

## **Pride and Prejudice**

### **Luke 9:46-50**

The last time we were in Luke 9 together we looked at verses 37-45. In those verses we saw a failure on the part of the disciples. A child was brought to them who was suffering under demonic oppression and they could not cast this demon out. In Matthew 17:20 Jesus told the disciples they were not able to cast that demon out because of their unbelief.

After Jesus had delivered the child, in verse 44, while the multitude was in awe at the mighty power of God manifested by Jesus, Jesus said to His disciples: “Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.” Don’t be carried away with the temporary favor of the multitude. Don’t set your hopes on a temporal, earthly kingdom. The people of Israel would not be delivered into the hands of Jesus, Jesus would be delivered into their hands.

Verse 45 tells us that the disciples did not receive this message. Their hopes and aspirations for Jesus and an earthly kingdom, and their place in that earthly kingdom, stopped their ears and kept them from receiving and understanding what Jesus had said. They had created a paradox between what they thought and what Jesus taught, and because they could not reconcile these things, it was hidden from

them. They were afraid to ask Jesus to explain this to them, choosing rather to remain as they were. They choose to not understand these words from Jesus.

In our text this morning we see this theme continue with the disciples. They did not yet understand the true nature of the kingdom of God. This led to pride among themselves, prejudice toward others, and correction from Jesus.

As we work through this text, we will divide it into two sections. First the pride of the disciples in verses 46-48. And second, the prejudice of the disciples in verses 49-50. In both of these sections we will see how Jesus corrected His disciples. As we study this text this morning may we humbly submit ourselves to receive correction from our Lord.

### **I. The Disciples Pride (v. 46-48)**

Verse 46 begins, “Then there arose a reasoning among them.” We know from Matthew and Mark that this did not happen immediately after the events in verses 37-45, but it did happen relatively soon after. Just a short time after Jesus delivered the demon possessed boy, this “reasoning” arose among the disciples.

This word “reasoning” indicates logic or “thoughts,” and that is how this word is most often translated in the New Testament. It can also be translated as “disputing.” We need to have a clear picture of what was happening here. The disciples were thinking about this issue. They were having a discussion, maybe even a debate. This wasn’t necessarily an argument, but this was an issue that they

thought was important enough to spend some time thinking about, debating about, and trying to figure out.

This discussion or debate is not necessarily a bad thing. There are questions and issues on which which solid, Bible-believing, gospel-confessing Christians disagree. And we should spend time thinking about these issues, both as individuals and as groups. We should reason our way through these issues with the Word of God as our guide. We should be able to discuss and even debate some of these issues in a friendly, cordial way as we seek to work out our own positions with a clear conscience before God. The “reasoning” among the disciples was not a problem, but look at what they were reasoning about.

Again, look at verse 46, “Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.” This was their concern. This was an issue at the front of their minds. This was the issue they deemed worthy of their thought and discussion.

Consider this in light of what we read in verse 45: “But they [the disciples] understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him [Jesus] of that saying.” The disciples didn’t understand what Jesus was trying to teach them. That would have been a worthy topic for the disciples to ponder. That was something we know they needed. That was a topic where discussion would have been beneficial. But the disciples seem to have forgotten that they don’t really understand what is going on or what Jesus was

trying to teach them. Or maybe they just didn't care. The issue of greatness was at the forefront of their minds.

Notice that their concern about which one of them is the greatest matches their understanding of the kingdom of God. They did not yet understand Christ's work as the spiritual Messiah. Like most of their contemporaries, the 12 disciples were looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom. He would obviously need men to help Him administer such a kingdom. What positions would they hold in that kingdom? Maybe Peter was gripping his sword hilt and thinking about being a great general at the front of the Messiah's army. Maybe Levi anticipated a role in the administrative functions of such kingdom not unlike the role he had as a publican. Maybe Judas Iscariot, who held the purse, hoped he would control the treasury. We don't know exactly what they were thinking, but this discussion about which one of them would be the greatest found its root in their understanding (or misunderstanding) of the kingdom of God.

What a clear example from Scripture that shows us how our theology affects our lives. What the disciples believed about the kingdom of God affected how they thought, how they acted toward each other, and how they acted toward others. We cannot separate what we believe from how we think and how we live. Our thoughts and our lives reveal what we truly believe. And if we were to carefully and humbly examine ourselves, that might alarm us because so often our thoughts and actions do not match our professions. We can come to church on Sunday, sing wonderful

theologically sound hymns, read the Word of God together, listen to the preaching of the word of God and say, “Amen, let it be so.” But our day-to-day lives do not match the truth we confess. Our priorities, our attitudes, our thoughts, and our actions betray us. We can say anything we want. What we truly believe comes out in how we live our lives. And that’s what we see in the disciples on this occasion. They acted according to their understanding and belief about the kingdom of God.

