

THE
MIRACLES
OF JESUS

in Luke's Gospel

PART 3

WRITTEN BY DR. STEVE JONES

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

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LESSON 1 | POWER OVER BOUNDARIES

JAIRUS'S DAUGHTER AND THE WOMAN WITH THE FLOW OF BLOOD | LUKE 8:40-56

No one likes being delayed. Whether stuck in traffic or delayed in an airport, we all wonder what is going on and what is taking so long. I remember one time I was headed to a conference. I was a little nervous about getting out on time because the weather looked a little cloudy. I made it to the airport only to discover that my flight had been delayed because of the weather. Once the weather cleared, we received a new departure time. I boarded the plane, which proceeded to taxi down to the end of the runway and wait its turn to take off. But then something weird happened. The plane turned and got out of line. It didn't go back to the terminal. It just sat there at the end of the runway while plane after plane took off in front of us. As we waited one hour, then two at the end of the runway, I kept wondering what was going on and why we had stopped. It wasn't the weather. Other planes were taking off. It was the plane; otherwise, we would have gone back. So Why? Why was this happening? After three hours, the pilot finally came on over the intercom and told us: there was a snowstorm over our destination. There was a chance it would clear, but it wasn't guaranteed. We had been delayed in leaving because they didn't want to take off and have nowhere to land. While I was grateful for the explanation, I was frustrated that they had waited three hours to tell us that.

Have you ever felt like God stopped on you? You thought you were growing in your relationship with God. You were learning to obey. You felt like God was leading you somewhere, and you were eager to follow. You were excited about the race that was set in front of you. Then something happens, and you feel lost, unsure, and confused. You wonder what happened. You can't figure out what went wrong or why God decided to lead you down this road. It just feels like God stopped on you. Every one of us will, at some point, find ourselves confused about the path God is asking us to walk. We will wonder if we wouldn't be better off taking things into our own hands, finding some other path to follow, or thinking ourselves foolish for trusting in the first place.

The good news in such situations is that we aren't alone. The Bible is full of stories about people whom God leads into confusing circumstances, how they wonder what God is up to, and how they sometimes choose to head in their direction or sometimes learn to trust God more.

The miracle we will look at today involves a man named Jairus coming to Jesus for help. Jesus agrees to assist. Along the way, Jesus stops to perform a second miracle and, in the process, causes a problem for the person He had already promised to help. By looking at this story, perhaps we can learn some lessons about why God stops so that we can handle it better when it happens in our own life.

THE REQUEST – LUKE 8:40-42

A man named Jairus comes to Jesus asking for help for his daughter, who is very sick and about to die. Jesus, though pressed by a crowd, agrees to go with Jairus. We learn in v42 that his daughter is 12 years old, a fact that causes an interesting comparison with the woman Jesus is about to heal.

THE INTERRUPTION – LUKE 8:43-48

On the way to the girl, another woman sneaks into the crowd. She is also sick and has been for 12 years. This woman has been ill the entire time the daughter of Jairus has been alive. Her medical condition is unclear, but its chief symptom was a continuous menstrual flow. According to Jewish purity laws, a woman was unclean during and for seven days after her menstrual period. She wasn't not allowed to enter the temple, and anyone who touched her also became ceremonially unclean. In Mark 5:26, we also learn that she had spent all the money she had to receive treatment but had actually gotten worse. She was at the end of her rope. Her condition had reduced her to pain, poverty, and isolation. The only hope she had was that Jesus could help. The social stigma attached to her illness made her unwilling to ask Jesus publicly to heal her, so she decided to sneak up on Him. She had faith enough to know that just touching the robe of Jesus would be enough. She succeeds and is instantaneously healed. But Jesus refuses to let her go quietly. He is aware he has healed her, and he singles her out. She is fearful and trembling. In certain Jewish communities, an unclean person entering such a public place could be at risk of being stoned. But she came and confessed everything and received complete restoration, not just of her physical affliction but of the spiritual trauma and social isolation it had caused. There is power in the first word Jesus spoke to her in v.34, "Daughter." He healed her body, restored her soul, and gave her peace.

