a good thing. It means we have a new heart. And if we have a new heart, we will repent and try, with all our strength, to fight against our flesh. In the end, we will rejoice because of it!

3.5.1. Okay, let’s move on slowly

IS PHILIP A THIEF?

4. In **Luke 9,12–14** it says: *Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to Him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”*

He replied, “You give them something to eat.”

They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.”

About five thousand men were there.

4.1. In **Mark 6,35–37** it says: *By this time it was late in the day, so His disciples came to Him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But He answered, “You give them something to eat.”*

They said to Him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

4.2. In **John 6,3–9** it says: *Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with His disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do.*

⁴ The flesh is the DEEPEST EXISTENCE of a person; it is the voice that constantly shouts at us: “Think of yourself, be selfish.” “Steal, it’s nothing.” “Slander, others do it too.” “Cheat, why shouldn’t you have more partners in life?” “Be proud, you deserve everything you’ve earned, don’t share it with anyone.” “You’re sick, you have the right to feel sorry for yourself, you have the right NOT TO THINK about others while you’re in this state.” “Hate, because they hated you too.” “Be jealous of others.” “Turn your head when you see a filthy beggar asking you for money for a sandwich.” “God doesn’t exist, it was made up by the feeble-minded.” “If God exists, why doesn’t He protect us from evil?”...

⁵ (Luke 6:20) “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God!”

Philip answered Him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

4.3. So many questions run through my mind: Why did Jesus test only Philip? Did Jesus—knowing how much money they had—want to see if Philip would state the exact amount or give a smaller figure because he had pocketed the rest? But in Mark, we see that the others confirmed the same amount Philip had said. Maybe Jesus asked Philip because he was from Bethsaida⁶? Also, in John, we see that Jesus was sitting on a nearby hill with His disciples—night was already falling—when they suggested sending the people away to get something to eat and rest. At that moment, maybe Philip was physically closest to Him, so Jesus decided to address the question to him with the intention of testing him—but perhaps the test was meant for all of them?! Isn’t Jesus’ question a bit absurd? By that I mean, no matter how much money they had, everyone knew—including Jesus—that no one carried THAT MUCH MONEY in their bag in case they might have to feed thousands and thousands of people. So why ask a question that doesn’t even need to be asked because everyone already knows the answer?!

4.4. To sum it up: an absurd command from Jesus, the human reaction of the disciples to that command, and—Philip is a thief?!

4.5. There are many interpretations of this event: Philip was the most faithless of all the others; the disciples should have already known that Jesus, as God, could feed all these people by Himself; Philip was a thief; Jesus was testing them because He was frustrated with their lack of faith, and so on.

4.6. Personally, I believe there’s a simple solution to the dilemma before us. Jesus’ command was not absurd, Philip was not a thief, but the disciples were both right and wrong in their reaction. And let me just say: the fact that they were wrong is not a bad thing, nor did Jesus expect a different outcome—at least, not yet.

JESUS TESTS PEOPLE JUST LIKE HIS FATHER

5. I will now try to explain what I mean by this. We have all seen movies where the antagonist tests their enemies in order to better control the outcome of their plans in the future. Through conversation, the antagonist uses various methods (manipulation, persuasion, threats) to test the reaction of the enemy. We know that those who usually win are the ones who remain calm, composed, and focused during such a conversation. Most of the time, those who lose control—start shouting, begin to threaten, driven by emotion—are actually revealing their weakness. In other words, the antagonist gains information during the conversation about how and where best to attack their enemy in order to defeat them.

⁶ (John 1,44)

5.1. Satan uses a similar method to convince us that faith in God and Jesus Christ is unprofitable, foolish, meaningless, and unfounded. In fact, through testing, he tried to convince Jesus of THE SAME THING⁷! Thank God he did not succeed.

5.2. Now, God and Jesus are the opposite of this world—both to mankind and to Satan. Through testing, they want to strengthen our faith, not break it. It's up to us whether we want to learn something new about God through the test or whether we slowly choose to drift away from Him. If we look at this event through that lens, then Jesus' words, *"You give them something to eat!"*, are not so absurd after all. He simply wanted His tired disciples to prepare their hearts and minds for what was about to happen next.

