

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 31: "JESUS AND THE FAITHLESS" **LUKE 9:37-45**

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 31 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're studying the Gospel account of Luke from chapters 4-9, which record Jesus' public ministry in the area of Galilee.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Jesus and the Faithless."

Sermon Introduction

Have you ever been in a situation where it was difficult to believe someone?

As you think about that question for yourself, let me tell you a time when it was *really* hard for my wife Tina to believe me.

After our first son was born, Tina and I were greatly helped by her mom and sister who came to Indonesia for two weeks to help us with the transition of being new parents. And the day after they left, Tina and I were sitting in front of each other reading our Bible at our dining table, and then I saw that she started tearing up. So I thought to myself, "She must be convicted by something in God's Word, so I don't want to interrupt what God might be doing in her right now." And then, she got up and went into our bedroom and closed the door, so I thought to myself, "Wow, God must really be working in her right now that she wants to be alone with God right now."

And then, to my total surprise, a few minutes later, Tina opened the door and told me how she was upset with me. She said something like, "Did you not see me crying? Why didn't you say anything? You are either totally unaware or you really don't care." And I told her, "There's a third option here: I was aware and I did what I did *because* I care." And then I began to tell her how I interpreted the whole situation.

And as Tina listened to me, she told me later that every part of her being felt like I was lying. What I was telling her was *completely* out of her paradigm. And she thought to herself, "Nobody really thinks like that. He's lying." And in that moment, it was incredibly difficult for her to believe me—but thankfully, by God's grace, she did.

I'm sure all of us have had experiences like this. There are times when every part of being thinks and feels as if another person is trying to hurt us by their words and actions, but ironically, they were trying to care for us and be helpful. And in those moments, even when it hurts, in our better moments, we choose to believe what we know to be true about that person even when everything in else is telling us the contrary.

But we don't just experience this with one another, but if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, I am positive that you have experienced this in your relationship with him. There are times when everything in your being tells you that Jesus isn't trustworthy, that he doesn't care, that he's abandoned you, that he won't provide, that he's not in control, that he's trying to hurt you. We *know* those things are *not* true about Jesus, yet that's the struggle we feel.

In our worse moments, we end up believing our feelings and circumstances rather than Jesus. But in our better moments, we come to our senses and remember who Jesus is and what he has done for us—and we choose to believe in him even when it's difficult to believe.

That's what we'll look more into today.

The One Thing

Believe in Jesus even when it's difficult to believe.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 9:37-45.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Last week, we saw how Jesus took three of his apostles—Peter, James, and John—up a mountain to pray, and that's where they saw Jesus transfigured where he was now radiating the blinding light of God's glory and where he was talking with the glorified Moses and Elijah about the salvation he would soon accomplish in Jerusalem. And the climax of that passage was God the Father speaking to Peter, John, and James about Jesus, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 9:37-45.

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹ And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰ And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹ Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." ⁴² While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

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.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in three parts.

- I. The desperate father (vv. 37-40)
- II. The deficient disciples (vv. 41-43a)
- III. The difficult truth (vv. 43b-45)

And throughout these three parts, we'll continue to come back to this theme of belief and unbelief, or faith and faithlessness.

I. The desperate father (vv. 37-40)

Verses 37-40 again says this:

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only

child. ³⁹ And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰ And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.”

So Peter, James, and John had just had this literal mountaintop experience with Jesus where they saw him in all of his transfigured glory. But now, “on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain,” they enter back into the brokenness of our world.

Look at verses 38-39. This is a picture of immense suffering in a broken world.

A desperate father emerges from the great crowd and he begins to *beg* Jesus to look at his son who is possessed and tormented by a demon.

This account is also found in Matthew and Mark, so when we pull the accounts together, we get a graphic and terrible picture of how tormented this man’s son is.

The demon seizes the son, and he suddenly cries out—or screams (Mark 9:18; Luke 9:39). The spirit throws him to the ground in convulsions and he foams at the mouth (Mark 9:18; Luke 9:39, 42).¹ He grinds his teeth and becomes rigid—or stiff as a board (Mark 9:18). The demon often casts him into fire or into water (Matt. 17:15), so he probably has terrible burns and scars. Even more, the spirit has made him deaf and mute (Mark 9:25), so he cannot hear or speak with anyone. And the demon “will hardly leave him” (Luke 9:39), meaning that he is almost *constantly* in this state. And on top of all that, this is the father’s “only child” (Luke 9:39).