THE NEWS – LUKE 8:49-50

"While he was still speaking," it says in v.49. Jesus has stopped, healed, and spoken with this woman. Perhaps the word "daughter" is still ringing in the ear when a man leans in and whispers into the ear of Jairus, "YOUR daughter has died. (v.49)" That's when you remember that this story of the woman being healed in the streets was happening on the way to Jairus's house. We forget Jairus in this story. But he is there, standing next to Jesus

the whole time. I wonder what he thought when he heard Jesus exclaim, “Who touched me?” I wonder how he panicked when he saw Jesus stop. I wonder how his heart began racing as Jesus started a conversation with the woman. I wonder if he worried that the woman had stolen his daughter’s miracle or if Jesus had stopped caring for him or was going back on his promise to help. We know it must have been anxious for him because Jesus looks him dead in the eye and says in v.50, “Do not be afraid, only believe.”

THE SECOND MIRACLE – LUKE 8:51-56

Jairus believes Jesus enough to allow him to keep coming. They get to the house, and people are already crying. He turns weeping into laughing by his statement that she is only asleep. But they aren’t amused; they are mocking Jesus. They know death. The little girl is dead. She is dead, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Then Jesus calls to her, and she rises from death back into life.

REASONS GOD STOPS:

There are numerous perspectives you can use to study this story. But the one that I find often overlooked is the aspect of Jesus stopping on Jairus and making him wait. We study Jesus healing the woman. We study Jesus healing the girl. We forget that Jairus is along for the ride the whole time. But his story is like so many of ours. Sometimes, we feel like God was leading us somewhere, and things suddenly go cold. When God stops on us, it is easy for a whole host of negative emotions to come creeping in. We can feel betrayed. We can feel like we don’t matter or aren’t important. We can wonder if we’ve been forgotten or done something wrong. But that is not the case. God doesn’t get distracted or play favorites. He isn’t some cosmic Santa Claus granting or withdrawing favor based on whether you’ve been naughty or nice. If we look closely at this story, we will notice a few clues to what God is up to when He stops in His tracks and leaves us waiting.

1. God Stops...To Expand Our Vision – Suffering and hard times tend to make us all a little selfish. When bad things happen, most of us turn inward. We become self-focused. We try to survive. Sometimes this is a sound survival strategy. Other times we need to realize we aren’t the only ones going through stuff. Jesus isn’t trying to marginalize this man or his sick daughter. He isn’t trying to invalidate their experience of suffering by showing them someone who has it worse. He is simply trying to expand their vision. A woman in the crowd had been suffering for as long as this man’s daughter had been alive. Jesus stops to draw attention to her situation. Not to show him someone who had it worse but to awaken people to other people going through hard times.

2. God Stops...To Expose Our Fears – It is interesting that after the news of the daughter’s death is reported to them, Jesus looks at Jairus and says in v.50, “Don’t be afraid, only believe.” When it comes to our fears, we sometimes treat God like He is a cosmic drill sergeant intent on discovering our fears so that He can “train” them out of us. Consequently,

most of us spend a lot of time both trying to hide our fears and trying to deal with them on our own. Two verses to keep in mind: Psalm 103:13, which says, “For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust,” and 1 John 4:18, which says, “Perfect love casts out fear.” God isn’t shocked or startled by the things we are afraid of. He isn’t expecting us to be more than we are. He knows our weaknesses and limitations. He is waiting for us to realize it and come to Him for help. That is one reason why God stops, to expose our fears, to give them time to bubble to the surface, not so that He can shame us, or train us, or bully us, but so that His perfect love can cast them out.

3. God Stops...To Explode Our Boundaries – We frequently put God in a box. We think we know what He can and can’t do. These people thought that too. They figured Jesus could help while the girl was sick. But when the girl died, they sent word that they didn’t need to bother Jesus anymore. She was beyond help. Additionally, Jesus made the people laugh when He told them that the girl wasn’t dead but only asleep. They knew she was dead. And they knew that there was nothing anyone could do. Sometimes God stops so that he can destroy our preconceived notions about where, when, and how God will act.

