

Sermon: The Greatness of God

Text: Luke 9:37-45

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Introduction: Can you imagine how Peter, James and John must have felt after an evening on the mountain with Jesus? They certainly must have felt privileged, maybe even proud, to have been there. They had seen Moses and Elijah. They had seen the glory of God and had heard his voice.

There is danger in spectacle! There is a part of me that loves to visit places like Southeast Christian Church with its greeters and ushers that made you feel honored just to be there. The huge atrium that has 30x60 foot banners hanging to promote this month's emphasis. You can go in on the ground floor or take escalators to one of five levels into their 9100-seat sanctuary, full of professional lighting, camera and sound equipment. The baptistry looks more like a lap pool. Southeast has a coffee-shop 2 or 3 times bigger than your local Starbucks. They have a cafeteria, bookstore, gymnasium, racquetball courts and 400-seat chapel for those intimate weddings. It is wonderful to hear the worship team backed up by a 200-voice choir and orchestra that has just the right blend of contemporary and traditional music. What a spiritual high! And then you have to go back home.

But now for the inner-circle disciples, it was time to get a reality check. They were coming down the mountain (v. 37) much like Moses of old. The 16th century Italian painter, Raphael, tried to portray the difference between the beauty of the Transfiguration and man's struggle below. It is also a picture of the incarnation as Christ comes down to bring remedy for man's sin.

Luke 9:37 (NIV) ³⁷The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him.

As Jesus comes down from the mountain and turns his face toward Jerusalem and the cross, it is necessary to reinforce and restate God's plans for his Messiah.

He wants his disciples to recognize:

I. Human Need (vv. 38-41ab) - other than their own

Luke 9:38-41ab (NIV) ³⁸A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." ^{41ab}"O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?"

A. A father has only one son (v. 38).

I have heard well-meaning people say to those who have lost a child: “well, at least you have other children.” That is not helpful! It minimizes the loss and does not value the impact of that life-changing and devastating event.

Yet, when there is but one child, there is an increased seriousness with disease and possible death. An only child often grows up with an increased sense of love and worth. The first child, the first grandson, is almost always spoiled. Especially in this time, a first-born son was indeed *special* even if other children would follow.

B. The son may die (v. 39).

The other gospel accounts give us added information about the son’s condition. Matthew (17:15) says the boy suffers from seizures. Mark’s longer account (9:14-29) says the boy “foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid (9:18). The demon causes the boy to go into convulsions (9:20). The boy is also unable to hear or speak because of this evil spirit (9:25).

This is interpreted by some as a case of epilepsy, but make no mistake whatever the medical condition is, it is complicated by demon-possession. This demon, like all demons, tries to destroy life. He throws the boy into the fire and into water in an attempt to kill him (Mark 9:22).

This boy’s problem had been around since his childhood Mark tells us (9:21). One can only imagine all the avenues the father had travelled to get his son help.

This is a picture of the costliness of God’s sacrifice for us that he would send Jesus, his only son, to die on our behalf. Just the opposite of what is happening here!

C. Jesus’ nine disciples were powerless (v. 40).

Three disciples went up the mountain, and nine stayed below. The nine disciples were not able to drive out this evil spirit. They had been successful earlier.

Luke 9:1-2, 6 (NIV) ¹When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ⁶So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

Were the disciples powerless because of the large crowd that each gospel writer mentions? Mark tells us about the Jewish teachers of the law who apparently were following Jesus and his group. They must have delighted in the disciple’s failure.

Because of the disciple's inability to help, the father seeks out Jesus.

But why weren't the disciples able to repeat what they had done before? Jesus says:

D. Enough faith is required (v. 41ab).

The disciples may have become overconfident about their own abilities and success. It seems they had forgotten the source of their new-found power.

Addressing everyone, and certainly his disciples, Jesus says: [Luke 9:41a \(NIV\)](#)
^{41a}“O unbelieving and perverse generation,”

Matthew talks of mountains and mustard seeds in his account. It is not that the disciples have “no” faith, but what they have is small. It takes spiritual discipline to fight against evil. Listen to what Mark records here after the healing:

[Mark 9:28-29 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁸After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn't we drive it out?” ²⁹He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.” (some mss. “and fasting.”)

Jesus says here: [Luke 9:41b \(NIV\)](#) ^{41b} “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?”

Jesus recognizes that his time left on earth will need to be spent in more teaching and strengthening of his disciples. Maybe Jesus would rather be talking about the cause of the problem, rather than just fixing the problem.

Illus. How many of you before you understood much about computers, asked for help, and what you got was such a fast demonstration of the key strokes necessary that you almost gave up right then? Maybe Jesus was going too fast for them.

Luke's gospel treats the disciples with respect. Care needs to be taken here as we turn our cameras on the disappointing disciples that our perspective allows for us in the shot. Do we relate more with Jesus, ready to offer divine correction? Or can we sit with the disciples hearing the rebuke, but ever-willing to try and follow better.

