

March 10, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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PATIENCE WITH WEAK FAITH PEOPLE
Luke 9:37-45

Luke chapter nine began with Luke's account of Jesus sending out His twelve closest students to learn how to represent Him, a task they would do throughout the rest of their lives (with the exception of Judas Iscariot). For that particular journey, Jesus had granted those men supernatural power to heal the sick, cast out demons, and to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

As we will see in our study today, the twelve came back with astonishing reports of success. They were flying pretty high. They did not understand that all of these experiences were like prep school for them. The Master would be leaving soon and they would take up His ministry of preaching the kingdom of heaven.

A good principle for students to learn is to acknowledge what they do not know and what they cannot do. Without that knowledge there is little motivation to press on toward the goal. That is what the disciples would be learning. Soon after their joyous return, Jesus took the twelve apostles to a remote area near Bethsaida where He told them to go ahead and feed about 20,000 hungry men, women and children. The disciples were nonplused. What was Jesus thinking? He was thinking that they needed to learn how to trust Him for the big things.

From there, Jesus took the twelve up to Caesarea-Philippi where He gave them opportunity to confess who He really was. Peter, speaking for the twelve, acknowledged that He is the Christ the Son of the Living God. Immediately upon that confession, Jesus, for the first time, began to teach the disciples that He was on His way to Jerusalem to be apprehended, killed, and to rise the third day. Peter,

again probably representing the rest of the disciples, attempted to dissuade Jesus from such foolish thinking.

Neither Peter nor the rest of the apostles understood that from this point on Jesus was leading them along the road to the fulfillment of the goal for which He came to earth. Those disciples who had recently experienced incredible powers needed to learn how little faith they really had. Jesus would be teaching them their great need to trust along the road to Jerusalem.

The trip to the cross would ultimately take about a year. Along the way the apostles would learn that they didn't have enough faith to cast a demon out of a poor, tortured boy (9:40). They will learn again that they did not have enough faith to trust Jesus's plan to go to the cross (9:40-45). They will learn that they didn't have enough faith to trust the positions of leadership the Master will appoint to them (9:46-48). They will learn that they didn't have a monopoly on faith, and it was okay for others to have faith to serve the Master (9:49-50). They will learn that they didn't have enough faith to trust Jesus to deal righteously with stubborn Samaritans (9:51-56).

Those twelve apostles remind me of me and maybe of you also. We are special people. Jesus chose us to become His servants. Jesus equipped us to serve Him. Jesus has provided us with abundant evidence of His power and of His concern to take care of us. But so often we try to manipulate our circumstances to turn out the way we think they should, instead of exercising faith in our Lord and Master to accomplish His will in us.

Sometimes I get so discouraged with myself to realize that once again I have taken my life out of the Master's hands and have been trying to shape it, direct it, and make it turn out according to my own design. I am encouraged to read that I am much like the men who walked and talked with Jesus daily. And He patiently taught them to trust Him. He is doing the same thing with us.

Authority Over the Spirit World – Again (vv.37-42).

This the story about a boy who was enslaved by a demon (vv.37-39). Luke has probably given a timeline of the event happening *On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him (v.37)*. We remember that the Christ

and three choice servants came from the mountain. It appears that Jesus and the three disciples of the inner circle stayed on the mountain over night. The previous day Peter, James, and John had the unique privilege of seeing a part of their Master's character that no one on earth had seen.

The inner three experienced a unique display of God the Son's glory that impacted them for the rest of their lives. Peter referred to this experience in his second letter. He wrote, *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18).*

However, as great as the experience was, Peter's argument is that we have a more accurate, dependable expression of truth in the written Scriptures: *And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).*

But now it was the next day and time to leave the glory of Transfiguration Mountain behind. So we find Jesus and the three disciples making their way down into the valley of real life where a great crowd, with great needs, predictably met them. If you have seen Raphael's painting, *The Transfiguration*, you know how well he captured this scene of the three disciples basking in Christ's glory with Moses and Elijah, while beneath the mountain is a dark scene of conflict and chaos where the real world stumbled along with the servants of Christ unable to do His work.

Coming down from the mountain, Jesus and the disciples came face to face with a man caught in impossible circumstances. He begged Jesus for help. *And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses*

him so that he foams at the mouth; and shatters him, and will hardly leave him" (vv.38-39). A man had a son who was seized by a spirit.

We can only imagine the pain this man experienced. Surely he loved his son, who we assume was a teen or more likely younger. But periodically a demon demonstrated Satan's hatred for the image of God, which had to crush the father's heart. Luke listed four manifestations of Satan's hatred through the demon. It seized the boy. The word means to take and bring under one's control. Periodically this demon would take complete control of the boy. These seemed to be long episodes in which the demon did not wish to stop. The poor father realized that his boy was enslaved to the demon's wicked whims.