CONCLUSION

All of us will eventually find ourselves in situations like Jairus. We will be confused or frustrated, wondering what God is up to and why He has stopped on us. We will be worried He has let us down or that we have done something to lose his favor. In those moments, it is essential to remember the lessons that Jairus learned. Look for ways God is trying to expand your vision. Be willing to confess your fears to God and see His perfect love cast it out. Consider whether you have put God in a box and see if God is trying to show you that He is bigger and stronger than the box you have put Him in.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever felt like God “stopped” on you, like He was leading you somewhere, then everything stops suddenly? How did you respond?
2. Have you ever watched God help or bless other people and wondered whether He was going to help you too?
3. How do hard times make us short-sighted? Have you ever been in a situation where God expanded your vision and showed you someone else that needed help?
4. Where do our fears come from? Why do we hide them? How does perfect love cast out fear?
5. What boundaries do we sometimes erect for God? What kind of box do we sometimes put God in? How can we keep from doing this?

LESSON 2 | POWER AND PROVISION

JESUS FEEDS 5,000 | LUKE 9:1-17

Former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher once famously said, “Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren’t.” The same is true of being an adult. The only people saying, “I am an adult; stop treating me like a kid,” are kids. Every parent, at some point, ends up having to help their child realize that even as they grow up, there are still dependent on others, even if simply in gratitude for what they have been given.

I had a friend one time who learned this lesson powerfully. When he turned eighteen, he told his father that he was a man now and felt he deserved a better car than the one he had been driving since he got his driver’s license a few years earlier. The father said OK and asked him what kind of car he had in mind. The son told him what car he had his sights set on, so they headed down to the dealer to look. The son found the model and color he had been looking for. He test-drove it and loved it. He and his father sat down with the car dealer to discuss the price. They negotiated a fair price. Then the dealer asked, “How will you be paying for this?” That is when the father asked, “yes, son, how will you be paying for this?” At that moment, the son realized that he was still dependent on the father and had failed to recognize the source of what he had.

The same is true of us and God. No matter how successful we become, we will never rise above our dependency on God or our need to be both humble and grateful. An old pastor’s sermon illustration makes the point. A group of scientists arranged a meeting with God. They informed him that they no longer needed Him because they had discovered all his secrets and were now able to do everything that He did. They even told God that they were able to make man themselves. God, slightly amused, asked them to show Him their fantastic ability. One scientist stepped forward, bent down, and grabbed a handful of dust. At this point, God interjected, “Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, you get your own dirt.”

Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” This also seems to be one of the points Jesus is trying to teach the disciples through one of his most famous miracles: “The feeding of the 5,000.” The miracle shows not just THAT Jesus provides but HOW Jesus provides. It’s a reminder that no matter how successful we become, the source of our strength will always be our connection to God.

JESUS GIVES POWER – LUKE 9:1-11

Sometimes when we tell this story, we jump right to the miracle. There were a lot of people following Jesus. They were in a desolate place. Jesus provided them with food miraculously. That is definitely a key message of this miracle. Like God miraculously provided food for the people of Israel while they wandered in the wilderness, now Jesus does the same thing again. In fact, John's gospel shows that the people heard the message clearly and drew a conclusion that Jesus didn't intend. John 6:14-15 says, "14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.' 15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) highlight an additional facet to this miracle. Jesus is doing more than just feeding the 5,000. He is showing the disciples what it means to lead in the Kingdom.

The story starts back at the beginning of the chapter. Jesus gives the disciples a mission. He gives them the power to carry out that mission. He then sends them out. Luke 9:1-2 says, "1 He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. 2 And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing."

After listing some of the instructions Jesus gave the disciples as well as some speculation on Herod's part as to who Jesus is, the passage concludes with the disciples returning to Jesus bringing a report of their success. Luke 9:10-11 says, "10 When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. 11 But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing."