5.2.1. Yes, their reaction WAS human: *"Shall we go and buy bread for two hundred denarii for everyone?"* But with limited knowledge and faith that had only just begun to mature—even though they had seen many of Jesus' miracles—they could not have guessed that Jesus would feed thousands of people out of nothing. Or perhaps they could? And why do I say that? We know that Yahweh in the Old Testament fed His people in the wilderness for years with manna and quail, and He did it all through His prophet Moses. So, Jesus' disciples, knowing that story, could have said in their minds: *"We know that You are the prophet of God, Jesus, and as such, our God can, through You, feed this people just as He did in the time of Moses."*

5.3. And that is why I said above (in 4.6.): they were both right and wrong! I believe we need to take both scenarios as possible in this event. However, Jesus' disciples—though their reaction was human—never once thought that Jesus had bad motives toward the people. Neither from their shared history up to that point nor now. Their hearts believed that Jesus only wanted what was GOOD for His people. On the other hand, in the time of Moses, it didn't take long for the people to think that Yahweh⁸ was a BAD God who had brought them into the wilderness only to kill them. In other words, both groups were tested by God and Jesus, but only one group was willing to LEARN faith, while the other drifted away from God because of the test.

5.4. Before I conclude, I want to say this: we were not in the wilderness with God and Moses, we did not see all the miracles God performed in their time, and we were not with the disciples and Jesus while He healed the sick. Because of that, it is very hard for us today to just instantly recognize when God is testing us in order to teach us something new about Himself. When I say VERY HARD, that doesn't mean it's IMPOSSIBLE.

WHEN WE ARE BROKEN BEFORE GOD, WE ARE STRONG BEFORE MEN

6. I will now share with you one of my more intimate moments with God, when He tested me. My last surgery broke me—spiritually and physically. I didn't feel like doing anything. I was angry—at myself, and sadly, at God too. I was lying in my hospital bed, not wanting to eat, not wanting to talk to anyone.

⁷ (Luke 4,1-13)

⁸ (Exodus, chapters 16 and 17)

6.1. I just wanted to lie there and be angry. On the second day after being moved from intensive care, a war veteran arrived, and after him came a 90-year-old man who had fallen down the stairs and broken four ribs. During the night, they tied the old man to the bed because he kept wanting to go to the bathroom, but couldn't: he shouted, begged for help to get up, uncovered himself, pulled off his bandages... basically, he was getting on everyone's nerves—including mine. In my head, I kept shouting: *"Be quiet already, old man! I'm tired and in pain, I don't want to listen to you all night, stop yelling, I've had enough of you!"*

6.2. Finally, the old man fell asleep—uncovered, of course. Do you think that, when I noticed he was uncovered, I got up and covered him? Sadly, I didn't. I convinced myself that, because of yesterday's surgery, I had the right to stay in bed and do nothing. But then, at one point, the war veteran got up from his bed—barely, but he did—and covered the old man with a blanket. He even tucked him in gently and stroked his head.

6.3. At that moment, I burst into tears like never before. I felt as if an elephant had sat on my chest—but it was actually Christ, not an elephant. I realized I was there to be tested. I had started off poorly, but when confronted with GOODNESS, I accepted God's lesson: *What would Christ do in my situation?*

6.4. The next day, I woke up and began reading the Bible in front of everyone, I talked with the doctor about God, I got out of bed, and while walking down the hallway from the hospital ward, I spoke with the cleaning lady about Christ. The war veteran and the old man became my brothers in hardship. And in the end, when my wife came to pick me up, I told her in the car: *"This was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life."*

CONCLUSION

6.5. God will test us. During the test, we will be confused and make foolish conclusions because of it. These will influence the future course of our lives, and then there will come that one miracle—whether a revelation through His Word, or a direct revelation through a life situation—that we will either notice or we won't. If we notice it, and respond in humility, we are willing to learn about God. But if we fail to notice it, we continue on with our foolish conclusions, slowly drifting away from Him.