And so, as the father observes all this happening to his son, he says that the spirit “shatters him,” which literally means that “it is crushing him together”²—or he’s being crushed or broken into pieces.

But all this is not just affecting the *son*, the *father* is also being shattered, crushed, or broken as he’s witnessing all this happen to his beloved son. Think how heart-wrenching all this must have been for the father

<pause>

So we see a sharp contrast in verse 37 between the experience of Peter, James, and John on the mount of transfiguration and the experience of life *below* the mountain.

On the mountaintop, they clearly saw Jesus in all his glory. There was no struggle with the forces of darkness and demons amidst Jesus’ blinding light of heavenly glory. They clearly recognized that they were in the presence of God and that Jesus is the Son of God. This was a brief glimpse of that eternal day when faith will give way to sight. And we all long for that day.

But the reality is that we do not yet live in that world to come. We live in the world *below* the mount of transfiguration, where we are still plagued by a world broken by sin.

But what’s comforting is the fact that Jesus *also* came down from the mountain. He did not leave with the glorified Moses and Elijah, but he stayed with his babbling and fearful disciples, and he came down from the mountain with them to enter back into the realities of this broken world.

No matter what brokenness or difficulties you’re going through right now, if you’re a follower of Christ, know that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you, but he is with you to the end of the age. Though he is the Lord God who created all things and is wrapped in glorious light, he willingly entered into the

¹ Matthew 17:15 identifies the son’s condition as epilepsy, which was well-known in the ancient world (R. T. France, *Luke*, TTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013], 171). Grant R. Osborne (*Luke Verse by Verse*, ONTC [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018]) writes: “This demon uses a prior medical condition, epilepsy, to torment the child.... The unclean spirit takes the elements of epilepsy, multiplies them, and enjoys the process of torture and death as it consumes the child.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 19) takes this one step further in regard to depression: “The devil [is] the adversary of our souls. He can use our temperaments and our physical condition. He so deals with us that we allow our temperament to control and govern us, instead of keeping temperament where it should be kept. There is no end to the ways the devil produces spiritual depression. We must always bear him in mind.”

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed. PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

darkness of our broken world to push back the effects of sin and demons and to ultimately conquer them in his own death and resurrection. He is Immanuel—God with us.

Jesus chose not to set up a tent and live on the mount of transfiguration, but he chose to come down the mountain to live with us where we live—in the brokenness of our world—so that we may have him as our living hope in all the everyday trials that we face.

<pause>

Going back, in the midst of this heart-wrenching situation, we also see evidence of this desperate father's *faith*.

In Mark's account, we know that the father intended to bring his son to *Jesus* (Mark 9:17). Evidently, he believed that Jesus could heal his son.

But since Jesus was away with Peter, James, and John on the mountain, he settled for bringing his son to Jesus' *disciples* (Matt. 17:16; Mark 9:18; Luke 9:40).

And verse 40 says that the father "begged" Jesus' disciples to cast out the demon. I don't know what your picture of begging is, but I think of a man on his knees, grasping the feet of Jesus' disciples with his head to the floor, pleading with loud cries and tears running down his cheeks. And for this man to do this publicly before the crowds shows how much embarrassment he was willing to endure for the sake of even a glimmer of hope that his son might be healed.

Think to yourself: Would you embarrass yourself in public like this if you didn't *believe* it would help at all? Would you drop to the floor and cause a scene of begging for help from someone if you didn't *believe* that person could really help?

But the rest of verse 40 leaves the father disappointed to say the least. He begged and begged, and Jesus' disciples tried and tried, but in the end, they could not cast out the demon.

We're not entirely sure how this entire scene played out. Perhaps some of the apostles, one at a time, stepped up to try to cast out the demon. And when one failed to do so, the next apostle stepped up and tried to do so—only to fail again. And with each successive failure, you can almost feel the father's hope and faith beginning to deflate as discouragement and disappointment begin to sink in.

We all know what it's like to get our hopes up for something or someone... only to be disappointed. And what makes it even harder to bear is when we're disappointed by Jesus' disciples.