Not only do the disciples bring back a good report. They also bring a crowd. Their mission was an incredible success. People were healed. People accepted their teaching. People were following them back to see Jesus themselves.

JESUS GIVES PERSPECTIVE – LUKE 9:12-13

There is no indication from the report they gave to Jesus that they returned from their mission over-confident or arrogant. But we do know that the disciples struggled from time to time with trying to figure out who was most important among them. Jesus has to continually remind them importance in the kingdom doesn't look like success in the world. That is what Jesus does here. On the heels of this report about their mission, Jesus performs this miracle. One of them is to teach the disciples an important lesson. He is

trying to show them that they will continue to do similar great things with similar power if they stay connected to the source of their power.

As the day draws to an end, The disciples say to Jesus, “¹² Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place.” Instead of agreeing, in verse 13 Jesus responds a command, ““You give them something to eat!” The disciples reveal their inadequacy in the face of overwhelming need, ““We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people.” In John’s version of the miracle, Philip responds to Jesus, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” A denarius was a days wage. 200 denarii was equivalent to more than 9 months salary. The disciples tell Jesus that they don’t have enough.

Jesus is offering them some perspective. They have just come back from a wildly successful mission trip. They did what Jesus had been doing. They had taught with authority. They had healed with power. But lest they forget that it was His power and authority, he puts them in a situation where they acknowledged they were at the end of their ability and no longer had what it takes.

JESUS GIVES PROVISION – LUKE 9:14-17

After getting them to acknowledge their need, Jesus then gives them another command. In verse 14 Jesus says, ““Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each.” The disciples obey. Jesus then performs the miracle. Verse 16 says, “Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people.” There have been countless attempts to explain away this miracle. Some people have suggested that one child’s generosity prompted others to be equally generous with their own meager provisions. Others say that everyone just ate a little or declined to eat at all. Still others claim that wealthy ladies in the group provided the food. Finally, some think Jesus hypnotized the crowd into thinking they were filled. All of these explanations go against what the text says. You can refuse to believe it. But you can’t deny that the gospels are claiming that Jesus used 5 loaves and two fish to miraculously provide food to 5,000 people.

How did it happen? Luke doesn’t say. Jesus blesses the bread, breaks it, and hands it to the disciples to distribute. As he breaks it, the food continues to multiply. Two things are important to notice. First, Jesus enables the disciples to fulfill his command. Jesus told the disciples to give the crowd food. They couldn’t on their own. But as they were obedient to Jesus, Jesus gave them what they needed to fulfill his commands. It was the disciples that gave the crowd something to eat. They didn’t go through a buffet line. The disciples had to hand it out. Second, Jesus provided more than enough. Verse 17 says “they all ate

and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.” There was more left over than they started with.

APPLICATION

As we look at the miracle, there are a couple of points that are worth applying to our lives.

- **Jesus Provides Miraculously** – In hopeless situations, Jesus is not bound by the “available resources.” Scripture is full of situations where people who cry out to God as they look at an apparently hopeless situation, only to see God do something that seemed impossible. In fact, that is one of the most important lessons of scripture. When you don’t know how its going to work out, trust that God does. Despair is thinking we have all the answers and see all the possibilities. Hope believes that God sees more than us and is able to do more than we can conceive. Philippians 4:19 says, “my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”
- **Jesus Provides Abundantly** – When God gives, He gives enough. He doesn’t give enough to remove our need for him. He always gives daily bread. But he gives enough for each day. The people in this crowd had enough to eat for the day. They would be hungry tomorrow. The good news is that God’s provision today is reason to trust that he will provide tomorrow as well. As Ephesians 3:20 says, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.”
- **Jesus Provides Relationally** – God gives in the context of relationships. He calls us into relationship with him. He calls us to be the conduit of his blessing to others as well. The disciples are only able to fulfill Jesus’s command when they obey him and rely on him to be the source of their power. The same is true for us. We will know God’s power when we stay plugged into the source. We will continue to be able to do great things for God as long as we stay plugged in to God. That is the picture that Jesus is trying to paint for the disciples. They will be the conduits of God’s miraculous, abundant provision as long as they are connected to Him. As Jesus told his disciples in John 15:5, “ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the broader context of this miracle? Why has the crowd gathered?
2. What role do the disciples play in this miracle?
3. How does this miracle show that Jesus gives miraculously?
4. How does this miracle show that Jesus gives abundantly?
5. How does this miracle show that Jesus gives relationally?

