

Jesus And The Disciples

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Luke 9:37-50

Several months ago I was talking to a pastor friend of mine on his cell phone in his car in Orange County. When you're on a cell phone with somebody and you're both in your cars, you can go through a valley or behind a hill and lose contact with each other. He had been going through a lot of trials, hardships and difficulties. All of a sudden the phone just cut out. So I called him back, got him on the phone and said, "I think you were going through a valley."

He said, "John, I'm always in a valley."

Sometimes we, as God's people, are in a valley. That's why David said in Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." In the Hebrew, "the valley of the shadow of death" would literally be "the valley of deepest darkness."

Even a child of God, who is a child of the light, quite often finds himself passing through "the valley of deepest darkness." You may be in one right now. It may be a dark valley of discouragement, a physical infirmity, your marriage relationship, your children or grandchildren or another issue happening in your life. But you are passing through this valley.

That's what our text is all about. We find that Jesus comes off the mountain of transfiguration with His three disciples—Peter, James and John—and He meets the other nine disciples at the bottom of the mountain. And what they first encounter is a demon-possessed boy.

They had to come off the mountain into the valley. It reminds us that God knows how to balance our lives. It's not all mountaintops. The fruit grows in the valley and not on hilltops. So if we want our lives to be fruitful, we must come off the mountain of glory into the valley of deepest darkness. That's what happens in our text. We can't stay on the mountain; we must learn to grow in the valleys.

Luke brings together four short incidents or pictures that reveal some areas in the disciples' lives they needed to grow in. And in every one of the four incidents in our text, the disciples err. They are either ignorant, powerless, prayerless or proud. I'm sure we could all admit that these same four areas we need to grow in as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The first incident shows the disciples needed to grow in faith. Have you ever felt like you needed your faith to be strengthened? That you need to grow in faith? We all, as followers of Christ, need to increase our faith.

The story background is found in verses 37-42. "Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him." So they are coming off the mount of transfiguration to the valley below. "Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, 'Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child.'" Only Luke tells us

this. ““And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him. So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” Here we have the powerless disciples; they could not cast the demon out of this young boy.

Verse 41, “Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.’ And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father.”

Someone said that this is a picture of Jesus the Healer with a heart. It speaks of His tender care. He heals the boy and then returns him back to his father.

Verse 43, “And they were all amazed...” or “astonished” “...at the majesty...” or “mighty power” “...of God.

In verse 37, it says, “Now it happened on the next day...” On the mountaintop, where Jesus was transfigured, we saw a preview of the Second Coming glory of Christ. Jesus pulled back the veil of His humanity and allowed His deity to shine forth. And He took only three of His 12 apostles or disciples with Him—Peter, James and John up on the mountain. The other nine were down in the valley.

I think this could play into the text as we develop it today; the three privileged on the mountain and the nine powerless down in the valley. We don’t know what mountain it was, but it was probably in the north of Israel.

Verse 37 says that “a great multitude met Him.” This same story is recorded for us in Matthew 17 and in Mark 9. They shed a lot of light on this passage. There is information in Matthew and Mark that is not in Luke, and Luke has some information that is not in those other two Gospels. Luke’s story is the most abbreviated of the three Gospels of this desperate dad who was beseeching the Lord for his demon-possessed son.

Now I want you to see four pictures that Luke gives us in this first incident. The first picture he gives us is of the distraught father. It’s not easy to be a parent. In the dark world that we live in today, there are people who are wrongfully opting not to have children because of the darkness and difficulty of the world around us and the demonic spirit in our culture. I can understand thinking that you don’t want to raise children today, but I believe God will protect our children, and we can pray for our children. God watches over our children. He loves them more than we do.

In Matthew 17:14, it says that the distraught father came “kneeling down to Him.” He was broken, and Mark 9:24 says that there were “tears” running down his face. And in Matthew 17:15, he cried out, “Lord, have mercy on my son.”

Have you ever prayed for your child like that? Your heart is broken with tearing running down

your face? "Lord, have mercy on my son!"

The father said, "I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Then Jesus asked the father, "'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'from childhood'" (Mark 9:21).

I don't understand how a little child could become demon possessed. But I do know that Satan hates God, Satan hates your marriage, Satan hates your children and grandchildren and Satan hates the church. He will do all he can to destroy what God has produced.

So this father is distraught and praying and asks for the Lord's mercy on his child. In verse 38, he says, "Look on my son." That very phrase literally means "to look on with compassion or mercy or sympathy." Then Jesus said in Mark 9:23-24, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Then the father said, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief!" He was saying, "I believe God, but help my unbelief." So we see a distraught father. It's difficult to raise children today with Satan attacking them.