<pause>

If you're not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, I wonder how much of that has to do with what you've seen and experienced from those who identify themselves as Jesus' disciples. You thought they would be more loving, honest, generous, hardworking, and faithful, but you've unfortunately had experience with Christians who come off as selfish, deceptive, stingy, who do the bare minimum required of them, and who don't do what they say. And if that's what it looks like to be a Christian, then you want no part in Christ.

If that's you, I'm so sorry that's been your experience with Christians. Even here, the apostles—those who lived life closely with Jesus—didn't live up to the standard of Christ, and it was disappointing to this desperate father.

But as we'll see later in how Jesus responds to his disciples, that's *not* how a Christian *should* live. Christians are sinners just as much as anyone, and none of us is saved from our sin by our good works; rather, we are saved by trusting in the perfect work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. But as we follow Jesus, we *will* become progressively more and more like Christ as we live a life of continual repentance and faith in him.

And I pray that, as you get to know members of our church, though we will disappoint you at times, that you would see our *progress* in becoming more and more like Christ—and that you would be drawn more towards Christ.

<pause>

If you're already a believer in Jesus Christ, then you probably also know what it's like to be disappointed by other disciples of Jesus, especially in the church. Perhaps you've tried to get to know others in the church, but you didn't feel like it was reciprocated. Perhaps you thought more members would reach out to you. Perhaps a brother said something that hurt you. Perhaps a sister didn't do something that you expected them to do. And if that's what living life with other disciples of Christ is like, then you want no part in Christ's church.

If that's you, again, I'm so sorry that's been your experience with fellow Christians in the church. The sad reality is that we will all disappoint one another at times as we imperfectly try to follow Jesus. I know that *I* have disappointed people in our church. And I know that, if you're a member of our church, *you* have disappointed fellow members in our church.

But I pray that none of us would not give up on Christ and how he has promised to work in his church—that he is sanctify her with his Word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27).

And I understand that that's not easy to believe, especially when we feel hurt by fellow disciples of Christ. I've shared before that I know what it's like to be hurt by people in the church. People have lied to me, cursed at me, slandered me, thought the worst of me even when I was doing my best to love and care for them.

But at the same time, I also see glimpses of Christ continuing to make good on his promise to sanctify his church.

- I thank God for people confessing their sins to one another and allowing others to be part of their process of repentance.
- I thank God for people seeking counsel from one another about how to obey God in difficult circumstances.
- I thank God for people tangibly expressing care and appreciation to one another.
- And I thank God for people pursuing and praying for one another, when we're going through difficult times.

I've experienced incredible *pain* in our church at the hands of Christ's disciples, but I've also experienced incredible *encouragement* in our church at the hands of Christ's disciples.

And even for us as believers in Jesus Christ, I pray that, as we continue to get to know members of our church and persevere in relationships with one another, though we will disappoint each other at times, that we would see our overall *progress* in becoming more and more like Christ—and that we would be drawn more towards Christ together.

<pause>

Going back to the desperate father: despite the terrible state of his son and experiencing great disappointment from Jesus' disciples, he still evidences *persevering faith* in Jesus.

At times, it hurts to trust. And when something hurts, you don't want to put yourself through it again. He had begged Jesus' disciples to do something for his son, but they all failed. But rather than walking away disappointed and bitter, he continues to believe that *Jesus* can do something. So when he sees Jesus come down the mountain, what does he do?

Verse 38 shows him doing the exact same thing in front of *Jesus* that just left him embarrassed and disappointed when he did it in front of Jesus' *disciples*. In the midst of the great crowd, he's back on his face *begging* Jesus to "look at" his son—to do something to help him.

But from Mark's parallel account, we know that the father's faith was not without fault; he said to Jesus, "if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus responds, "If I can! All things are possible for one who believes." And immediately, the father cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:22-24).

The father didn't have *flawless* faith, but he had *persistent* faith. His faith was defective. It was belief mixed with unbelief, it was faith mixed with faithlessness, but it was still faith nonetheless. It was a faith that would not give in to doubts and disappointments. It was a faith that begged Jesus not only to heal his son but to help his faith.

<pause>

The reality is that none of us have flawless faith. We all have a mixture of belief and unbelief.

If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ yet, perhaps your unbelief extends to the *person* of Christ—is he really God and did he really die and resurrect for the forgiveness of sins for all who repent and believe in him? But at the same time, you're here today listening to God's Word, so perhaps there's a seed of faith in you that believes something about God—at least enough for you to be sitting where you are right now.

