

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Again Foretells His Death

Luke 9:43-50

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Scripture

Luke began *The Gospel of Luke* with a brief prologue (1:1-4), in which he stated his purpose for writing. Then he described the details surrounding Jesus' birth (1:5-2:40). After describing the boy Jesus in the temple (2:41-52), Luke narrated Jesus' preparation for ministry (3:1-4:15). After Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (4:1-15), he went to the region of Galilee where he ministered for about two years (4:16-9:50). In our study of *The Gospel of Luke* we come now to the conclusion of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

Jesus' ministry in Galilee, which was primarily a ministry of preaching and miracles, had been remarkable.

During his time in Galilee Jesus called twelve men to serve as his apostles, that is, as his appointed messengers. They had witnessed Jesus' preaching and miracles. They had also been commissioned by him to go and proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (9:2). After their successful missions trip, Jesus told them about his impending death (9:21-22). A short time later, as Jesus' ministry in Galilee drew to a close and he was about to set his face to go to Jerusalem (9:51), he again told his disciples about his impending death. In the aftermath of Jesus' prediction of his death, Luke mentioned several problems the disciples had with Jesus' prediction of his death.

Let's read about Jesus again foretelling his death in Luke 9:43-50:

⁴³ But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they

might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

⁴⁶An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side ⁴⁸and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

⁴⁹John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” ⁵⁰But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.” (Luke 9:43-50)

Introduction

Steve Montforto took his three-year-old daughter Emily to a baseball game between the Philadelphia Phillies and the Washington Nationals during the 2009 pennant race. Phillies fan Steve Montforto was sitting with Emily when a foul ball curled back into the upper deck. Montforto leaned over the railing to catch his first and only foul ball – every fan’s dream. But when he handed the ball to little Emily, she immediately threw it back over the railing and down into the lower deck. Everyone gasped. Montforto himself was as surprised as anyone to see her throw the ball away. But rather than getting irritated with his little girl, he did what a loving father should do: he wrapped his daughter up in a tender embrace.

This is the way Jesus shows his patience with us and loves us. He puts gifts into our hands that we could never catch for ourselves. Without realizing what we are doing, sometimes, we throw them away. Yet rather than getting irritated with us, he is patient with us and loves us again. Then he gives us the freedom to go love someone else with the same kind of love. He even gives us the grace to go back to people who throw our

love away and love them all over again.¹

Jesus demonstrated this kind of love and patience with his first disciples. It seemed like they kept throwing away gift after gift that he had given them.

Luke showed us Jesus' love and patience even though the disciples displayed problem after problem.

Lesson

The incident of Jesus again foretelling his death in Luke 9:43-50 shows us the patience of Jesus with his disciples.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Problem of Perception (9:43b-45)
2. The Problem of Pride (9:46-48)
3. The Problem of Prejudice (9:49-50)

I. The Problem of Perception (9:43b-45)

First, note the problem of perception.

Jesus had just cast a demon out of a boy. **But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, 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" (9:43b-44).**

By saying this to his disciples, he wanted them to understand what his primary purpose was. As one commentator said, "The main message of the gospel is not that Jesus can perform exorcisms and work other wonders, although of course he can, but that he came to suffer and die for our sins."²

In his first prediction of his death, Jesus said, "The Son of

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loves* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 58.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Vol. 1: Chapters 1-12, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 487.

Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (9:22). Now, on this occasion of his second prediction, Jesus said, **“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”** This made even less sense to them than when Jesus said it the first time.

In fact, Luke noted, **“But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying”** (9:45). The disciples had a problem of perception. They still did not correctly perceive the purpose of Jesus’ mission. They did not understand that Jesus *had* to experience suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection in order to fulfill his mission of seeking and saving the lost.

One might cut the twelve disciples slack because at that point Jesus had not yet experienced death and resurrection.

However, we know better. We know that Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected after three days. We know the full meaning of his death and resurrection: that through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God forgives all our sins and gives an eternal and abundant life that will take us to be with him in heaven for all eternity.

And yet, we sometimes have a problem of perception too. We take our eyes off Jesus and his saving work. We think that Jesus is like a genie in a bottle who will do whatever we ask him to do. Oh yes, Jesus saves, but we also want him to provide us all our earthly comforts now. We will follow Jesus so long as he meets our needs. But that is a far cry from authentic Christian discipleship.

