

October 9, 2022

JESUS' DISCIPLESHIP OF THE TWELVE

Luke 9:1-50

*(4 of 11 in a series through Luke 7-15)*

In Luke 9:23 Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). This is probably a text that a number of us are familiar with. It was one of the texts I memorized early in my Christian life. But the language itself may be confusing to those who aren’t familiar with the Christian faith. And I don’t even mean the language of taking up one’s cross daily. I mean the language of following Jesus. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Certainly for many in the first century it meant literally *following* Jesus. If you remember our text two weeks ago, it began with the disciples getting in a boat with Jesus to go to the other side of the sea, then entering into the land of the Gerasenes (where they encountered a demonized man), and then coming back across the sea before going to the house of a man named Jairus. To be a follower of Jesus during his earthly ministry meant that you were going to get your steps in.

But we know that those who followed Jesus in the first century weren’t simply following him around in order merely to be in the same physical location where Jesus was. They followed him around to learn from him. That’s what it means to be a disciple. It is to be a learner. They saw Jesus as their teacher and sought learn from him by watching what he did and listening to what he taught. It also implied that one was committed to obey what he said, so that when Jesus invites one to follow him, it is an invitation to commit one’s life in obedience to him.

But that’s not simply true for those following Jesus in the first century but for us as well today. We’re called to learn and obey all that Christ commands us to do. This is precisely what the mission of the church is—to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Christ commands us to do. That is part of what we’re doing today. It’s one reason why we’re taking time to open the Bible and learn what it is that Jesus taught, did, and commands of his followers. And that is precisely why Luke groups together the teachings and events in Jesus’ life that he does in 9:1-50.

This chapter is about discipleship. The disciples are referenced throughout this chapter, being referred to as the “twelve,” the “apostles,” the “disciples,” and by their individual names twelve times in this one chapter.<sup>1</sup> Jesus teaching his disciples is what ties each of these sections in this one chapter together. And the blessing for us is that as we see what Jesus wants his disciples to learn and ensure that we’re listening, seeing, and learning as well. So, what lessons do we need

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 9:1, 10, 12, 14, 18, 20, 28, 32, 33, 40, 43, 49, as noted by David Garland, *Luke: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 372.

to learn from this chapter? First, we see that Jesus' power (and power in us) is more than we can imagine.

### **Jesus' power (and power in us) is more than we can imagine**

As Jesus turns toward the work of preparing his disciples for their mission, he first sends them out in order to preach and heal. And so Luke tells us that "they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere" (v. 6). But before they went, he'd told them to take nothing (no doubt relying on people's hospitality and provision), and he also noted that if they're not received well, they should just shake the dust off their feet and move on. But the key is in verse 1 as Luke tells us that Jesus "gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases." And then, of course, they went off and did it.

Now, in one sense, this really doesn't register on the radar, does it? I mean, we know Jesus has authority to heal and cast out demons. This is nothing new. We saw him cast out a great number of demons, heal a woman who'd been suffering from an ailment for twelve years, and raise a little girl from the dead in the text we looked at two weeks ago. It's not shocking to see another reminder that Jesus has authority over demons and power to heal diseases. But at the same time, this is something different, isn't it? Here is Jesus giving the authority and power that he's demonstrated to ordinary people so that they might do what he did. And that feels quite different, doesn't it?

This seems to be the point Luke is showing us. This power that Jesus demonstrates in his ministry—which is more than we can imagine—is also a power that he is working in and through his disciples. That's what we see in verses 1-6.

The next place we see this is in the feeding of the 5,000 in verses 10-17. This is most likely a story in the gospels we're familiar with. Jesus is continuing his ministry of speaking to those following him about the kingdom of God and healing when the day began to wear on and his disciples point out to him that the people probably need to get on their way, find lodging, and get something to eat. After all, they must be hungry at this point. But Jesus replies, "You give them something to eat" (v. 13).

Now, we know from other gospel accounts that a boy came along with five loaves of bread and two fish, but Luke doesn't bring that detail into his account. He simply notes that the disciples tell Jesus that's all they have—five loaves and two fish. How can they be expected to feed these people? And so Jesus has them instruct the people to sit down in groups of fifty. Then, looking up to heaven and blessing them, he began breaking the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd so that all ate, were satisfied, and twelve baskets of leftovers were collected afterward.

We rightly think of this story as Jesus feeding the 5,000. But once again, note how he uses the disciples. First, he commands them to feed the people, and though they voice their inability,

they end up doing it, don't they? They distribute the bread to the people so that all have more than enough to eat. The text explicitly notes their involvement.