If you're already a believer in Jesus Christ, perhaps we don't struggle to believe that Jesus is God and that he died and resurrected for the forgiveness of our sins, but our unbelief extends to the *promises* of God—are they really true even when I don't *feel* that they are true?

- Perhaps you struggle to believe that God works all things for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28), especially when you're enduring suffering.
- Perhaps you struggle to believe that Jesus is gentle and lowly, and that he alone gives rest to your soul (Matt. 11:28-29), especially when you feel overwhelmed with work.
- Perhaps you struggle to believe that Jesus' grace is sufficient for you and his power is made perfect in your weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10), especially when your weaknesses are made known to others.

No matter who we are, none of us have flawless faith. So just like the desperate father, may we learn to cry out to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

As believers in Jesus Christ, don't believe your momentary experiences or fickle feelings; don't be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13). Rather, hold fast the confession of our hope in Jesus Christ without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Heb. 10:23).

You don't need *flawless* faith, but just *persistent* faith. You don't need to run; crawling will do. Just don't stop taking your eyes off Jesus and don't stop moving towards him. In our darkest valleys, may we not wander in our own aimless directions, only to die in that valley, but may we stick close to our good shepherd who will protect us and who has promised to bring us through to the other side (Ps. 23).

<pause>

So first, the desperate father; and second...

II. The deficient disciples (vv. 41-43a)

Verse 41 says this:

⁴¹ Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."

At first glance, what Jesus says here is a bit startling, but the key is understanding *who* Jesus is referring to here.

Is Jesus referring to the desperate father when he says, “O faithless and twisted generation”? No, the father has done exactly what he ought to have done—in his disappointments and doubts, he came to Jesus and he persistently trusted in Jesus. In many ways, the desperate father is held out as a model of faith.

Perhaps Jesus is referring to the unbelieving in the crowd or even more broadly the unbelieving in that generation. But more likely, Jesus is referring to *his disciples* who could not cast out the demon from the boy. In fact, the nearest focus in the previous verse is in reference to Jesus’ *disciples* who could not cast out the demon.³

But why would Jesus rebuke his disciples like this? This only makes sense as we go back to the beginning of this chapter.

Luke 9:1-2 = And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

Jesus gave his twelve apostles his power and authority over “*all* demons.” And earlier in this chapter, they were exercising that power and authority throughout the region of Galilee.

But now, for some reason, when this father comes and begs Jesus’ disciples to cast out the demon from his son, they cannot do it. Why is that?

Jesus says it’s because they are a “faithless and twisted generation.” This phrase doesn’t *literally* mean that his disciples were “faithless” in the sense that they had *no* faith. We know that’s *not* the case because in Matthew’s account, he says that they weren’t able to cast out the demon because of their “little faith” (Matt. 17:20).

They had *some* faith, but it was a *deficient* faith. Another time that Jesus describes one of his disciples as having “little faith” is when Peter stepped out of the boat to walk on water with Jesus, but when he saw the winds, he was afraid and his faith began to shrink away, and he began to sink (Matt. 14:29-31).

So in calling his disciples a “faithless and twisted generation,” he is *not* saying that they were completely devoid of faith.

Rather, this phrase “faithless and twisted generation” is in reference to the wilderness generation after the exodus, where God had delivered his people from slavery out of Egypt in over-the-top miraculous ways. God sent ten plagues, he split the Red Sea, he rained manna from heaven and he burst forth water from a rock, and he was visibly with them in the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The wilderness generation had ongoing, firsthand experience of these great miracles of God. And yet, somehow, somehow, they continued to rebel against God by not believing in his Word, and so they are referred to as a “faithless and twisted generation” (cf. Deut. 32:5, 20).

So in essence, by Jesus calling his own disciples a “faithless and twisted generation,” he is saying that even though they have personally witnessed—how he had cast out demons; healed the sick, leprosy, paralyzed, and deformed; forgave sins; calmed a storm; and even raised the dead—and even though they have personally participated in his miraculous work—how they had also cast out demons, healed the sick, and participated in the feeding of the five thousand—they still have little faith in his word.