LESSON 3 | POWER AND GLORY

JESUS TRANSFIGURED | LUKE 9:18-36

Have you ever been right about something but also somehow wrong at the same time? This happened to me one time, or more accurately, about me. One day, one of my daughters was looking at the pictures that fill the walls of our house. She saw one of a person in hospital scrubs holding two newborn babies. She asked my wife, “who are those babies?” My wife responded, “That is you and your sister on the day you were born.” The daughter then asks, “who is that in the middle?” My wife patiently responds, “That’s your daddy?” The daughter responds in awe and bewilderment, “Daddy is a doctor?” And my wife, not missing a beat, says, “No...I mean, Yes...but not the kind that helps people.”

You see, I do have a doctorate, just not a medical doctorate. And while I might still characterize the work I do in the church as “helping people,” I understand what she was trying to do. She was helping to clarify a potential misunderstanding in my daughter’s mind. My daughter was right and wrong. She needed more information to clarify her understanding. Even if it took my wife sticking a metaphorical dagger in my heart to do it.

Something similar was going on in Jesus’s day. The term “messiah” was a loaded term. People had heaped upon the term a lot of additional meanings and expectations that weren’t found in Old Testament prophecy. That is one of the reasons why Jesus keeps telling people to keep his identity a secret. He doesn’t want people to get the wrong idea.

Well, one of the purposes of the miracles is to open our eyes and show us who Jesus really is. Each miracle gives a different window into his true identity. The miracle stories in Luke are primarily collected in chapters 5-9; they are building up to Jesus asking the disciples a question. The answer they give is both right and wrong. So, Jesus has to correct and clarify their understanding. The picture Jesus gives of his identity and mission is so foreign to what many Jews were expecting from the Messiah that on the heels of this confession, a miracle of Jesus happens that confirms his message.

As we look at this miracle and the situation that necessitated it, may we also have our eyes open to who Jesus really is and what He came to do. May we not be guilty of trying to fit Jesus into our box and be startled that his mission is different than the one we think He should accomplish.

CONFESSION – LUKE 9:18-20

The story starts back on the heels of Jesus feeding the 5,000. From Matthew's version of the story, we learn that Jesus has taken the disciples to the far northern part of Galilee, a place called Caesarea Philippi. The town was situated at the foot of Mt. Hermon, which rises 9,200 feet above sea level. The snow on its summit makes its way down to the Sea of Galilee, which is 700 feet below sea level then eventually to the Dead Sea, which is 1,200 feet below sea level.

Here, Jesus turns to his disciples and asks, "Who do the people say that I am?" In verse 19, the disciples summarize the various answers: "They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." Jesus then, in verse 20, asks them point blank, "But who do you say that I am?" To which Peter responds, "The Christ of God."

It is important to remember that Christ isn't the last name of Jesus. It is a title. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. Both mean "anointed one." Peter is doing more than saying Jesus is unique or important. He is claiming that Jesus is the Jews' long-awaited Messiah.

CLARIFICATION – LUKE 9:21-22

Peter is right. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus initially responds by blessing Peter. In Matthew 16:17, Jesus says, to keep quiet. But Jesus tells him and the other disciples "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Luke 9:21 says, "He warned them and instructed *them* not to tell this to anyone." The reason is that the term Messiah had become loaded with expectations. Jesus had come to be the Messiah, the one promised by the Old Testament, but it wasn't going to look like what people were expecting.