But, we might be tempted to say at this point, "Hold on a second. We're noting the disciples feeding the 5,000, when really all they did was extend Jesus' miraculous working to others. I mean, how hard is it to hand out bread when the other guy is doing the heavy lifting of multiplying it?" But ask yourself how different this is from the scene we just saw in verses 1-6. Sure, the disciples go forward and preach and heal, but it's only because Jesus "gave them power and authority over all demons and to curse diseases," as Luke tells us. What does it matter whether they're used to demonstrate Jesus' power over disease or to distribute the multiplied bread? They both are a picture of Christ's power and Christ's power at work through his people.

Isn't this the dynamic that is played out in our lives again and again as we serve Christ? For example, what do we give that we haven't first been given by him? What do we do or say that he doesn't empower us to do or say? All of the Christian life is the equivalent of the disciples handing out bread that their master multiplied. Christ empowers, and we live it out, simply distributing to others the grace given to us. And if we don't see it as such, it may be that we've settled into too lofty a view of our own abilities and too little understanding of the power of Christ at work within us. And no doubt if we've lost sight of that, we've done far too little in terms of giving him thanks and making sure he gets the glory for all good things. Or we might be on the other end of things, feeling hopeless, for example, in our battle with sin because we've forgotten that because of our union with Christ, sin has no dominion over us (Rom 6:6).

So as Luke compiles Jesus' lessons for his disciples in this chapter, the first is that he wants them to see that his power (and his power in us) is more than we can imagine. Don't lose sight of this. Live and serve our Lord in light of that reality. Second, we see that Jesus' mission (and that of his followers) will involve suffering.

### **Jesus' mission (and that of his followers) will involve suffering**

We might hear the first point and think that this means that the Christian life is all roses and lilies. After all, we're walking through this life, serving our Lord, empowered by his strength and might. But Jesus makes it clear in verses 18-45 that his mission will involve suffering and as a consequence the mission of his followers will involve suffering as well. Let me show you how Luke unfolds this.

It seems that Luke compiles stories that follow a format of showing Jesus' glory, followed by Jesus noting his upcoming suffering. Let me see if I can show you what I mean. In verses 7-9 we're given a peek at Herod's thoughts. He'd imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist, and now he's hearing of Jesus working miracles. And as his conscience is no doubt weighing on him, he begins to question who Jesus is. He's hearing some say that Jesus is Elijah, others that he's John the Baptist—back from the dead—and so he wants to meet him. But this really just sets the stage for a conversation Jesus has with the twelve.

In verse 18, Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (v. 18). And they tell him the very things Herod had been hearing. Then, he asks who the disciples think that he is, and Peter rightly answers, “The Christ of God” (v. 20). Okay, so that’s a glorious moment. Peter rightly heralds Jesus as the Christ. You’d think it’d be a moment of celebration. But note what happens next. In verses 21-22, Jesus charged them to tell no one, saying, “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.” Jesus is proclaimed as the Christ by Peter, and Jesus follows it up by announcing his coming suffering and death. Here is Jesus’ glory followed by an announcement of his coming suffering.

Then, note what happens in verses 28-36. In verse 27 Jesus had said that some in his midst would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God, and then about eight days later some saw a glimpse of it. Peter, James, and John went up with Jesus onto a mountain and Jesus’ appearance was altered and his clothes became dazzling white. Then, Moses and Elijah appeared with him. Peter was so moved by this that he suggested they make three tents for them, but then the Father spoke from heaven making clear that these three weren’t equal but that Jesus was far superior to Moses and Elijah, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him” (v. 35). It was a moment quite similar to Jesus’ baptism when his Father spoke from heaven then as well, identifying Jesus as his Son.

But notice what happened right in the middle of this. As Moses and Elijah appeared, Luke tells us that they “spoke of [Jesus’] departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (v. 31). So, Moses and Elijah appear in order to converse with Jesus—an amazing scene—and what do they talk about? They talk about his departure, that is, his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension to come. At this moment when his glory is displayed perhaps more clearly than at any other point in his earthly ministry, his heavenly conversation partners are speaking of his coming suffering and death. Again, glory followed by a reminder of suffering.

Finally, in verses 37-45, we see this dynamic pictured again. First, we see Jesus’ glory. After coming down from the mountain, Jesus is confronted with a man begging him to heal his son. He’s being tormented by a demon who seizes the boy, convulses him, and brings harm to him. The man also mentions to Jesus that his disciples could do nothing to cast it out. And Jesus responds, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here” (v. 41).

Now, I’m not completely sure to whom Jesus is directing this. It could be that he’s directing this to the disciples, upset that they couldn’t cast out the demon. In that case, it may be that the disciples forgot that Jesus was the source of their power and were trying to cast out this demon as if it were just a matter of following the right formula. Or it may be that Jesus is simply addressing Israel as an unbelieving nation, knowing that many of these people will soon be against him. I’m not sure and commentators are divided on their suggestions. But regardless, he heals the boy and Luke tells us, “All were astonished at the majesty of God” (v. 43).