Commentator Philip Graham Ryken captures well the correction to the problem of perception. He writes:

Make no mistake: Jesus calls us to keep the cross at the center, the way the apostle Paul did when he resolved to know

nothing “except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), or when he refused to boast about anything “except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). The cross must remain at the center of our personal evangelism, of what we tell people about the Christian faith. It must remain at the center of our stewardship, of the costly decisions we make about investing our time and our money in gospel work. It must remain at the center of our family life, as we serve one another in love. The cross must also remain at the center of our commitment to see the world won for Christ, starting in our own community.³

II. The Problem of Pride (9:46-48)

Second, notice the problem of pride.

Luke said that **an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest (9:46)**.

What brought the twelve apostles to that point? Consider what led up to that point. Earlier in his ministry in Galilee, Jesus spent a night in prayer and then named twelve men to be his apostles (6:12-16). Out of the hundreds of disciples that followed Jesus at that time, he chose only twelve to be his apostles. They left everything to follow Jesus. Their ministry apprenticeship included observing Jesus’ ministry firsthand. They heard his powerful preaching and saw his amazing miracles, demonstrating his power over nature, demons, disease, and even death. Then Jesus commissioned them to go on their first missions trip of preaching, healing, and casting out demons. By the grace of God they had been given a unique gift to serve alongside Jesus. And Peter and John and James were given further special moments with Jesus when only they were with him when he raised Jairus’ daughter and saw him with Moses and Elijah (8:49-56) on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:28-36).

When the three disciples came down from the Mount of

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Vol. 1, 488.

Transfiguration with Jesus, they discovered that the other nine disciples had been unable to cast a demon out of a boy (9:40). Jesus cast the demon out of the boy, and then again foretold his impending death. Even though the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying, they started arguing about **which of them was the greatest**.

Kent Hughes states pithily, "Pride is the sin we cannot see in ourselves and yet so detest in others."⁴

Bishop J. C. Ryle says the following about pride:

Of all sins there is none against which we have such need to watch and pray, as pride. It is a pestilence that walks in darkness, and a sickness that destroys at noonday. No sin is so deeply rooted in our nature. It cleaves to us like our skin. Its roots never entirely die. They are ready, at any moment, to spring up, and exhibit a most pernicious vitality. No sin is so specious and deceitful. It can wear the garb of humility itself. It can lurk in the hearts of the ignorant, the ungifted, and the poor, as well as in the minds of the great, the learned, and the rich.⁵

Psychologist Milton Rokeach wrote a book called *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti*. He described his attempts to treat three patients at a psychiatric hospital in Ypsilanti, Michigan, who suffered from delusions of grandeur. Each believed he was unique among humankind; he had been called to save the world; he was the messiah. They displayed full-blown cases of grandiosity, in its pure form.

Rokeach found it difficult to break through, to help the patients accept the truth about their identity. So he decided to put the three into a little community to see if rubbing against people who also claimed to be the messiah might dent their delu-

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 365.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 327.

sion – a kind of messianic, 12-step recovery group.

This led to some interesting conversations. One would claim, “I’m the messiah, the Son of God. I was sent here to save the earth.”

“How do you know?” Rokeach would ask.

“God told me.”

One of the other patients would counter, “I never told you any such thing.”

It’s a crazy idea, taking a group of deluded, would-be messiahs and putting them into a community to see if they could be cured. But it has been done before.⁶ Luke said that **an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest (9:46).**

But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great” (9:47-48).

In Jesus’ day, children were loved but they were considered insignificant. In fact, Rabbi Dosa ben Archinos said: “Morning sleep, mid-day wine, chattering with children and tarrying in places where men of the common people assemble, destroy a man.”⁷ When I grew up in South Africa, the saying was, “Children should be seen but not heard.”

It is easy to spend time with people who are prominent, powerful, and prestigious. But it is another thing to spend time with a child. Nevertheless, each child is important and valuable in the eyes of God. What Jesus is saying is that when we take time for a child, it is as though we are doing it to him.