Second, we see the dark world, in verse 39. "And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him." And Mark 9:22 says, "And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him." It is a pathetic, tragic and sad scene.

If you are a parent, it tears at your heart to see this desperate father and to see this dark world that we live in today. But it's a picture of the church's mission; that we go into the dark world and shine the light of the Gospel.

ignorant, powerless, prayerless and proud. It is a picture of the defeated church, in verse 40. If God can use these men, He can use us. So there is hope for us. You think, God where did You find these guys?! The Bible says that "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27). I'm disappointed that the Lord had to put up with these guys, but I'm glad that He puts up with me as well.

In Mark 9:29, Jesus said, "This kind [of demon] can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." You have to pray. So the disciples were powerless because they didn't pray. The church needs to pray. We need to pray.

I heard the story of a church that gathered one Sunday morning. The organist was going to open the service, but when he placed his hands on the keys, silence. The pastor saw what was going on and slid into the pulpit and began to pray while they were remedying the problem. Then the janitor realized he had pulled the power cord to the organ when he was vacuuming on Saturday. He went backstage and plugged the organ back in. He wrote a note to the organist and put it on the organ. It said, "When the prayer is over, the power will be on."

God help us to get desperate today in this dark world. I believe because we don't pray, fast and

seek the Lord, that many times we find ourselves a powerless church.

Notice, fourth, the divine solution to this dark time. Verse 41 says, "Bring your son here." One other modern translation says, "Bring your son to Me."

I became a Christian after high school, but I was a prodigal son. I grew up in church but went prodigal during my high school years. But during my senior year before graduation, I rededicated my life to the Lord. A year before that, my Dad said he went up into the mountains to a men's retreat, and with another man in the Lord who also had a prodigal son, they went out into the woods at night and spent the night praying and crying and calling on God for their sons. I believe I'm here today because of my father's intercession for me up on that mountain and because of my parents praying for me.

So when you have a child who is in distress and they're living in a dark world, bring them to Jesus. When you have problems with your children, bring them before the Lord. That's one of the challenges of being a grandparent; they're not yours, and in that sense, you can't train them. But you can influence them by getting on your knees and praying for them.

I was praying this morning for my newly born granddaughter. We can pray, pray, pray every day for all our children and grandchildren. They should all be on our prayer list, and we should name them before the throne of God and bring them daily to Jesus Christ. That's the solution.

to set the captives free. He came from glory to this dark world of sin to set the captives free.

Jesus rebuked the demon in this boy. He clearly was demon possession. Verse 42, "Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father." So Jesus is called the compassionate healer with a heart. Jesus is recorded in Luke's Gospel as giving the widow of Nain's son back to her. And here Jesus gave the boy back to his father. This shows the compassion and sympathy of Jesus.

Do you, like these disciples, need to grow in faith? What's the solution? Pray. Spend time praying. Spend time immersing yourself in the Word of God. We need to pray, less we become powerless. We need to grow in faith.

Now to our second incident; the disciples needed to grow in understanding. And in this second, passion-prediction in Luke, Jesus predicts the Cross, verses 43-45. "And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did..." They're all blown away and amazed at the power of God to deliver this boy. And they had just seen the transfiguration on the mountain and the power of God in the valley. So they are anticipating that the kingdom of God had come among them.

Verse 43, "He said to His disciples, 'Let these words sink down into your ears...' that's another way of saying, "Listen carefully" "...for the Son of Man..." that's a reference to Christ; He's speaking about Himself. That is a Messianic title from Daniel 9 "...is about to be..." that shows the certainty of His Crucifixion "...betrayed into the hands of men.'" The other Gospels get into

more detail about His Crucifixion; that He'll suffer and die at the hands of wicked and cruel men (Mark 9:31).

This is the second prediction of the Crucifixion. And in verse 51, we'll see that "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." He was on His way to Jerusalem to suffer and die. The number one reason for the Incarnation was God becoming a man in the person of Christ for the purpose of the Crucifixion. He didn't come just to be an example; He is that. He didn't just come to teach us; He is that. But He came to die for us; He was born to die.

We have a cute, little picture of our newest granddaughter texted to us yesterday. It said something like, "Hi, Millers; I'm here." And to think of a baby, so fresh and innocent, purposely born to die, given a body in order to die. That was the reason He came: to die in our place, to be our substitute, to be our sacrifice. So Jesus predicts, in the midst of what is going on here, in the midst of His power to heal, that He was going to go to Jerusalem "to be betrayed into the hands of men," verse 44.

