

# The Disciples Understood Not (Luke 9:37-50)

Sunday school February 12, 2017

I want to call your attention to **READ Luke 9:37-42**. Last week we studied about Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus took His inner circle of disciples-Peter, James, and John-up to a mountain to pray, and who He has been all along on the inside comes out for everyone to see. In that event, He shows in deed them what Peter had confessed in word earlier in the chapter, that He is the Christ of God. In verse 37 where we began reading today, He brings them back down the hill, where the crowd meets them. While Jesus and the inner circle have been up on the mountain beholding His glory, the other 9 are having a problem, a power failure as I called it a few weeks ago. What ensues is a sequence of scenes that are unified by misunderstandings the disciples had about Jesus. We know from earlier in the chapter that the crowd has misunderstandings about Jesus. Some thought He was a prophet. Some thought He was John the Baptist. Some thought He was an Old Testament prophet like Elijah or Moses risen from the dead. In this passage, we learn the disciples had misunderstandings too, and in fact even His closest disciples were not immune from misunderstandings. That's what we are going to study this week: the misunderstandings of the disciples.

**Transition:** So let me HAND OUT OUTLINES. First misunderstanding...

**I. Misunderstanding of God's Power** In the bit we read at the outset, we see a sharp contrast between the lack of faith from the disciples (He calls the entire generation "faithless and perverse" in verse 41) and the presence of faith from the father of the child possessed with a devil.

**Transition:** Let's take these one at a time. First...

**IA. Faithless Disciples** The failure of the disciples to cast out this devil is surprising to us because at the beginning of the chapter Jesus had given them power and authority to cast out devils. **READ Luke 9:1, emphasize ALL DEVILS** Back in our text, verse 42 tells us that this child's condition was caused by a devil. So if the disciples had power and authority to cast out all devils, why not this one? So we, reading this, find their failure very surprising considering what Jesus had told them. Looking at it from their perspective, they probably also found their failure very surprising. Judging from the size of the crowd, they had probably cast out devils and healed the sick successfully many times; otherwise the crowd would not have followed them to the mountain. So when this one didn't respond to them, that had to give them that panicking "uh oh" type feeling.

As I was preparing for this lesson, I got to thinking about what I would do if I was one of these disciples in this situation. What would I do if God had given me the power to do something, but in this case I couldn't do it? Run and hide? Hopefully not, but maybe. Give up? "Sorry, but I guess God does not want this devil cast out." I hope I would have done what they did, and that's bring the case to Jesus. We don't heal the sick and cast out devils these days, but we all still have times when God tells us to do something, and then we try to do it and things don't work out the way we think they should. When I took my first math professor job up at Liberty in 2009, I thought I was going where God wanted me to go and would be there the rest of my life. I pictured myself dying in my campus office and getting carted out in a body bag like Jerry Falwell was. 6 months later, I realized it wasn't going to work out: I couldn't minister to students in the environment I had to work in up there. What do I do then? Run away? Take a job at a government university? Give up and take early retirement? No, take it to Jesus.

When you take it to Jesus, a couple of things could happen. You might get comforted and encouraged to try again, given another chance with a slightly different situation. Alternatively, you might get a rebuke, which is what the disciples get here. In the parallel passage in Matthew, Matthew 17:19-21, the disciples ask Jesus directly why they couldn't cast the devil out. Jesus answers them directly "because of your unbelief," and He goes on to explain that "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." So Jesus reprimands the disciples for a lack of faith and a lack of fellowship with God. In our minds, we often think of comfort and encouragement as good but rebuke as bad because it is more painful in the short-run. No, rebuke is good too because it gets us thinking the right way and gets us back on track. That's what eventually happens here. Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith and fellowship with God, that is, a misunderstanding that they had God's power just because they were disciples. Eventually they get back on track.

**Transition:** In contrast to the faithless disciples, we have

**IB. Faithful Man of the Company** It's instructive how persistent this man is to get the devil cast out of his only son. Verse 40 tells us he begged the disciples to cast out the devil; they failed. Now in spite of their failure, in verse 38 he begs Jesus to do the same. That is, in spite of the disciples' failure, he still has faith that Jesus can help, and correctly so. Verse 42 says, "And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father." Jesus just spoke a word, and it was done. So we see here the faithfulness of the man in contrast to the faithlessness and misunderstanding of the disciples. You would think it would be the other way around, that Jesus' followers would have more faith than the people in the crowd, but it's not.