What gave rise to this discussion about greatness on this occasion in particular? Two things had just happened which may have seemed to the disciples to be distinctions of greatness or a lack thereof. Remember back to verse 28 when Jesus separated Peter, James, and John from the other disciples and took them up the mountain with Him. They went up the mountain to pray. And while on the mountain, those three disciples were witnesses to the transfiguration. Peter, James, and John might have thought that this was quite the feather in their cap.

Remember, Jesus specifically instructed them not to tell anyone about the transfiguration until after His resurrection (Mark 9:9). But they knew what they had witnessed, and this may have given them an air of aloofness toward the other disciples. Jesus took us up the mountain for a special time of prayer. We got to witness something the other disciples did not see. Maybe we are greater.

While that was happening up on the mountain, what was happening down below? Look back to verse 40. The father of the demon possessed boy said to Jesus, “I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not.” The nine

disciples who were left back had failed to exercise the power Jesus had given to them. They had failed to deliver this child from spiritual oppression, and when they asked Jesus about it He told them it was due to their lack of faith. It's easy to see how that could have been a blow to those nine and a boost to the other three. So they began to think and discuss and debate about which of them should be greatest.

In their proud consideration of themselves and their misunderstanding of the kingdom of God, the disciples are not a good example for us, but a bad example. It is a good thing we have accounts like this in Scripture. Scripture does not try to hide the faults of God's people. From the sin of Adam to the sins in the first century church, Scripture presents a clear and consistent message: Even the best among God's people are still flawed and sinful. This reminds us that we don't look to any mere man for hope. We don't draw our confidence from the good men and women of the faith who have gone before us. We don't aspire to be holy as they were holy and thus be accepted by God. No. Rather, we see their faults and we are reminded that man can never be enough.

Our hope is in the Lord. He is our sinless Redeemer. He alone is perfect. He is our Savior. We rest in Him and Him alone.

We are incredibly blessed to have many wonderful examples of faithful men and women, both in the Bible and in church history. We can benefit tremendously from their lives, but we only follow their example as they followed Christ. Rest in

no one else. Hope in no one else. There is only one way to the Father. We follow Jesus Christ.

Verse 47 is both an alarming and a comforting verse. First, consider how this verse is alarming: Jesus perceived the thought of their heart. Jesus knew what the disciples were thinking. They had thought about this and discussed this amongst themselves, but they had not talked to Jesus about this. Yet Jesus knew what they were thinking.

We learn from this verse that nothing is hidden from the Lord. Every sin is laid bare before Him. Even the secret thoughts of our hearts are revealed to His omniscience. Matthew Henry commented, “Thoughts are *words* to him, and *whispers* are loud cries. It is a good reason why we should keep up a strict government of our thoughts because Christ takes a strict [notice] of them.”<sup>1</sup>

Hebrews 10:31 says, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Hebrews 12:29, “God is a consuming fire.”

He is “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”

(Revelation 22:13)

In Isaiah 9:9-10 God said, “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry’s commentary on this verse.

times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”

Nothing is be hidden from Him. All is laid bare before Him. There are no fig leaves that can cover your nakedness, no natural solution for your sin before the thrice holy God. The angels in heaven proclaim, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty.” (Revelation 4:8) The holy God sees all your sin. Nothing is hidden from Him. This is a fearful and alarming revelation: Jesus perceives the thoughts of your heart.

Now consider how this verse is comforting. What did Jesus do when He perceived the proud and sinful thoughts of the disciples? Look again at verse 47.

Jesus didn’t blast the disciples. Jesus didn’t say, “You’re done. Clearly you guys aren’t getting my message. I’ll go find some other people to be my disciples.”

No, rather Jesus had a child sit down next to Him, and He gave the disciples an object lesson to teach them where they went wrong in their understanding and in their attitudes. What a comfort it is to see how Jesus dealt with His sinful disciples and we can make application to ourselves.

God sees you at your absolute worst. He sees you at your lowest point. He sees you in your most sinful state. Yet He loves you. Romans 5:8, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”



Your sin does not exclude you from the mercy of God in salvation. Jesus came to die for sinners. Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 5:31-32, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” I love the biblical truth expressed in the hymn, “Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, / weak and wounded, sick and sore; / Jesus ready stands to save you, / full of pity, love, and pow’r.” The gospel of Jesus Christ does not say, “Come, ye righteous, rich and needless.” But rather, “Come, ye sinners, poor and needy.”