On the surface, it may seem like there’s no difference between the faith of the desperate father and the faith of the apostles—they both had some level of faith. But a huge difference between them is the sheer amount of firsthand experience that the apostles had with Jesus that the desperate father did not have. The father was *not* traveling around with Jesus throughout his ministry in Galilee. The father was *not* in the boat when Jesus calmed the violent storm. The father was *not* with Jesus when he raised the dead. But the apostles *were*. The apostles had every reason in the world to believe Jesus at his word, and yet they still had such little faith. That was the difference between the two. As Jesus will later make clear to his disciples: “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” (Luke 12:48).

³ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse by Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

And in this particular instance, even though Jesus had told them that he had given them his power and authority over *all* demons, they were not trusting in his word.

In Mark's parallel account, we're told that some of the religious scribes were present in the crowd arguing with the disciples. So like Peter who began to fear and sink when he saw the wind, perhaps the disciples began to fear and shrink back in faith when they experienced the religious leaders arguing with them.

Or perhaps after a previously successful ministry tour where the apostles were casting out demons, they began to think that they had power and authority in and of themselves to do it. Again, Mark's parallel account tells us of their lack of prayer (Mark 9:28-29), so perhaps they mistakenly thought that they could cast out the demon themselves without depending on God in prayer.

We're not exactly sure what the disciples were thinking, but all we know is what Jesus tells us. They were acting like the wilderness generation that experienced great miracles of God and yet constantly *disbelieved* God's Word. They were acting with "little faith." They were acting like Jesus never gave them his authority over "all demons."

And listen again to what Jesus says to his disciples.

[⁴¹ Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."]

He says, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?"

You can begin to feel the exasperation of Jesus' rebuke in the word "O." He is not saying this in an emotionless way, but he's obviously bothered by his disciples' lack of faith.

And when he says, "how long am I to be with you?" it's a hint that Jesus' time is almost up. His sights are set on Jerusalem to accomplish redemption for sinners in his death and resurrection (Luke 9:30-31), but *afterwards*, he knows that his mission of proclaiming the gospel, gathering believers into local churches, and teaching them all that he commanded (Matt. 28:18-20) would be continued by his *apostles*.

But they're nowhere ready. They're acting like the "faithless and twisted generation" in the wilderness.

And when he says, "how long am I to...bear with you?" this is probably startling for many of us because we cannot imagine Jesus ever saying these words to his *disciples*—by implication, to *us*.

Our picture of Jesus is a person who never gets frustrated or angry, who never rebukes or says a harsh word. We can imagine him that way towards the religious *hypocrites*, but surely he would never respond that way to his own *disciples*.

Let me be clear. Jesus never *sinfully* gets frustrated or angry; he never *sinfully* rebukes or says a harsh word. But he *does* get frustrated and angry, and he *does* rebuke and say harsh words to his people. And if we read the OT, especially the Prophets, we won't be surprised because that's how we'll see God talking to his people at times.

In fact, it's *because* God *loves* his people that he speaks to them this way. Because God loves his people, he hates anything that causes them harm and anything that leads them away from their highest good found in him alone.

So you see God warning, rebuking, and disciplining his people as means of leading them to repentance of sin and faith in him once again.

We must remember that God is "*slow to anger*" (Exod. 34:6), but he *does* get angry. If you're a Christian, God forgives and accepts you in Christ, but that doesn't mean that he is always pleased with you.

- He is not pleased when you get puffed up with pride.
- He is not pleased when you act like you're self-sufficient without him.
- He is not pleased when you live with bitterness and unforgiveness towards others.

- He is not pleased when you lie, gossip, and slander—unwilling to resolve your conflicts with your brother or sister face to face.

Don't ever think that Jesus is ok with you when you choose to live in sin and to disobey or disbelieve his Word. He's not ok with that. He is not pleased by that.

And *because* he loves you, and *because* sin and unbelief are killing you, he will at times have a rebuke or harsh word for you.

When I think about my own followership of Christ and my own discipling relationships, there were key moments when a brother or a sister in Christ rebuked me or said some words that I felt like were harsh, but those were huge and necessary wake-up calls for me.

And if you're a Christian, I'm sure you can recall those times in your life as well, when God sent a brother or a sister to say to you something that you were perhaps offended by, but it was *exactly* what you needed to hear to grow in your followership of Christ. And though it was hard to hear in the moment, as you look back, you're thankful that they had the courage to love you like that.

Now let me just add a couple notes.

If you think that you love people *too* much to speak the truth to them, then that's not love—at least not if you believe that God is love, because that's not how God loves. If that's you, then you love *yourself* more than you love that other person; you love your *comfort* more than being willing to enter into an awkward moment to help your brother or sister see what they need to see to mature in their followership of Christ.