Second, the demon caused the boy to scream. This verb means to shout with a loud, unpleasant voice. The word is used in other places to describe the scream of a raven. Maybe we could picture it like an extreme temper tantrum, like something you would see in a Sci-Fi movie.

Third, the demon threw the boy into convulsions with him foaming at the mouth. Picture this as uncontrollable shaking and foaming at the mouth. Matthew described the demonic events as something like epilepsy (Matthew 17:15). Matthew also added that the father described the demon possession as the boy falling uncontrollably into the fire or water. Dr. Luke used words that identify the problem as something greater, deeper than a physiological issue. It was a demon issue.

Fourth, the demons shattered the boy. This word describes the end result of these periodic demonic events. After these episodes the boy was left broken, shattered, trampled down. See the boy lying on the ground exhausted almost like he was dead. Sympathize with the father.

How would I, the father of three sons, feel if one of my sons was periodically tortured by a demon I could not see, could not grab, could not choke, could not kill? I would feel hopeless, helpless as though life was spinning out of control and there was nothing I could do to correct the problem. I have three sons. This man had only this one who a demon had captured and enslaved.

The man's address to Jesus indicates he had faith in Jesus. As Jesus and the disciples approached the crowd, *a man from the crowd*

cried out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son.” His faith that Jesus could help drove the man to come and seek Jesus. He was unconcerned about the opinions of others as he cried out with a loud voice. He respectfully addressed Jesus as “Teacher,” one who has authority. He was begging Jesus to at least look at his son. He must have appeared quite pitiful to the great crowd of his peers. Is your problem big enough yet that you have resorted to Jesus, believing that He can help? How often have you cried out with a loud voice to Him, not caring what anyone else thinks of your faith?

The poor father admitted to Jesus that he had asked help from the disciples only to discover that mere humans appeared to be powerless (vv.40-42). The apostles, of all people, were powerless to remove the demon. “*And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not*”(v.40). Notice that he had also *begged* them for help. Why the disciples?

They were Jesus’s representatives by virtue of the fact that they were with Jesus all the time. Jesus had been teaching them for a year-and-a-half. Jesus had recently imparted supernatural power to them so that they were able to cast out demons. We read a few weeks ago how, *He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (Luke 9:1)*. Surely when they returned after their “mission trip” they reported the same kind of thing the 72 representatives reported later. Luke recorded that *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Luke 10:17)*.

So how do we respond when people come to us begging us for help? If we confess Christ and if we live like we are trying to emulate His character, people will come to us for help. Granted there are always people in financial need either begging on the street corner or approaching us in other venues. We cannot possibly meet their needs. But what about people who are captured by their sins, tortured by their rebellion against God? They ought to come to us and ought to expect that we can help in some way because of our relationship with Christ who has all authority over sin and spiritual battles.

What a sad conclusion is found in the words, *But they could not*. And the sadder reality is that all of us work through human limitations as we try to do spiritual work. None of us can fix every spiritual problem, nor are we in our own power able to change

anyone. But people who have been with Jesus ought to be able to direct hurting people to Jesus.

The Master assessed the humans painfully well. *Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation” (v.41a)*. The assessment covered everyone. The people who made up the crowds were a faithless and twisted generation – like we are. It wasn’t that the apostles had lost their power or that they forgot the spell or incantation by which they had cast out demons before. No doubt the nine disciples had tried everything they could think of to repeat their past success against demons. According to Jesus’s assessment, the one critical part that was missing in all the disciples’ efforts was faith.

A faithless and twisted generation is a group of people who by all means ought to know and trust God, but do not or are at least weak in faith. And even in the case before us, it was not just the disciples. Broadly this criticism could apply to everyone present in that great crowd. Like any given church service, all levels of faithlessness were represented. Some people were critics and did not trust Jesus at all. Some people trusted Jesus to make life nice and easy for them. But most accurately, “faithless” and “twisted” applied to the disciples who of all people should have been resting in complete dependence on Jesus.

Christ must show longsuffering to bear with us. He can say to us what He asked the crowd, “*How long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here*” (v.41b). Philip Ryken calls this “holy frustration with the unbelief of His own people, including His closest friends” (Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, “Luke,” vol. 1, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2009, p.485). I must pause to wonder how often the Lord Jesus is frustrated with me.

Wise, but faithless, people acknowledge their problem (Mark 9:20-24). In Mark’s account of this event, the father of the boy stands out as distinct from the rest of the crowd. *And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to*

him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:20-24).