Seeing the hopeless situation, Jesus takes:

II. Divine Initiative (vv. 41c-43a)

[Luke 9:41c-43a \(NIV\)](#) ^{41c} “Bring your son here.” ⁴²Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. ^{43a}And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

A. Jesus commands obedience (vv. 41c-42a).

When the Creator of the cosmos commands his creation, it is best we believe and obey. Following Jesus, of course, does not free us from problems or danger. Even here, as the boy is coming, he is being attacked by this evil spirit.

A trip out onto the lake at Jesus' command may be both dangerous and worship at the same time. It has not been that long ago we heard Jesus ask the same question: **Luke 8:25 (NIV)** ²⁵“Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

With a word Jesus can make right what has been distorted by sin.

B. Jesus rebukes evil (v. 42b).

A word from God will someday punish and separate us from all evil. This miracle is continuing proof of Jesus' power and authority over Satan. Even though he is on his way to Jerusalem to be handed over to these powers, it is of his own free-will.

“Just as the disciples learn that they must trust God's plan for Jesus, so we can learn to trust his path for us. Sometimes the path of rejection turns the corner in a surprising way, in the same way as the cross turned into resurrection.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 279

C. Jesus healed the boy (v. 42b).

The healing was instantaneous and lasting. When Jesus makes you whole, you become free to follow and do the will of God.

The word Matthew uses that is translated “healed” (θεραπευω) carries the idea of “caring for” and “restoring” (*BAGD*, p. 359). This is God putting his creation right. Mark says the boy, in fact, appeared dead, like a corpse. **Mark 9:27 (NIV)** ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

D. Jesus restores relationships (v. 42b).

Can you imagine the joy in the father's heart? Can you imagine the boy's experience of seeing and hearing again? Jesus “gave him the boy back to his father.” Anyone delivered from evil is given back to his heavenly father.

E. Jesus reveals his greatness (v. 43a).

“Whenever evil is defeated, we can admire the greatness of God.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 278

Whenever God heals and restores, we need to praise the greatness of God and sing with the contemporary song by Chris Tomlin: “How Great Is Our God.”

It is God who is great, not us. We need to follow his plan, his path, his will - even when there is trouble, and even when it makes no sense to us.

III. Divine Revelation (vv. 43b.-45)

Luke 9:43b-45 (NIV) ^{43b} While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.” ⁴⁵But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

After the healing, the crowd is left to ponder and marvel at Jesus’ greatness. Their admiration, though, is short-lived because the Son of Man is to be betrayed shortly by a witness of this very event - Judas.

But right now:

A. Jesus opens hearts (v. 43b).

This was a teachable moment where Jesus decided to give them words they would remember and understand later. They could not put Messiah and suffering together. Nor could they put Kingdom and service of others together.

Some words are forever attached to important events, so Jesus took advantage of that opportunity here!

Illus. My grandfather Bennett asked me a question at 7 or 8 years old: “do you want it over or under?” At the time I did not fully understand what he was saying. It became clear as he pulled down my trousers and paddled me for some juvenile offense. Fifty+ years later I still remember which end of the living room I was in.

All the words Jesus spoke from the cross coupled with the events of the day would later change the heart of a Roman centurion to say.

Matthew 27:54 (NIV) ⁵⁴.... “Surely he was the Son of God!”

B. Jesus plants seeds of faith (vv. 44-45).

At Jesus' baptism, God commends his Son to us. Again on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, God commands us to listen to him. Now Jesus demands that everyone listen carefully. Even though the words of Jesus are not initially understood, he wants the disciples to store them away in their memories.

Luke 9:44a (KJV) ^{44a}Let these sayings sink down into your ears:

We need to be careful again that we not miss the application to us. Jesus may be telling us things we do not understand that will become clear later.

Just like the disciples of the 1st century we are not unaffected by popular thought even about Jesus. I hear stuff all the time about how God will do this or that, and often it has no foundation in Scripture. "We may be like fish in water that don't know they are wet."

Listen to God's words and pray that He will bring clarity to your life as you try and follow Him. Our generation is walking away from God following different paths thinking all will lead to heaven.

Illus. Spanish teachers in Midland, Michigan are teaching my five-year-old grandson about the "Day of the Dead" while at the same time never allowing the name Jesus to be voiced in the classroom.

Conclusion: More than anything, Jesus wanted his followers to see the greatness of God at work in Him. Someday these disciples will experience God's presence in a new way. Greatness, love, service and sacrifice will all be redefined at the cross. Today, it is in his followers, God wants to see a reflection of that same glory Jesus displayed. Just like the disciples of 2000 years ago, we are also a work in progress.

II Corinthians 3:18 (NIV) ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

"Saving faith" is always tied to hearing. Faith is small when we don't listen to God's word. We need to recognize "The Greatness of God" and use the power of faith he has given us as a gift. "To fail to draw on such resources is spiritual neglect, like trying to use a bicycle to go across the country when a jet plane is available." - Bock, *Luke*, p. 279

Our problems may be great, but God/Jesus is greater! Trust in our great God; He will never disappoint! He's the greatest!