This time instead of just telling the disciples to keep quiet, he gives some more details. In verse 22, Jesus tells them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

Instead of being welcomed into Jerusalem, He is going to be rejected. Instead of being victorious over his enemies, He will be killed. This isn't the kind of Messiah even the disciples were expecting. In fact, in Matthew's Gospel, after Jesus says this, Peter takes Jesus aside and gives him a talking to. Matthew 16:22 says, "²² Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

COST – LUKE 9:23-27

Peter is so right and so wrong. He knows who Jesus is and yet also misses the point. He actually has the nerve to rebuke Jesus and tell him to tone down the suffering side of things. Jesus responds with his own rebuke. Matthew 16:23 says, “He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

Instead of the double rebukes, Luke includes a teaching of Jesus on the cost of following Him. In verse 23, Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” The way that Jesus is showing his follower is one of self-denial, choosing to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. He goes on to say in verses 24-25 that this is the only way to find true life: “²⁴ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his ²⁵ life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?”

The final picture that Jesus paints, though, is not one of suffering but of glory. In verses 26-27, Jesus says, “²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” The road Jesus is about to walk, the one He is inviting his followers to join Him on, ends in victory.

CONFIRMATION – LUKE 9:28-31

A little over a week later, something amazing happened. Verse 28 says, “Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.” Nothing unusual here. The disciples had done this before. Then all of a sudden, the miracle happens. Verses 29-31 say, “²⁹ And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

This miracle is called “The Transfiguration.” His face and clothing became white and gleaming. Two people, Moses and Elijah, showed up and started talking with Jesus. What is going on, and what is the purpose of this miracle?

This miracle confirms the message of Jesus and the true nature of his mission. We see Jesus revealed for who He really is. His true radiance, which had been hidden or toned down, now shines forth. We see Jesus as He really is.

But what of the presence of Moses and Elijah? This is to confirm the message of Jesus. The disciples thought that Jesus's understanding of the mission of the Messiah was something new. Later, on the Emmaus Road, Jesus will walk the disciples through the Old Testament scriptures again. Here, Moses and Elijah, representatives of the Law and the Prophets respectively, show up and talk about what is about to occur. In Luke 24:25-27, the risen Jesus says, "²⁵ And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

An interesting note, the Greek word that gets translated as "departure" is literally the word "exodus." Moses is here speaking to Jesus about the new "exodus" that Jesus is about to lead his people on.

CLOUD – LUKE 9:32-36

The disciples were sleepy. They wake up and see what has happened. Even after everything that they have seen, Peter still doesn't fully understand. Peter notices that the two men are leaving, so Peter says to Jesus in verse 33, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." — not realizing what he was saying. I love Luke's commentary on Peter's words. Peter has stuck his foot in his mouth. Some people think that the words of Peter are just careless. He doesn't know what to say, so he says whatever comes to mind. But Peter's words reveal that he still doesn't fully understand what Jesus is calling them to. He is saying that he prefers this glory to the rejection, suffering, and death that Jesus had previously described.

Peter is thick-skulled. The words of Jesus aren't enough. Now the miracle of Jesus's transfiguration is not enough. He overhears Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah about the new exodus, and Peter still misses the point. So finally, God the Father intervenes directly. Verse 35 says, "Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"

God has to tell Peter, "Stop being so difficult. That is my son. I chose him for this mission. He knows what he is doing. Listen to the words that are coming out of his mouth."

Evidently, this was enough for Peter, and he learned his lesson. Verse 26 says, " And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent." Peter finally learned to keep his mouth shut and listen...at least for a moment.

CONCLUSION

How are we like Peter? We have a mission we'd prefer Jesus to be working on. So, we skip over his commands about not loving the world, not seeking worldly approval, or having trouble in the world. We try, like Peter, to make Jesus conform to our own expectations of who He is and what He is supposed to be doing. How are we, like Peter, right about Jesus but also wrong at the same time? Will we do it, or will we persist like Peter in trying to get our way? The miracle of the transfiguration invites us to surrender our opinions, our expectations, and our desires and to take up our cross and find our true life by losing it for Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What would you say if Jesus asked, "Who do people say that I am?"
2. What would you say if Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?"
3. How is Peter both right and mistaken about who Jesus is?
4. What part of Jesus's message does Peter not approve of? Why?
5. What parts of Jesus and his teaching do we sometimes either neglect, avoid, or misunderstand?