Jesus suffered alone, because in verse 45, it says, "But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying." I don't know why they didn't want to ask Jesus about what He had said. Maybe they didn't want to hear the truth. They didn't even want to think about it. "What do You mean? You're the Messiah! We just saw You transfigured up on the mountain! We just saw your power to deliver this demon-possessed boy!"

Then Jesus sat them down, and with great emphasis and great emotion said, "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men," verse 44. That's a statement about His Crucifixion. But they didn't want to hear it; it did not compute. So the disciples were lacking in faith, and they were lacking in understanding. The same thing is true of us: we lack faith and understanding.

Why would they not understand? In verse 46, they would be arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Think about that: Jesus is telling them, with this great, weighty burden on Him, that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified. It didn't compute. They didn't get it.

This is what's called "the dark night of the soul." This is what it's like when someone says, "God, do you even care for my soul?" You feel so alone. Have you ever been under a great weight, under a great burden and you feel so all alone? Jesus knows and Jesus cares and Jesus understands.

Even His own disciples didn't share in or understand His burden that He would be crucified. They dismissed it. They had just seen His glory on the mountain, His power in the valley, but they simply lapsed back into thinking of the Messiah as a popular, political, ruling king on earth. Basically they weren't thinking Biblically.

It's absolutely important that we, as Christians, think Biblically. We need to see life Biblically; to

look at all the world Biblically. Everything we look at should be looked at through the lens of Scripture. This is why it is essential that our understanding in the Word of God grows. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). It's the power of God's Word. Meditate on it. Marinate your heart and your mind in the Word of God.

Psalms 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." That's because they're rooted and grounded in the Word of God.

The disciples needed to grow in their understanding. They were following the culture, the popular views. They weren't following the clear teaching of the Scriptures, the Word of God.

So we need to grow in faith, we need to grow in understanding like the disciples and, number three, like us, they needed to grow in humility. Isn't that something we all need: a good dose of humility? Verses 46-48 say, "Then a dispute arose..." which actually was a full-blown argument "...among them as to which of them would be greatest." What had Jesus just told them? That He was going to be crucified. But what were they talking about? Who would be the greatest. I wonder Jesus, where did you get these guys?! But that encourages me; that God can use someone like me. So they were debating who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Now after the transfiguration and after the demon-possessed boy was healed, they were walking back home to Capernaum. And verses 46-50 happened in a house in Capernaum. Verse 47, "And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him..." maybe Jesus put the child on His knee "...and said to them, 'Whoever receives this little child in My name...' that's the key "...receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you..." that's the key to understanding this child "...all will be great.'" Jesus is saying that if you receive a child, someone humble and insignificant by the world's standards, then you are receiving Jesus.

So the disciples lacked faith, understanding and humility. But at least the disciples believed that there was a coming kingdom; they are to be commended for that. But they were all self-absorbed and argued about how great they were.

In context, three of them went up on the mount of transfiguration—Peter, James and John. The other nine were not a party to that. So as a result, there could have been this jealousy and rivalry. "Why did they get to go and we didn't get invited?! They got to see the transfiguration, but we didn't!" The Bible doesn't say.

It could also have been that they were so overwhelmed by God's grace and goodness to them that they began to think that they were special. That's a very dangerous thing.

God loves you, God is gracious to you and God is merciful to you. Yet none of us deserve it. If you believe God is blessing you because you're something special, you need humility. Humility is not thinking highly of yourself or lowly of yourself, it's just not thinking about yourself. That's a humble person. When you know you're humble, you're not. When you think you're humble, you're not. Humility is the virtue that when you know you have it, you've lost it. Humility is something you don't notice if you have it.

Everyone who knew my dad said that he was one of the most humble men they had ever met. And he was one of the most humble men I have ever known. He was selfless. He was so thoughtful of other people. What an amazing man! It was all because he walked with God. He read his Bible, he prayed, he loved the Lord with all his heart and he was humble.

So we all need to pray for a dose of humility. And many times God accomplishes that in our lives by "pulling the rug out from under us," metaphorically speaking. Because God loves us, He many times will pull the rug out from under us.

One of my favorite texts in the Bible is 2 Corinthians 12:7, where Paul describes his "thorn in the flesh...a messenger of Satan to buffet [him], lest [he] be exalted above measure." God afflicted His servant, Paul, to keep him humble. Paul valued character over comfort. In verse 10, he said, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." That's so very important.