**Transition:** Next misunderstanding...

**II. Misunderstanding of Jesus' Suffering READ v. 43-45** Verse 43 tells us that Jesus makes this statement about His coming betrayal and suffering "while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did." Everyone was amazed at the miracles He did, including the disciples, including a disciple who would ultimately betray Him (Judas). So in spite of His encouragement to "Let these sayings sink down into your ears," they beheld and understood His glory, but they didn't understand His suffering. I had a high school math teacher who used to say, "you have to pound it into your brain." That's what Jesus says but in a nicer way here. It's not because God hid the truth from them or didn't want them to understand. Quite the contrary, in Luke 8:10, which we studied in the context of the parable of the sower a few weeks ago, Jesus says to them, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." They, His disciples, were the ones who were supposed to understand. In this case, they didn't understand because of a lack of faith and fellowship. The parallel account in Matthew, Matthew 17:23, says "they were exceedingly sorry." The saying troubled them, and they weren't sure what to make of it. They were afraid to ask Him about it, possibly because He had just called the entire generation faithless and perverse, or possibly because they couldn't understand how a person powerful enough to cast out this devil and transfigure Himself could be forced to suffer. In any case, they don't ask and therefore don't understand His suffering that was to come.

**Transition:** Next misunderstanding...

**III. Misunderstanding of Greatness READ v. 46-48** The disciples arguing over who is greatest comes up twice in Luke's gospel, once here and again in Luke 22:24-27, which we'll get to...eventually. If you read these verses correctly, you see a beautiful picture of the compassion Jesus has on His misunderstanding disciples. Being God, Jesus knows what they are thinking, and He realizes they don't understand, among other things, what it means to be great in the kingdom of God. So to help their understanding, He gives them an object lesson: a child. Some people think that the child He sets beside Him is the child from verses 37-42 that had just had the devil cast out of him. We don't know that, but it's plausible because there is no temporal or other divisions between that block of text and this one.

In this world, in spite of the overprotective and overpampering way parents sometimes treat their children, children have the lowest status in terms of greatness. Ecclesiastes 10:16 says, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!" The United States Constitution says you have to be at least 35 years old to be President. There's good reason for that: children don't have the wisdom, experience, and judgment needed to lead an entire nation. Some adults don't either. There are a lot of other things children are not legally allowed to do. They can't drive. If you are driving down I-85, you don't want a 6 year old kid to pull up beside you in the fast lane. When I was a kid, my dad used to sit me on his lap and "help" him drive the car into the garage at our house. It was a narrow opening, and one time I hit his arm and bashed the car into the side of the garage. It put a big indentation into the side of the car. Children aren't allowed to vote. They aren't allowed to bare arms. They aren't allowed to bare marry. They aren't allowed to legally represent themselves. So in this world, children fall at the bottom of the ladder in terms of greatness.

But Jesus takes a child and sets him right beside Him. In their culture, the people whom the host thought was the greatest, whom the host wanted to honor the most, would be set right beside the host. So when the disciples were reasoning who should be the greatest, they were reasoning who would sit right beside Jesus in His kingdom. So Jesus puts this child right where the disciples all wanted to be. His point is: greatness in this world does not matter. What matters is to do the will, work, and service of the Lord. Jesus says by His reckoning, which is the only reckoning that ultimately matters, whoever does that will be great. That's His attempt to correct their misunderstanding of greatness.

**Transition:** Last misunderstanding...

**IV. Misunderstanding of Discipleship READ v. 49-50** When John says in verse 49 that "he followeth not with us," he means this one they forbade was not in the circle of the 12 apostles. He doesn't follow you the way we do. Jesus had followers/disciples other than the 12 apostles because in chapter 6 He chose the 12 apostles out of His disciples, so John forbids him to do anything in Jesus' name because he wasn't one of the 12 apostles. This is one of the few cases in the Bible where John, in many ways Jesus' closest disciple, the disciple whom Jesus loved, gets rebuked. It happens again later in this chapter, but it does not happen often. So even Jesus' closest disciple has misunderstandings about Jesus.

The context of this rebuke is doing the Lord's work. Interestingly, what John forbids him to do here, casting out devils, is what the 9 apostles had failed at doing in verses 37-42. The point is: even if they don't follow Him as closely as you do, don't criticize someone who is doing the Lord's work. The problem is it is hard to find people who are doing the Lord's work. As I thought of this, I thought of the video we watched last Sunday evening about the work Frontline Ministries is doing in west Africa. They have some very different ways of doing things than we do. I've been here at Fellowship Baptist Church for almost 3 years now, and I have yet to see anyone play big drums like they do or shake the shekere like they do here. Some people would criticize them for their music, but we support them financially and prayerfully because they are doing the Lord's work. That's what discipleship is: following the Lord and doing His work.

## **Conclusion**

As a closing thought, it's easy for us to criticize the disciples for their misunderstandings, but if we don't examine ourselves regularly we too can fall into these traps or at least forget the traps are there. We can forget the need for prayer and fellowship in order to have God's power in our lives. We can forget the price He willingly paid so that we can have forgiveness of sin and eternal life with Him. We can forget that greatness in the kingdom of God is far more valuable than greatness in this world. And we can forget being His disciple means doing His work and supporting others who are doing His work. We can forget any of these things if we don't remind ourselves and practice them on a regular basis. May we examine ourselves to remind us daily of how we should follow Him.