Notice in this account how Jesus allowed the man to admit the extent of the problem. *And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him” (vv.21-22a).* But at least the father had enough faith to ask Jesus for help. Through his limited faith the father begged Jesus, “*But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us” (v.22b).*

Limited faith is not good faith. Jesus established the standard of real, genuine, trusting faith in Him. *And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes” (v.23).* All things includes every single thing that fits in God’s will. The needy father got it. He acknowledged his condition which is our condition. *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (v.24).* We, like him, have enough faith to approach Jesus and cry out for help. But having cried out, why do we take the boy back and try to fix him ourselves? Why don’t we leave our great needs in the care of the Master to Whom we supposedly committed them?

The Christ demonstrated compassionate power in spite of faithlessness. The demon expressed its power, *while he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him (v.42a).* This was one last display of demonic power to keep the boy from Jesus. From this picture we might conclude that it is possible that when the sinner is drawing near to Christ, Satan will throw great obstacles in his or her way. Many of us know from experience that while we are moving into closer relationship with Christ, learning to draw more on His power, we can expect Satan to unleash a torrent of circumstances and reasons that will cause us to doubt.

God the Son demonstrated His power. *But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father (v.42).* The Master exercised His authority, rebuked the demon, and made the demon leave the boy. And then He *gave him back to his father.* What a beautiful picture of our Lord’s compassion. God loves to restore family relationships by dismissing the sin that fractures them.

So what is your demon? Genuine and actual exorcism is quite rare in this day, which means we are not talking about actual demons. Rather, we need to ask if we have faith for God to do the spiritual work that is necessary to conform us to the image of Christ the head of the Church? Do you have faith that God can, according to His will, accomplish spiritual work in your friend or loved one. Do we have faith in God to use our efforts, our ministry to change the lives of real people? Why are we satisfied to exercise faith in God to provide us with passing stuff but act as though we can handle all the spiritual, eternal matters on our own? That whole picture is standing on its head!

The Response (vv.43-45).

There was a conflicted response to this amazing display of divine power and majesty. Luke told us that everyone was astonished at God’s majesty. *And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing (v.43a).* Through His simple rebuke of the demon, Jesus publicly demonstrated the majesty of God. This glimpse of glory was much less dramatic but still showed the same glory the disciples had witnessed on the mountain the day before.

Jesus’s demonstrations of divine power and authority ought to cause people to marvel. People should marvel as we simply read the accounts of Jesus’s life and ministry. But what do we do with the information about Jesus’s authority? Some people respond by asking Jesus for more money, a better life, release of problems so they can be comfortable. They treat Jesus like He is some kind of divine ATM machine – just punch in the right code and He spits out blessings. Some people want to take the Majestic Jesus and place Him in their theological box which limits His authority to do what He knows is best. When people witness the power and authority of the Christ and realize that He invites them to come to Him, they want to make Him and earthly king of their little kingdom.

At the end of this part of the story, Luke included a statement from Jesus that Matthew and Mark indicate He might have said a couple of days later. After this glorious display of power, the Master spoke of apparent defeat once again. *Jesus said to his disciples, “Let*

these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men” (vv.43b-44).

The Christ’s immediate response to everyone marveling at His majesty was to remind His followers that He wasn’t on earth just to do miracles and make life comfortable. Nor was He on earth to don the majesty of mere earthly kings. God the Son came to earth expressly, only, to pay the price to cover the penalty for the sins of His people. This majestic miracle worker who commanded the weather, multiplied food, healed the sick, raised the dead, and rebuked the spirit world was going to be delivered into the hands of mere men, wicked men, who would kill Him. That does not make sense to human wisdom.

Therefore, we read about a confused response to what Jesus promised. Christ’s servants didn’t get it. *But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it (v.45a).* Notice that it really was not their fault that they misunderstood. The disciples still needed to grow spiritually. Some things they would not understand until they were indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. But until then, Jesus would continue to challenge His followers to keep the cross as the central focus. At this point, that was not even a possibility. But eleven of the twelve would learn the central importance of the cross of Christ.

The eleven disciples would, like Paul, keep the cross at the center of all life. He reminded the Corinthian believers, *“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).* He confessed, *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).*

The twelve apostles didn’t understand what Christ said, but they were also afraid to ask for an explanation. *And they were afraid to ask him about this saying (v.45b).* Why? For a human to admit lack of understanding is humiliating. I guess a lot of us believe it is better to be ignorant than embarrassed. That is not a good motto by which to live. Maybe the apostles were afraid to admit the truth that Jesus was not planning on establishing an earthly kingdom, and they were not in line to receive appointments to His cabinet of advisors.

When Jesus released the troubled man’s tortured son from demonic bondage, He not only displayed His power and authority,

but also His compassion. Jesus’s power to give us victory over the enemies of sin, Satan, and the enslaving world IS His compassion.