He took a beautiful child, propped him up on His knee and He said, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me." What Jesus means by that is that a great person is one who shows kindness to the lowly. The great people of this world are those who humbly show kindness and serve the lowly, the weak, the needy. So we need a dose of humility. If there's anything the church needs today, it's a dose of Christ's humility (Philippians 2).

The fourth incident shows the disciples needed to grow in tolerance, verses 49-50. We need that too. "Now John answered and said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons.' Now they had just seen Jesus cast out demons. And it indicates from the text that this person was successful; they were casting out demons or devils. "...in Your name." They were doing it for the right motive, in the name of Jesus. "And we forbade him because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, 'Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side.'"

He didn't go to our church. He didn't have a Revival sticker on his donkey. "You can't do that; you're not a part of our church!" So Jesus is warning them against a spirit of sectarianism and being critical and judgmental of others.

Don't misunderstand this. This is not saying that we should be open and accepting of false doctrine. In Jude 3, it says, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Fight for the faith. "The faith" is the body of truth that orthodox Christians hold in common. We fight for the faith.

But we don't fight over nonessential; we don't divide just because we have denominational lines. Revival Christian Fellowship is not the only Bible-preaching, healthy church in this area or anywhere else. There are a lot of other good churches that are doing the work of the Lord. They may be different; they may have different philosophies of ministry, different styles. But if they are brothers in Christ and are preaching the truth Gospel and are doing it for the glory of God, we should not despise them.

I like what St. Augustin said. He said, "In essentials, unity..." we can't compromise "...in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love." An example of this is in Numbers 11:26-30. Joshua was all upset and ran to Moses. There were two men in the congregation, Eldad and Medad, who were prophesying. They had not been "approved" or "sanctioned" by Moses. But Moses said, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" Don't stop that.

In Philippians 1:15-18, one of my favorites, Paul said that when he was in prison in Rome, there were those who were preaching the Gospel, not for right motives but for contentious reasons. Yet they were preaching the Gospel. So Paul said, "Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." He wasn't going to censor them or criticize them or get upset with them.

Then the disciples of John the Baptist came to John and said that there were a lot of people leaving his baptisms and going to be baptized by Jesus. "Let's go down there and put flyers on their donkeys to come to our baptism!" But John told them, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of" (Luke 9:55). He said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven" (John 3:27).

And it turns around the other way too; if God is using someone, if God is blessing someone, never become jealous or envious, because no one can receive anything unless it comes from God. And God is sovereign and gracious, and He can use whoever He wants to use. That gets no objection from me. So we need to be careful.

Now tolerance has been redefined in our culture. The culture today uses the same words—the same vocabulary—but they have a new dictionary. "Tolerance" today is defined as "accepting everyone's view as equally true, authoritative and valid." It says that I have no right to claim that I have truth, and you are in error. But that's not tolerance. That view is wrong.

Tolerance is saying, "You're wrong, but I love you and I'm praying for you. I allow you to believe what you want to believe and say what you want to say, but I will not accept your false truth or your false doctrine." So we stand on truth, but we do it with tolerance. But the false doctrine we don't accept as being equally valid or true.

And the reason our culture does that today and the reason our culture is so crazy today is because we have forsaken absolute truth, the Bible. We live in a relative culture; everything is in flux. "What was true 100 years ago is not true today, and it won't be true tomorrow. Truth changes; there is your truth and my truth." No.

I've asked people, "Do you believe in truth?"

They say, "No."

Then I ask them, "Is that a true statement?"

"Well, maybe there is only one truth: that there is no truth." That's self-defeating. How convenient; that what you believe is true.

There is truth; it's fixed in God. Without God and without His Word, we have no fixed point or reference for absolute truth.

Are you going through a valley right now? God wants to increase your faith.

I think one of the most moving details in our story of the demon-possessed boy, that was omitted by Luke, is in Mark 9:24, where "The father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'" It was a heart's cry. So we should be praying, "Lord, help me to trust You! To believe You!" The Bible says, "The just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Not by sight. Not by feeling. But by faith.

And then we need to grow in understanding. So we need the Word of God, the Bible. Open your Bible. Read your Bible. Study your Bible. Feed on the Word of God.

We need humility. Reading the Word will bring humility. By prayer and Bible study, God humbles us and keeps us humble. We should all pray that God would make us humble. I should have humility in my marriage, humility on my job, humility in my ministry. "Give me the humility of Christ." Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

And we all need to be tolerant. We need to show more love—toward those who we would disagree with. But remember that "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love."