LESSON 4 | POWER AND FAITH

JESUS HEALS WHEN DISCIPLES CAN'T

LUKE 9:37-43

On the day after Christmas in 1960, The Green Bay Packers lost the NFL Championship game. The Packers had victory in their sights. As time was running out in the fourth quarter, they were driving the ball down the field, but they were stopped on the goal line as time expired. The following summer, as the teams began to gather for pre-season training, future Hall of Fame coach Vince Lombardi gathered the team that had squandered a fourth-quarter lead to lose the championship. Many players were probably wondering what new lessons their coach could teach them to help them finish the season strong and take their playing to a new level. They were all probably surprised when Vince Lombardi walked in and said five words that no one was expecting: “Gentlemen, this is a football.”

Coach Lombardi realized that what his players needed was not a new trick but a return to the basics. He focused that summer on reinforming the fundamentals. The results are well known. His Green Bay Packers won 5 of the next 7 NFL Championship games, as well as the first two Super Bowls.

Athletes aren't the only ones that forget the fundamentals. The same is true with followers of Jesus. As we mature, we think we have outgrown the need for certain lessons we learned early in our walk with Jesus. We think that dependence on God is like training wheels, good for learning to ride a bike, but once you have mastered the art, they are no longer necessary. The truth is that dependence on God is something that Christians never outgrow. We see this on display in the miracle we will look at today.

Luke 9 is the culmination of the miracles section of Luke's Gospel. It is also the conclusion of Jesus's Great Galilean Ministry. He has taught with authority, and his miracles have revealed his real identity to his followers. The Transfiguration has shown his glory and the true nature of the mission he has been sent on. He is leading a new “exodus” involving him being rejected and killed before rising again. It has been difficult for the disciples to get their minds around, so the Transfiguration served as confirmation that this was indeed God's plan. Luke 9:51 says, “When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem.” From here until he arrives in Jerusalem in Luke 19, Jesus is journeying towards fulfilling his mission.

But before he sets out, he performs one final miracle. But this miracle isn't a spectacular or eye-opening one. It doesn't reveal anything new about Jesus. Instead, it reveals something about the disciples...they have forgotten the basics. Perhaps as we look at this miracle, we will see how we do the same.

THE DISCIPLES LACK OF POWER – LUKE 9:37-40

This story happens on the heels of the Transfiguration. Verse 37 says, "On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him." One member of the crowd calls out, especially for Jesus's attention. Verses 38-39 say, "³⁸ And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy, ³⁹ and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth; and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leaves."

The situation the man described caused some commentators to say this boy has epilepsy, not a demon. The problem with that interpretation is that epilepsy was well-known in the ancient world. However, none of the Gospel writers, not even Luke, who frequently highlights medical conditions, use the common Greek word for "epilepsy." All of them describe what Jesus does here as an exorcism. This may be a case, though, where spiritual oppression takes the form of exploiting a physical ailment and making it worse.

The issue that brings the man to Jesus is actually something else. In verse 40, he says, "I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." The man comes to Jesus because the disciples couldn't do it.

THE DISCIPLES LACK OF PRAYER – LUKE 9:41

Before Jesus heals the boy, He rebukes: "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." Though it sounds like Jesus is rebuking the crowd or even the man, he is actually rebuking the disciples. They are the ones who are being unbelieving. Why? Because at the beginning of this chapter, Jesus gave them the power to cast out demons. Luke 9:1 says, "He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases." The disciples had even come back and told Jesus all that they had been able to do. What changed that they were unable to do it here?