There is application here for the Christian life as well. When we fail as disciples of Jesus Christ, and we all fail, but praise God He does not cast us out. We will face chastening and correction. Those whom God loves, He disciplines, but the end of God’s chastening and correction of His children is not our destruction, but our sanctification, our growth in Christ-likeness. When we fail, may we remember not to look to ourselves and try to re-gain God’s fatherly favor by our righteousness, but rather turn again to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be reminded that all our righteousness comes from Him. Rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ and in faith and obedience press on, step by step, following our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus did not reject His disciples, but rather, He taught them and corrected them through an object lesson. What was that lesson?

Jesus had a child come sit next to him. That was the very position the disciples wanted and had been discussing: Who would be next to Jesus in

greatness? In Mark 10:37 we read that James and John were so bold as to ask Jesus, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” This is what the disciples wanted. But Jesus took a child: an unnamed, unknown, insignificant child and had that child sit next to him.

I wonder what the disciples thought when Jesus did this? Before them was the physical representation of the position they desired: the seat next to Jesus. And who did Jesus place there? A child.

I’m sure they were surprised. Maybe they were humbled. Maybe some of them were annoyed.

Children in the ancient world were not held in the same esteem that children are held in today, especially in the West. Certainly children were loved and cherished. We have seen several examples of that already in Luke’s gospel. But children were not seen as particularly valuable or insightful members of society at large. Children were taught, and children were expected to obey. They were very low on the social pecking order. We see that Jesus took this lowly child, and placed him in this honored position next to him, this position that the disciples coveted, and in verse 48 Jesus instructed the disciples.

Jesus explained this object lesson. The first half of verse 48 doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the issue at hand. Look at what Jesus said, “Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me.” What does this have to do with the disciple’s desire to

be the greatest? The disciples don't seem to be struggling with accepting Jesus. Earlier in this chapter, back in verse 20, Peter led the disciples in confessing that Jesus was "the Christ of God," the anointed Messiah.

So why did Jesus begin with this instruction about receiving this child in His name? Remember that Jesus was explaining an object lesson. We don't have to go and find this child and receive him in Christ's name in order to be received by the Father. In this passage and in the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark Jesus was not talking about literal children, although these passages are often interpreted and applied that way.

What did the child in this passage represent? Why did Jesus have this child next to Him? The lowly position and unassuming humility of this child was set forward by Jesus as a counter to the pride and ambition of the disciples. It was not one of the disciples Jesus sat next to Himself, but rather this child.

That is why Jesus said, "To receive me, and to receive the Father who sent me, you must receive this child in my name." We must lay aside our pride and our sinful ambition, put on modesty of mind and humility, and assume the lowly and unassuming position this child represented and we must do so in the name of Jesus Christ. This is what He has called us to as His disciples.

In the second half of verse 48 Jesus very clearly connected this illustration to the proud desire of the disciples to be the greatest. Jesus said, "For he that is least

among you all, the same shall be great.” Again, the disciples had misunderstood the true nature of the Kingdom of God.

They were treating the Kingdom of God like the kingdoms of men. In the world, pride and ambition are the avenues most often used for advancement. The more a man desires to be great, the more he grasps at greatness. He seeks to exalt himself and put others down. This is the path the disciples had started down. But Jesus stopped them and told them that this is not how the kingdom of God works.

It is, in fact, the opposite in the kingdom of God. The proud will not be exalted, the proud will be abased. We cannot climb to a position of honor before God by putting others down. Do you desire to be great in the kingdom of God? Then become least among all the saints.

Before we move on, I want to draw your attention to one more thing in this first half of our text. The disciples were concerned about which of them should be “*greatest*.” Jesus instructed them that those who were humble would be “*great*.” Not the greatest, just great.

We should desire to be great in the kingdom of God, great by the path of humility as Jesus has outlined in this passage. We must guard against the temptation to be greatest. To be better than everyone else. Such is the way of pride. It is not the way of Christ.

I Corinthians 10:12 warns, “But they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” When we begin to

compare ourselves with each other we open the floodgates for all the destruction that pride brings. Sanctification is not a race where we compete with each other. Rather, it is an endurance race where we strive after Christ. Don't look down on a brother or sister in Christ who is at a different place in their walk with God. Pray for them. Encourage them. And may we all strive together to be great in the kingdom of God.

So far from our text we have looked at the disciple's discussion. They were concerned about which one of them would be the greatest. Jesus knew what was in the hearts and minds of his disciples. He had a child come and sit next to Him to illustrate lowliness of mind and humility. Jesus taught the disciples that if they would be great in the kingdom of God, they must be least among all the saints.