So there's a picture of glory. Jesus has just healed a boy, and the crowd is marveling at the majesty of God. But then Luke tells us in the second half of verse 43 and in verse 44, "*But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing*, 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,'" once again showing us Jesus' upcoming suffering right as we're caught up in his glory.

Whether Jesus was recognized as the Christ, marveled at for his work of casting out a demon, or being transfigured before the eyes of the disciples, those around him could always be tempted to develop a misconception of him, thinking him to be some political leader, ready to overthrow Rome and seize the throne. But that wasn't the purpose of his first coming. He came to deal with our sins. And in order to deal with our sins, he had to pay the penalty that our sins deserved. That meant that he had to die on the cross, bearing the wrath of God. That's what he's praying about in the garden when he asked his Father to let the cup pass if there were any other way. But there was no other way. The only way that God's people could be redeemed was through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. His mission involved suffering and death.

But there's also a lesson here for us in how we live our lives. Right in the midst of Jesus talking about his own suffering, he says to those around him, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (vv. 23-26).

Jesus makes clear that following him comes with cost. He points to the cross—an instrument of gruesome execution in the first century—and tells us as his followers to take it up daily. Now, that's confusing, isn't it? I mean, if I told you to take a lethal injection daily, you'd probably be a bit confused at how you're going to keep doing anything after day one of that. I mean, it's lethal. Well, Jesus isn't saying that we'll most definitely die on the first day we begin following him. But he is saying that we must be willing to die for him. And he's also saying that we must willingly endure all suffering short of death that comes our way for following him. And I think he's also suggesting that we put to death all that our flesh desires in following him. All are true, and so if we're going to obey the one whose mission meant suffering and death, we should not be surprised to find that we suffer in following him as well. This is our call as disciples. We must be ready to suffer and persevere in obeying our master. And, finally, Jesus tells us that his followers must pursue his glory, not ours.

### **Jesus' followers must pursue his glory, not their own**

Our text ends with two episodes that are really about the same thing. First, the disciples—amazingly, after hearing that Jesus will suffer at the hands of men—embark on an argument about which of them is the greatest. Seems like bad timing to have that conversation, doesn't it? And Jesus, knowing what they're saying, takes a child, puts him by his side and says, "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” (v. 48).

Now, what is Jesus doing here? Well, children represent the lowest in society. They offer nothing to you in terms of standing. Here’s what I mean. Have you ever been tempted to want to be around someone or seen with someone because it elevates you? As shameful as it is, my guess is that all of us have done that. We might like being seen with the person who is attractive, or popular, or wealthy, or influential because we think it makes us more desirable. And by the same token, we may desire to get away quickly from those who do not offer us any elevated standing.

Well, children represented the lowest of society—perhaps much as they do today. And Jesus is saying that unless you’re humble enough to receive and value this child, then you’re not humble enough to receive and value me. This is one reason why I’ve said to our young people that the pursuit of being cool or popular or what have you can easily be a path to hell. It takes giving up a pursuit of our own glory to follow Christ. You cannot follow Christ and seek to exalt yourself.

And that seems to be the point of the last story as well. John tells Jesus that he saw someone casting out demons in Jesus’ name and tried to stop him “because he does not follow with us” (v. 49), but Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you” (v. 50). Now, by that, Jesus wasn’t necessarily saying that this one is a disciple of Jesus. After all, we know that on the day of judgment many will say to Jesus, “Did we not cast out demons [among other things] in your name?” and Jesus will respond, “I never knew you.” It seems, rather, that Jesus is again reminding his disciples that this isn’t all about them. They may well have been more worried about good things happening apart from them than they were pleased that good things were happening. And so Jesus reminds us again that, as his followers, our pursuit must be for his glory, not ours. And this is fitting when our hope in the gospel is all about what Jesus did for us. He lived for us, died to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead so that by faith we might have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That’s the gospel we preach to others as well. And if that’s the message we preach, how could we ever pursue our own glory above his?

What does it mean to be a disciple? Part of the answer to that question is given to us right here in Luke 9:1-50. We recognize the power of our Lord which he is pleased to work in us, and we walk—empowered by him—in obedience to him, acknowledging that all is of his grace along the way. It means that we realize that following Christ costs our lives. Therefore, we start each day with an understanding that, if need be, we must be willing to die for Jesus. It means that we put submit every desire to him. And it means that we set our lives toward bringing glory to him and not ourselves. So let us examine ourselves this morning and make sure these things characterize us. If not, let us repent, and where they do, let’s give thanks to him—even as we come to the table. Amen.