If you think you love people *so* much because you speak the truth *without* any filter, then that's not love either—that's selfishly venting what's on your chest and leaving that person in shambles with no help to pick up the pieces. Truth used as a weapon is not redemptive at all. Truth not spoken in love ceases to be truth because it's twisted and bent by other emotions or agendas that are less than what is good for that person.⁴

<pause>

Going back, as we look at Jesus' rebuke of his disciples, on some level, this should be greatly comforting to us.

When we read the book of Acts, perhaps we're tempted to see the apostles as these super Christians, but in many ways, they were just like you and me. Despite all that they've seen and experienced and even participated in, they're still struggling to believe Jesus at his word. Yet the apostles were entrusted with proclaiming the gospel and being Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

If you feel like you're nowhere ready to participate in Jesus' Great Commission, you're in good company. Look at the twelve apostles in this passage and then look at the apostles in the book of Acts.

They look like two totally different groups of people—one group rebuked for their lack of faith and one group renowned for their lives of faith. What in the world happened to them?

In essence, Jesus didn't leave them. This wasn't some hit-and-run kind of rebuke, but Jesus was committed to them. Although Jesus rebukes them here, he does not abandon them, but he leans in and invests even more in them, which we'll continue to see later in this passage and throughout the rest of the Gospel account. And as Jesus stayed with them and as they stayed with Jesus, they became more and more like him.

But for now, Jesus patiently bears with his disciples' great forgetfulness and little faith, and he asks the desperate father to bring his son to him.

⁴ Paul Tripp, "Session 3: What Dreams Are Made Of" (Lecture, *The Marriage of Your Dreams* conference, 2020).

Verse 42 to the beginning of verse 43 then says this:

⁴² While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astonished at the majesty of God....

As the boy was being brought to Jesus, the demon tried to do some final harm to the boy in similar ways as before. It was the demon's last-ditch effort to stop the boy from being brought to Jesus, but it was unsuccessful.

In an anticlimactic way, Luke just says that Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, he healed the boy, and he gave him back to his father. It all happens so fast. Jesus simply says the word and the demon is gone, the boy is healed, and the father is rejoicing with his restored son in his arms.

Verse 43 then tells us the *effect* of Jesus restoring the boy: "And all were astonished at the majesty of God."

The word "majesty" also means "greatness" or "the quality of being unsurpassed."⁵

Even in what seemed like such a disappointing and hopeless situation of this demon-possessed boy that *none* of Jesus' disciples could do anything about, after Jesus so *effortlessly* restored the boy, everyone saw and were astonished at the majesty (or the greatness) of God.

They saw that Jesus is *greater* than his disciples, he's greater than the demon, he's greater than the whole hopeless situation at hand. No person, no demon, no situation, no problem can surpass what Jesus can do, but he surpasses them all.

Of course, the problem is that our troubles oftentimes *seem* greater than Jesus. In the moment, when you're sinking and beginning to feel waves hurl at you, all our focus goes to the water we're drinking in. And in those moments, it's very *difficult* to see that Jesus *walks* on that water and he *stills* those waves; it's very *difficult* to believe that Jesus is greater than our problems.

In essence, this is what this whole passage is about: Believe in Jesus even when it's difficult to believe.

But all the more, that's why we need to constantly *rehearse* and be *reminded* that Jesus is the Most High God, infinitely greater than anything in all his creation and matchless in every way.

Some ways that we can constantly remind ourselves is to:

- listen to songs that *exalt* the greatness of God,
- pray prayers that *praise* the greatness of God,
- spend time with people who will *point* you to the greatness of God, and
- share with others about how you *experienced* the greatness of God in whatever you're going through.

Also, one of the most important ways we can remind ourselves of the greatness of God is simply to regularly *gather* together for Sunday Celebration and Prayer Gatherings, where, from start to finish, God's Word leads us to *see* and *respond* to the greatness of God in Jesus Christ.

If God is small in our lives, then our faith in him will be easily swallowed up by other things—fear of man, desire for pleasure, our own self-sufficiency. But if God is big—if God is great—in our lives, then even when difficulties come, our faith in him will not be engulfed by our feelings or our circumstances. Rather, our faith will be fortified in the fire; our faith will be developed through the difficulties.