Mark's account gives us a clue. In Mark 9:29, Jesus tells the disciples the reason they couldn't cast out the demon was because "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." It seems like a pretty basic thing. Evidently, in this instance, the disciples hadn't been praying. What were they doing then instead? They were trying to exercise power independently without being connected to the father. They were trying to do it on their own.

Why would they do this? Well, remember that Jesus is coming back from the mount of Transfiguration. He didn't take all the disciples with Him, only Peter, James, and John. It was the nine disciples that were left behind that were unable to cast out this demon. If we look a little further in Luke 9:46-48, Jesus talks about how greatness is determined in the kingdom. Perhaps the nine who got left behind took it personally that they weren't included on the special journey. They were evidently trying to use the power of God apart from reliance upon God. And they failed miserably.

THE DISCIPLES LACK OF PERSPECTIVE – LUKE 9:42-45

Following the rebuke, Jesus gets to work. The miracle is done quickly. Verse 42 says, "While he was still approaching, the demon slammed him to the ground and threw him into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father." Jesus did quickly and effortlessly what the disciples had been powerless to do. Why? Because he was connected to the father.

The story has an interesting ending. The people see what Jesus does and marvel. Verses 43-44 say, "⁴³And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁴ "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."

What is the connection between this statement and what has just happened? Perhaps here we have another window into how the disciples failed. They were hoping to impress the crowd with their power. Perhaps they also thought that the way people were marveling at the miracles of Jesus indicated that the betrayal and death Jesus had predicted wouldn't happen. While people marvel at what God has done through Jesus and the disciples, Jesus reminds them that the plan hasn't changed.

In the same way that the disciples forgot the source of their power, so too the people will forget. The same sort of people who are amazed at Jesus will one day betray him to death. Though this might sound like a low note on which to end Jesus's Great Galilean Ministry, Jesus is trying to get the disciples to lay down their own expectations and plans. Everything is happening exactly the way Jesus expected. He is preparing the disciples for what he knows is coming.

APPLICATION

This is the last miracle story before Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem to suffer and die. It contains a "back to basics" reminder about the importance of faith. If we want to avoid being a part of the "unbelieving and perverted generation" that Jesus talks about, we had better learn these lessons.

1. Faith requires constant connection – The disciples had the power of God because they had a connection with God. Whether out of laziness, jealousy, or inattention, they forgot to pray and lost that connection. We need to remember this. Dependence on God isn't something we outgrow. When we struggle, one reason might be that we have stopped relying on God's power and are trying to do it on our own. We must remember what Paul says in Colossians 1:29, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Paul says that he works hard, but he relies on the energy that comes from God at work within him.

2. Faith requires Constant Use – Another mistake we make about faith is thinking it's an on/off switch. One day we don't have it, we flip the switch, and it stays on until we turn it off again. The truth is that faith is more like a muscle. It grows with use and shrinks with neglect. This is made clear by the father's statement in Mark's version of this miracle. In Mark 9:23, Jesus says to the father, "All things are possible to him who believes." The boy's father responds in verse 24, "I do believe; help my unbelief." We all are in the same situation as that boy's dad. We have belief. We also have unbelief. Our belief is strengthened the more we exercise it.

3. Faith requires Constant Surrender – Throughout the gospels, the disciples hear Jesus's plans and either disbelieve him or keep trying to dissuade him. After every miracle, when the disciples see the awe and wonder that comes upon people, they evidently held out hope that Jesus would change his mind about what lay ahead of them in Jerusalem. The words of Jesus after the miracle remind us that faith involves constantly surrendering our plans to God. God isn't trying to ruin our lives. But God is trying to ruin the plans that we have made for ourselves and for Him. He has a larger plan that is coming true, that we are invited to participate in, that is for his glory and our good. But the only way we can see it is if we constantly surrender our desires, expectations, hopes, and fears to him. That is what faith means.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon from the boy?
2. What is the connection between this story and the Transfiguration?
3. What does it mean that faith requires constant contact?
4. What does it mean that faith requires constant use?
5. What does it mean that faith requires constant surrender?

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR —

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