Jesus is simply teaching that greatness in God’s sight is

⁶ John Ortberg, “Leader’s Insight: Curing Grandiosity (Part Two),” *LeadershipJournal.net* (1-29-07).

⁷ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 646.

measured by humility in our service.

Commentator William Barclay notes that there are many wrong motives for service.

First, there is the desire for *prestige*. Author A. J. Cronin tells of a district nurse he knew when he was in practice as a doctor. For twenty years, single-handed, she had served a ten-mile district. "I marveled," he says, "at her patience, her fortitude and her cheerfulness. She was never too tired at night to rise for an urgent call. Her salary was most inadequate, and late one night, after a particularly strenuous day, I ventured to protest to her, 'Nurse, why don't you make them pay you more? God knows you are worth it.'

'If God knows I'm worth it,' she answered, 'that's all that matters to me.'"

She was working, not for human recognition, but for God. And when we work for God, prestige will be the last thing that enters into our mind, for we will know that even our best is not good enough for him.

Second, there is the desire for *place*. If we are given a task or a position or an office in the Church, we should regard it not as an honor but as a responsibility. There are those who serve within the church, not thinking really of those they serve, but thinking of themselves.

A certain English Prime Minister was offered congratulations on attaining to that office. "I do not want your congratulations," he said, "but I do want your prayers."

To be chosen for office is to be set apart for service, not elevated to honor.

And third, there is the desire for *prominence*. Many people will serve or give so long as their service and their generosity are known and they are thanked and praised. It is Jesus' own instruction that we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. If we give only to gain something out of the

giving for ourselves, we have undone much of its good.⁸

III. The Problem of Prejudice (9:49-50)

And third, look at the problem of prejudice.

John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us” (9:49).

Apparently, the disciples had recently seen someone casting out demons in Jesus’ name. Since Jesus himself had not commissioned him, as he had commissioned the twelve disciples, they tried to stop him from his ministry.

But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you” (9:50). Jesus does not pronounce any judgment about the man who was casting out demons in his name. He does not praise him nor condemn him. He simply tells his disciples not to stop him.

Jesus statement is important. There are so many differences and divisions in the body of Christ. It is easy to think that our way is the right way, and that everyone else is wrong.

I read a story about three preachers who were discussing the question, “If Jesus Christ came back to earth what church would he go to?”

The Roman Catholic said, “He would go to our Roman Catholic Church because of our line of Apostolic Succession.”

The Pentecostal said, “He would go to our Pentecostal Church because of our enthusiasm.”

The Presbyterian said, “Of course, he would go to our Presbyterian Church. Why would he change after all these years?”⁹

⁸ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 152–153.

⁹ Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 693.

Bishop Ryle is helpful again on this point:

We forget that no Church on earth has an absolute monopoly of all wisdom, and that people may be right in the main, without agreeing with us. We must learn to be thankful if sin is opposed, and the Gospel preached, and the devil's kingdom pulled down, though the work may not be done exactly in the way we like. We must try to believe that men may be true-hearted followers of Jesus Christ, and yet for some wise reason may be kept back from seeing all things in religion just as we do. Above all, we must praise God if souls are converted, and Christ is magnified, no matter who the preacher may be, and to what Church he may belong. Happy are those who can say with Paul, "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice," (Philippians 1:18) and with Moses, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29).¹⁰

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of Jesus again foretelling his death as set forth in Luke 9:43-50, we should thank God for Jesus' patience with us.

We have all the same problems as the twelve disciples. We also have problems with perception, pride, and prejudice. Michael Wilcock asks, "What then can Jesus do with a group of disciples still so unbelieving, slow-witted, swollen-headed, and narrow-minded, except take them with him on another year's course of teaching?"¹¹

Let us thank that Jesus demonstrates the same love and patience with us as he did with his first disciples. Amen.

¹⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1, 330.

¹¹ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 113.

Mission Statement

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Father, thank you for the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. It really was a marvelous season of ministry.

And yet his first disciples seemed to struggle so much to understand the ministry of Jesus.

We are so grateful to you for the love and patience that Jesus demonstrated toward the twelve disciples, and for the love and patience that he continues to demonstrate toward us today.

Grant us proper focus in place of an improper perception.

Grant us humility in place of pride.

And grant us large-heartedness in place of prejudice.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!