⁵ James R. Edwards (*The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015]) writes: "The word for 'greatness' (Gk. megaleiotēs) means the quality of being unsurpassed. 2 Pet 1:16 uses megaleiotēs of the 'majesty' that the three elite disciples witnessed atop the Mount of Transfiguration; Luke's use of the word here suggests that, in the exorcism and healing of the boy, the same majesty is displayed for all to see at the foot of the mountain."

So even as we recognize our deficiencies in our faith right now, may we not get discouraged, but let's do all we can to fix our eyes on the majesty (or the greatness) of God in Jesus Christ to help us to believe in him even when it's difficult to believe.

<pause>

So the desperate father, the deficient disciples, and third...

III. The difficult truth (vv. 43b-45)

The rest of verse 43 to verse 45 says this:

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.

As the crowd is marveling at the majesty of God, Jesus has some important private words for his disciples.

Jesus tells them, "Let these words sink into your ears," where the "you" is emphatic, so it reads more literally, "*You* put these words into your ears!"⁶ This phrase was essentially a Hebrew way of saying, "Memorize this!"⁷

Evidently, Jesus really wants them to listen very carefully to what he's about to say to the point of committing it to memory. And he says, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." This is the second time that Jesus has foretold his death. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus told his disciples, "The Son of 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" (Luke 9:22).

Jesus provides a bit more information this second time around though.

First, he says that he will be "*delivered* into the hands of men," meaning that *God* will deliver him to be killed, even though sinful people will carry out his execution. Jesus wants his disciples to know that when they see him later crucified, that it was all according to God's sovereign plan for the redemption of sinners.

Second, he says that he will be "*delivered* into the hands of *men*," meaning that even though it will be the Jewish elders, chief priests, and scribes who conspire to kill him and the Roman government who officially executes him, the guilty parties are not just the Jewish leaders or the Roman government, but all of sinful humanity.⁸ In other words, because *all* have sinned and deserve God's righteous wrath for our sins, we're *all* responsible for the death of Christ.

On the surface, this seems like a big downer in light of such a joyful experience of this boy being restored and returned to his father. Why would Jesus not only mention this but *emphasize* this to his disciples when everyone else is marveling at him?

This becomes especially puzzling when verse 45 says that "it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it," meaning that *God* concealed the full meaning of what Jesus was telling them so that they would not yet fully understand.

So why would Jesus tell his disciples something with such great emphasis and simultaneously conceal the full meaning of it to them?

⁶ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, PCNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 159.

⁷ David L. Jeffrey, *Luke*, BTCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 143.

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

Let me first say that God is good and this is not some sort of trick that he's playing on his disciples. The fact that God reveals and conceals is not because he's playing games with us, but because he knows our hearts and when we're ready to fully understand something.

If you're a Christian, my guess is that, for many, you didn't become a Christian the very first time you heard the gospel. Even though you understood the words that were spoken in the gospel, you didn't quite get it.

If you grew up in the church, perhaps you heard the gospel hundreds of times—you might've even memorized it and could recite it as it was preached week-in and week-out—but my guess is that, for many, it wasn't til *later* that you truly understood the gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ.

And when you look back on your life and at what point God lifted the veil for you to fully understand and trust in Jesus, my guess is that, for many, you could say that it was God's perfect time and what he allowed you to go through *beforehand* has profoundly shaped you as a person and how God is using you for his good purposes even *now*.

We also see examples in *Scripture* where God tells his people with great emphasis what he is going to do, and yet he simultaneously conceals the full meaning of it until the perfect time comes.

For example, Scripture talks about the last days and the end times before Christ's second coming, the resurrection of all the dead, and the final judgment where people will either enter endless punishment in hell or endless joy in the new heavens and new earth. The OT prophets talk about it, Jesus talks about it, Paul talks about it, Peter talks about it, and John talks about it in the book of Revelation. But at the same time, the full meaning of the end times is still concealed from us because we're not there yet.

But just like everything in the OT was fully revealed in Jesus' *first* coming, everything about the last days and final judgment and the new heavens and new earth will be fully revealed in Jesus' *second* coming, and we'll be saying to ourselves and one another: "Of course! God has been telling this to us for millennia!" That's when the veil will fully lift and all will be fully revealed.

