

Four Shortcomings of All Christians (Luke 9:37-50)

1. We fail to believe in God at all times (v.37-42)

- Mark's account informs the reader that when Jesus, Peter, James, and John descend the mountain (presumably Mt. Hermon), they witness the other nine disciples arguing with the scribes about some matter, with a large crowd around them (Mk. 9:14).
 - From Luke 9 onward, the focus is no longer primarily on the crowds but on Jesus and His disciples, as they will receive hands-on training and experience so that when Jesus ascends into heaven, they can continue His work.
- It is when Jesus is with the twelve that a father "cries out" from the crowd, appealing to Jesus to "look at his only son" (v.38). The "only child" motif is the third and last mention in Luke's gospel (7:11-17; 8:40-56).
- As the father brings his only son to Jesus, the reader discovers a challenging case on various levels, creating pathos and ethos for the reader:
 - A. Physically, the boy may have some form of epilepsy. If he does, the demon is enhancing the seizures, prolonging them, rendering the young boy powerless.
 - B. When the demon seizes the boy, the child screams (Lk. 9:39), grinds his teeth, and becomes stiff as a board (Mk. 9:18). On many occasions, the boy has been thrown into fire or water by the evil spirit (Matt. 17:15; Mk. 9:25).
 - C. It "crushes/shatters/breaks him" and will hardly leave him (v.39).
 - D. This boy has been demon-possessed for many years (Mk. 9:21).
 - E. It is the man's only son, so future progeny may be jeopardized.
- The demon that possesses the boy, when seeing Jesus, threw the boy down (Mk. 9:20). The Greek word for "throwing" is the picture of a wrestler body-slammng his opponent.
- Jesus repeatedly demonstrated His authority over sickness and demons. As in previous accounts, Jesus demands this demon to depart (Mk. 9:25).
 - After the demon departed, the boy appeared to be like a corpse (Mk. 9:26-27), but Jesus "took him by the hand and gave him to his father" (Mk. 9:27, c.f. Lk. 7:15).
- We are informed that while Jesus, Peter, James, and John were on the mountain during the Transfiguration, the other nine could not heal this boy (Lk. 9:40).

They cast out all demons a little more than a week ago, yet they couldn't in this case. Why?

- It is because the disciples are part of a "perverse generation" (v.41; Mk. 9:19).
 - This is an allusion to the nation of Israel during their wilderness wanderings. Just as Moses rebuked the nation of Israel for their perverse (twisted) ways, Jesus rebuked the disciples for their unbelief.
- Whatever procedure or formula they used with previous cases did not work this time. This demonic possession could only be released by "prayer and fasting" (Mk. 9:29).
- In practice now, they are no different than the physicians who failed to help the woman with the "issue of blood." (8:43).
- Jesus rebukes the disciples for being slow to trust Him and exercise authority (9:1-4). We learn that Jesus' most intimate followers have descended into doubtful, questionable, prayerless disciples within a week.

2. We refuse to submit to God's disclosure of Himself in His word (v.43-45)

- V.43-45 form an inclusion with the disciples' curiosity following two of Jesus' miracles:
 - The calming of the storm (8:25) and Jesus' feeding the five thousand (Mk. 6:52).
- As the crowd marvels at Jesus' miracle (Lk. 9:43), Jesus speaks to His disciples and, for the second time, informs them of His passion prediction (9:21-22).
 - Previously, Jesus informed His disciples of the enmity He would face from the religious leaders (9:22). Now, He further defines the extent to humanity (v.44).

- The verb "delivered" is a divine passive, which indicates that this has been the plan all along (Acts 2:23). While this is the mission of the incarnate YHWH, it in no way excuses man from their sin.
- Luke informs us that they did not "understand" because it was "concealed" from them. Who or what is doing the concealing, and to what degree are they responsible? Either:
 - A. God has concealed the meaning of Jesus' second passion prediction from them because, like previously, they would have hindered the mission of the cross (v.21). In this way, they will not be guilty of doing something they are not able to do.
 - B. They are responsible for refusing to believe because they were "fearful" (v.45), doubting the prophetic utterances of Jesus. The disciples have already been given the keys to the kingdom (8:10) and received more revelation than anyone else.

Contextually, Jesus holds the disciples accountable for failing to exercise faith because of His previous rebuke (v.41), calling them "crooked" and "twisted." Jesus' consternation is over their unwillingness, not inability. They are unwilling to trust Jesus and change their theology and belief about Him as the Messiah and the Son of Man.

3. We pursue greatness for ourselves (v.46-48)

- Not only are the disciples slow to learn, refusing to believe in God, and unwilling to change their theology through Jesus' teaching, but now they will argue about who will be the greatest in the kingdom. Have they not been listening that Jesus is going to die?
- Their quarreling is perceived by Jesus (v.46-47), and as a result, He gives them an object lesson by "taking a child and bringing him by His side."
 - Children were not in a position of honor, as they were the smallest and least members of society. They were not considered valuable, as half of children died before adulthood due to primitive hygienic and medical knowledge. In addition, they did not contribute to the workforce.
 - Jesus, as He honors this child, turns the Roman and Jewish culture upside down under the context of hospitality, undermining social norms.
- In Luke's gospel, the focus is not on being *like* this child toward Jesus but on being *like* Jesus to this child. The least are those who serve others, just as Christ came not to be served but to serve (Mk. 9:35).
- The child signifies those who are "insignificant" and "little" in the eyes of the culture. To be Christlike is to give attention to those dishonored and overlooked in society.

4. We confuse friends with enemies and enemies with friends (v.49-50)

- The disciples had witnessed an unnamed man casting out demons in Jesus' name (v.49) and tried to stop him. The Greek for "stopping" or "hindering" is imperfect, indicating it was repeatedly: the disciples made multiple attempts to stop this man.
- John is the spokesperson for the disciples and issues the complaint to Jesus. John does not say, "he does not follow *you*," but instead, "he does not follow *us*."
- The disciples still possess an elitist and superior position in their standing with Jesus and rebuke the man for not being with *them*.
- The irony is that Jesus has given the disciples more power, authority, teaching, and demonstration than anyone else. Yet, they were doubtful, complaining, prideful, jealous, and unable to exorcise the demon-possessed son (v.v.38-43). Yet, this unknown man is doing what they couldn't, being "outside" their special circle: casting out demons.
- Jesus exhorts them: if he is for the mission of Jesus, leave him alone, and let him continue in his work. There is no neutrality in following Jesus (Lk. 6:20-45; 9:23-26).