



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 9:37-48

To understand more about the transfiguration of Jesus.

A Paradigm Shift

I recall a story from a fitness coach named Martin Rooney who had stopped into a powerlifting gym while traveling to get in some extra reps. He walked over to where the squat racks were located and noticed a barbell on the ground loaded with over 600 lbs. of plates. “Wow,” he thought. “I want to talk to whoever is lifting this much weight.” He began to look around the room for a giant of a man, but no one was around. A moment later, a little guy came into the area and Rooney asked him, “Hey, who was deadlifting this,” to which he responded, “I am.” Rooney laughed, thinking it was a joke, but then realized the guy was quite serious. He walked back over, hinged into perfect deadlift form and pulled the bar clean off the ground. Rooney had just met Rich Sadiv, often referred to as *The Human Crane*. Sadiv, at roughly 190 lbs., could pull 675 lbs. off the ground. In a room full of giants, he looks to be the least likely to possess such strength, and yet in professional powerlifting competitions, he has often been the greatest.

One of the most fascinating and simultaneously confusing messages of Jesus is: “For he who is least among you all is the one who is great” (Lk. 9:48). This strikes against our very (fallen) human nature; that by being the least among your peers, you will actually be great in the kingdom of God, and yet, Jesus repeats this sentiment many times over throughout the course of His human ministry. To be great in God’s Kingdom means to be unimportant, rejected, and outcast; all things truly *not great* by the world’s standards.

An Exorcism

Verse 37 begins “the next day” after the Transfiguration, “when they had come down from the mountain.”

Upon their arrival, “a great crowd met Him,” and immediately a man from the crowd cried out to Jesus to help his “only child” (Lk. 9:37-38). Below are a few details from this interaction.

COME, LOOK!

One of the immediately interesting details about this man’s cry for help is that he does not plead with Jesus to heal his son, but to simply “look” at his son (Lk. 9:38). There are many reasons for why he might have used this terminology, but the consensus is that this man thinks that if Jesus sees the horrible condition of his son, He will be moved with compassion enough to heal him. In other words, sometimes seeing the condition of another individual conveys that which words cannot.

ASSAULT

The obvious question is, “What was there for Jesus to see?” The answer is, quite a lot. The boy was not simply possessed with an unclean spirit, but was being physically assaulted by its presence: “It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him” (Lk. 9:39). This unclean spirit’s activity in the life of this boy was physically damaging, and also likely brought a great deal of public shame on the family as well.

UNBELIEVING

The man then reveals something else: Jesus’ disciples could *not* cast this unclean spirit away. The man says to Jesus, “And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not” (Lk. 9:40). It’s at this point Jesus chides their “faithless and twisted generation” (Lk. 9:41) for not believing. It’s unclear whether Jesus is speaking about only His disciples or the whole group. Either way, Jesus is calling into question His contemporary generation that is living in disbelief like so many past generations have (Deut. 32:5, Num. 14:11; Is. 65:2). This is an important distinction to pay attention to. Jesus does not rebuke any of them for the inability to cast the demon out, but for their lack of belief. Edwards puts it this way: “Inability and inadequacy are limitations, not faults. In contrast, disbelief (12:46) and perverse belief (Acts 13:8, 10; 20:30) are willful choices for which people are culpable.”¹

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: GOD IS LIMITLESS

It is crucial to understand that not this passage, nor any other passage in the Bible, teaches that God is somehow limited to act or perform miracles by a person’s lack of faith. This is a teaching often found in more charismatic camps, and it is not only wrong but *harmful*. To assert this is to attack the very attributes of God Himself, who by orthodox and biblical definition is limitless. To say, then, that God cannot heal or cast away demons or perform miracles unless someone has the faith for Him to do it is heretical and should be outright rejected and repented of. If God were limited by our faith, none would be saved (Eph. 2:1-8). And notice, even in this story, the boy would not be able to be healed since Jesus has just called to attention their lack of believe. And yet, it takes Jesus no time to dispatch the demon and return him to his father, and “all were astonished at the majesty of God” (Lk. 9:43).

THE COMING CROSS

While the people were still “marveling at everything He was doing” (Lk. 9:43), 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” (Lk. 9:44). Jesus is referring to His eventual death, burial, and resurrection, but “they did not understanding this saying,”

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 287.

and “they were afraid to ask Him about this saying” (Lk. 9:45). They had not been given the ability to understand His words just yet. This lack of ability to understand without being given the ability has been mentioned once before already in Luke 8:10: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’” Jesus had apparently not yet given them the ability to know and understand what was coming for the Son of Man.

The Greatest

In typical fashion, the disciples soon after these events broke into an argument regarding “which of them was the greatest” (Lk. 9:46). It’s easy to miss the weight of Jesus’ response to them, but crucial for us to understand something about the nature of Jesus: “But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts,” answered them (Lk. 9:47). Jesus didn’t merely engage in the debate, but He answered them based on His intimate knowledge of the very essence of who they were. Jesus, more than merely a teacher, is God in the flesh and demonstrates that by doing that which only God can do (Ps. 44:21; Jer. 17:10; Acts 15:8).

It is in this context that Jesus “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’” (Lk. 9:47b-48). Jesus is not inferring that disciples should be more like the child, but that they should be more like Him and receive even the least, most unimportant of society, such as children, widows, the demonized, and the lepers. The least in society will be great in the kingdom, because the economy of the kingdom turns the world’s standards upside down.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the absolute limitless power of Christ even in the face of disbelief. Jesus is fully man and also fully God, and thus He has no problem doing the perfect will of the Father regardless of human participation. Another important takeaway is the way in which the kingdom of God turns the world’s economy upside down and presents the most outcast and downtrodden as the great ones of the kingdom. To do the ministry of Jesus is to recognize this reality and receive the least among us. For in doing so, we have received Jesus Himself, as well as the Father (Lk. 9:48).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 9:37-38. When did this passage take place? Where had they just returned from? Who approached Jesus, and what did he ask of Him?

2. Read Luke 9:39-40. What was wrong with the man’s boy? What was happening to him? Who else did the man ask for help?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 9:41. How did Jesus respond? Who was He speaking of? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Luke 9:42-43. What did the demon do the boy? What did Jesus do to the demon? How did the people watching respond?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 9:44-45. What did Jesus say to His disciples? Did they understand? Why or why not?

2. Read Luke 9:46. What were the disciples arguing about?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 9:47. What did Jesus know about His disciples? Who did He bring along His side?

2. Read Luke 9:48. In your own words, summarize Jesus' words here to His disciples.

Week 36 Discussion: The Least

Jesus teaches us that the least among us will be great in the kingdom of God, and that we should receive them because as we do this, we receive Jesus (Lk. 9:48). Talk as a group about practical ways in which we can better reach and minister the downtrodden and outcast of our society with the Gospel.

1. Icebreaker: Who do you think is "the least among us" in today's world? Why?
2. How important is it for the church, as advocates for life, to advocate for orphans as well?
3. Have you ever ministered at a homeless shelter? What was that experience like? Share with the group.
4. Why do you think the American church overwhelmingly avoids this emphasis of Jesus' ministry?
5. Compile a list together as a group of people who fit this category and spend time praying for them.
6. How can the church more intentionally become a safe place for even the least of society?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus casts out a demon from a young boy and chides the crowd for being faithless.
2. Jesus teaches His disciples the importance of ministering to the least among them.