<pause>

Now, let's go back to the passage. For the disciples, the thought of God delivering Jesus to be killed at the hands of sinful men was completely outside of their paradigm for the Christ. No, in their minds, the Christ would be a conquering king who would liberate his people's oppressors, not a suffering servant who would be rejected by his own people and hang naked to die on a cross. Even as Jesus was telling them, they get at face value what his words mean, but they have no conception of what Jesus is *really* talking about. They can't imagine it. And they wouldn't understand the full meaning until after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Matthew's parallel account says that the disciples were "greatly distressed" (Matt.17:23), which means that they grasped *something* of what Jesus was saying and it stressed them out. And so, they were afraid to ask him more about it. If even *partial* understanding was so hard for them to believe, *full* understanding would have been too much for them to handle at this time.

But this is the *second* time that Jesus is foretelling his death to his disciples, and he will later tell them a *third* time. *Why* does Jesus *keep* telling them something that he *knows* they won't fully understand? And not only that, why does he *emphasize* it to the point of essentially telling them to *memorize* what he's saying?

Because Jesus is preparing the disciples to believe in him even when it's difficult to believe. If it was difficult for the disciples to believe Jesus' word to cast out a demon, then their faith will be dashed to pieces when they see Jesus crucified. But Jesus telling them what would happen *before* it happened these three times was meant to be an anchor for their faith, especially when all would be revealed after his resurrection.

They would have these words memorized and they would remind each other, saying: "Jesus' death and resurrection were not an accident or hiccup in God's will, but Jesus told us exactly what would happen,

and even though we didn't quite understand what he was saying at the time, now that it's happened, we know that it all happened according to God's good and perfect will." And they would be emboldened to continue following him.

Even though they didn't fully understand it yet, Jesus called them to memorize this difficult truth, so that their faith would be bolstered once it all came to pass.

And this was not only for the twelve apostles and the first century Christians, but this is for all of us who are followers of Christ today.

As we hear Jesus emphasizing to his disciples what will happen to him at the cross, may *we* know with certainty that God is completely sovereign and good over the death of his Son for the forgiveness of sinners. And if God is sovereign over even the cross, how much more is he sovereign and good in all the highs and lows of our lives right now.

So no matter what you're going through right now—whether that's anxiety and depression, financial difficulty, relational conflict, stress from work, struggles with singleness, marriage problems, trouble having children, or anything else we could possibly experience in a world broken by sin—as we see God's sovereign plan come to pass in Jesus' death on the cross to redeem wretched sinners like us, may we be encouraged and emboldened to believe in Jesus right now even when it's difficult to believe.

<pause>

Here's the...

Life Application

1. Have your disappointments in Jesus' disciples led you closer or farther away from Jesus himself? Persist in believing that Jesus is at work in his disciples—including you.

The unfortunate reality is that none of Jesus' disciples are fully sanctified yet, and all of us will disappoint and hurt one another. But rather than keeping a record of wrongs, getting bitter, and living with unforgiveness, which pulls us farther and farther away from Jesus, let's persistently run to Jesus in all our disappointments and hurts, believing that he is committed to sanctifying his disciples—including you—and living in light of Jesus' perfection rather than his disciples' imperfections.

2. How have you exhibited being a "faithless and twisted generation"—not believing in God's Word despite all the personal ways that you have experienced his faithfulness? Repent and recall all the ways you have experienced the "majesty" (or greatness) of God.

It's easy to be hard on the disciples in this passage, but just know that we often do the very *same* thing—constantly forgetting and disbelieving who Jesus is and what he has done in our lives. Rather than brush it off as no big deal, as we read what Jesus says to his disciples in this passage, may we take our faithlessness as seriously as Jesus takes it and repent for our sin. And may we prepare ourselves to act in faith each day by regularly remembering all the ways we've experienced the greatness of God in our lives.

3. Who can you intentionally help to believe in Jesus even when it's difficult to believe? Pray for wisdom, opportunities, and love to speak to them more intentionally about Jesus.

Even as you speak about Jesus with others, just know that, even like the disciples in today's passage, they may not fully understand what you're talking about. But stick with them, pray *for* them, and pray *with* them—and perhaps one day you'll have the privilege of seeing their eyes open wide as they finally understand and believe in full that Jesus alone is their Lord and Savior.

The One Thing

Believe in Jesus even when it's difficult to believe.

Conclusion

If you're able, can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?