The disciples heard what Jesus taught. There was nothing hidden to them in His words. This was not a mystery or a riddle. Jesus spoke plainly to them.

Yet, once again, we see that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was trying to teach them. And we see that clearly in the events that follow in this chapter. This morning, we are going to look at just the next two verses where we see the disciples' prejudice.

## **II. The Disciples' Prejudice (v. 49-50)**

Verse 49 begins, "John answered and said." So far, that's ok. Maybe John said, "Lord, forgive us." Or better yet, "Lord forgive me, for I have sinned. And not

only am I guilty of the sin of pride toward the other disciples, but I was involved in something else that was wrong, and I see that now, and I want to confess that to you as well.” That would have been good and commendable from John, but we all know that’s not what he said.

Look at the verse 49. Why was this John’s response to what Jesus had just said? What does this account of the disciples rebuking someone else have to do with the discussion amongst the disciples about which one of them would be the greatest? Some think that John was deflecting. Jesus had just corrected the disciples for something they had done that was wrong. Maybe John was trying to draw attention to something the disciples had recently done that he thought was good. Or maybe John was just trying to change the subject. Or maybe this was a legitimate concern John had and he wanted Jesus to instruct them on what else they should do in a situation like this.

What had John and the other disciples done? They observed a man casting out devils. This seems to be a good thing. If someone had been demon possessed and now was no longer under that spiritual bondage, we would consider that a positive change. But remember, there was some concern among the Jews that demons could be cast out with the authority of Satan. We see this accusation leveled against Jesus by the religious leaders. We will look at Luke’s account of that accusation when we get to Luke 11. So maybe this man was doing something

that seemed like a good work, but he was doing it by the wrong authority. Was that the case?

No. This man cast out devils in Jesus' name. So this man was doing a good thing and he was using the right authority. Having observed this, what did the disciples do?

John said, "We forbid him, because he followeth not with us." The disciples put a stop to this, or at least they tried. Notice the attitude of the disciples. "Who does this man think he is? He is not one of us. He is not one of the 12. He is not even one of the 70."

This seems like another manifestation of the disciples' pride. Remember, 9 of them had recently failed to cast out a demon. Here was someone who was not part of their special group, who did not have all the privileges they had, and yet he had success where they had recently failed. So they stopped him.

Before we look at Jesus' response to John and make application from that, let's consider what we know about this man. First, we don't know who he was. As far as we know, this is the only mention of him in Scripture. No other details about this man are given to us.

Second, he was successful in casting out demons in the name of Jesus. This is important because it demonstrates true faith. This man was sincere in his use of Jesus name and his reliance upon Jesus' power and authority. How could we possibly know that. In verse 50 Jesus told the disciples that this man was for them,

not against them. We also have an example in Scripture of some people who tried to use the name of Jesus to cast out a demon but they were not sincere and thus they had no success.

That account is found in Acts 19, starting in verse 13. Seven Jewish exorcists in Ephesus tried to cast out a demon saying, “We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” (Acts 19:13) Acts 19:15-16 tell us what happened, “And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

The name of Jesus is not a magic incantation, but where there is sincerity and a genuine reliance upon Jesus, God honors the name of Jesus with power. The man in our text must have been sincere in the use of Jesus’ name and his reliance upon Jesus’ power and authority.

But I must add this warning: the only reason we can be certain about this man is because of the words of Jesus in verse 50. We can observe his works and say, “This appears to align with genuine faith.” But you and I cannot see what is in the heart of someone else.

Judas Iscariot went about preaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons in the name of Jesus. But in the end, he betrayed the Lord. He was not a true follower of Jesus, though he gave every outward evidence.



Jesus gave this solemn warning in Matthew 7:22-23, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Good works, even the best works, done in the name of Jesus are worthless if Jesus says to us on the day of judgment, “I never knew you.” Draw no eternal confidence from your works or the works of others. Rest only in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Without genuine faith in Him, we have nothing.

Now look at verse 50 and see how Jesus responded to what John had just told Him. “Forbid him not.” John and the other disciples had done wrong. They should not have tried to stop this man.

Look at the reason Jesus gave: “He that is not against us is for us.” From one perspective this statement is very strict. From another perspective, it is very broad. First, consider how this statement is very strict. Jesus said, “He that is not against us is for us.” The inverse is also true. He that is not for Christ is against Christ.

There are only two possible paths that a person can be on: for Christ or against Christ. There is no neutral ground. You must be for Him or you are against Him. On which side of this line are you? If you ignore the gospel, if you push it out of your mind and just go on with your life, if you just don't care about spiritual things one way or the other, don't think that you are neutral. If you are not actively

for Christ, you are against Him. May each one of us carefully examine ourselves by this standard. This statement from Jesus is very strict.

From another perspective, this statement is incredibly broad. Again, Jesus said, “He that is not against us is for us.” John and the other disciples had tried to stop this man because he was not a part of their particular group. Jesus told his disciples that they were wrong: “Forbid him not.” Just because this man did not follow Jesus as the 12 followed him, or maybe as the 70 followed him, didn’t mean that this man was not a true follower of Jesus. John and the others could not bear this. Because this man was not a part of their group they tried to stop him.

Jesus gave His disciples, and us by extension, this litmus test: Is the person you are concerned about working against the gospel of Jesus Christ? If the answer is no, then that person is for us. All believers are working together under the banner of Jesus Christ. And don’t twist or misunderstand what I am saying here. I’m not saying that everyone who claim’s Jesus is truly following Him. I’m not saying that we should accept false teachers and cults just because they claim Jesus on a surface level. But what I am saying it that all genuine believers are united in one body under Jesus Christ, even if they are not part of our particular group.

It’s not just John and the other disciples who struggled with prejudice toward others who were not with them as they followed Jesus. We struggle with this. We like to circle the wagons around our theological camp and say, “Anyone who is in here with us, they are good. Anyone who is outside, they are suspect.” Sometimes

we do this over very important, yet still secondary points of doctrine. Sometimes we do this over things that are so trivial that with time and perspective they seem silly.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ we possess unity with every other true believer. This is not a unity we must strive to attain. We possess this unity in Christ. May we live out this unity in our practice. Forbid not your brother or sister in Christ.

We can illustrate this with a sad example from church history. Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli were two early leaders in the reformation. You and I would not agree with either of these men in every point. And yet, there is no reason to doubt that they were both our brothers in Christ. These two men thought it would be helpful if they could join forces and work together for the furtherance of the gospel. They met for a conference and found that they had agreement on all essential doctrines. However, there was one point in particular where they disagreed. They had different views on the Lord's supper. Martin Luther championed a position called consubstantiation. Zwingli held to the memorial view. Though they tried for some time, they could not find agreement on this issue. Zwingli was willing to agree to disagree. This was not a fellowship-breaking issue for him. But Luther could not tolerate any position other than his own. Luther genuinely believed that his was the biblical position and thus, if Zwingli held to another position, then he was rejecting the Word of God and by extension rejecting Christ.

Luther became adamant on this that he said, quote, “Our spirit is different from yours; it is clear that we do not possess the same spirit, for it cannot be the same spirit when in one place the words of Christ are simply believed and in another place the same faith is censured, resisted, regarded as false and attacked with all kinds of malicious and blasphemous words.”<sup>2</sup>

Luther said, to paraphrase, “We simply believe the words of Christ. Because you disagree with our position, you must be of a different spirit.” Martin Luther’s position was that Zwingli and those who were with him were not true believers. And this rift between these two Christian brothers was never repaired.

Later in his life Luther wrote, “I wish from my heart Zwingli could be saved, but I fear the contrary; for Christ has said that those who deny him shall be damned.”<sup>3</sup>

When Zwingli died in battle some years later Luther said, “Zwingli drew his sword. Therefore he has received the reward that Christ spoke of, ‘All who take the sword will perish by the sword’ [Matt. 26:52]. If God has saved him, he has done so above and beyond the rule.”<sup>4</sup>

What a tragedy that there was such division between these two Christian brothers. It did not need to be this way.

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<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from this essay: <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1643/FredrichSpirit.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>3</sup> Quote found here: <https://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.com/2009/06/luther-zwinglis-death-proved-im-right.html>

<sup>4</sup> Same as above.

We must be careful to guard our hearts lest we be guilty of the same thing. Just because someone doesn't fit into the theological camp we call our own doesn't mean that they are not our brother or sister in Christ. Our unity is not found in the secondary points of doctrine that we love so much, but in the gospel of Jesus Christ. When an attitude of prejudice begins to creep into our hearts toward a fellow Christian, may we remember the words of Jesus, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."

This morning we have looked at the pride and prejudice of the disciples. In pride they reasoned amongst themselves about which one of them would be the greatest and they acted with prejudice toward a man who was a genuine follower of Jesus.

We have seen how Jesus corrected His disciples.

We are certainly no better than the original disciples. How often are we guilty of these same sins: pride and prejudice? May we all heed the correction our Lord gave in this passage.

As we close I want us to read the words of Jesus from this text one more time.

From verse 48: "Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great."

And verse 50, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."