

How to Grow Strong in the Faith, Part 1

Luke 9:42-43

We are returning to Luke 9:37-45, Luke 9:37, "On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Behold, a man from the crowd cried out, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child, and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him, so that he foams at the mouth. It shatters him and will hardly leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.'

"And Jesus answered, 'O, faithless and twisted generation! How long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. All were astonished at the majesty of God. 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 unto the hands of men.’ 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.”

And so Jesus encounters this scene. He comes back down off the mountain, and he encounters this scene of, of sorrow and turmoil. He comes into this darkness and confusion. There’s a severe demonic possession, and then failure. There’s a failure for his disciples, a failure to cast out the demon. For the crowd, they’re more interested in the, the controversy and the spectacle, and so for them it’s a failure to care. For the religious scribes, it’s a failure for them, even in all their learning and their study and their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. It’s a failure of them to see through to what’s truly important.

Down at the bottom all, of all this, at the root and foundation of all that Jesus is seeing as he encounters this scene, Jesus is able to look beyond the outward symptoms to see the heart of the problem. He’s able to diagnose and see what is the cause and what is the cure. The very heart of the problem is

unbelief. Unbelief is what he sees. That is what prompts his sighing and his grieving. That is what prompts this indictment of Israel's condition, this generation. That's what prompts his rebuke of his own disciples for failing to believe. "How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?"

We've been reading Luke's Gospel long enough to understand the simmering hostility in Israel's religious establishment, the scribes, the Pharisees, the priests. The crowds, they're easily impressed by the spectacle of Jesus' power, but they're just as easily turned against him in unbelief because they do not inherently believe. That's going to become more apparent as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, and we, we're going to see that at the end of this chapter, and it's going to occupy the rest of Luke's Gospel, the long march to Jerusalem. He encounters with increasing hostility of unbelief.

But how is it, here, that Jesus' own disciples, who've been walking with him for two, two-and-a-half years, how is it that they have failed to believe? How is it that they have failed to stand firm and to act in faith? They had power and authority over the demons, Luke 9:1. And they exercise that power and

authority, that's recorded in verse 6 of Luke 9, also testified from their own lips in verse 10. When Jesus sent them out, they likely went two-by-two. But here, there's nine Apostles ganging up on one demon. And still they failed. What happened? Why the failure, here, of their faith?

Go back to verse 22 in Luke 9. Let's try to put ourselves in their shoes, have a little sympathy for them. In fact, we could call it empathy because we know exactly why they've failed. Peter had just made the good confession in verse 20, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Christ of God. But Peter and the others, they didn't know the significance of that statement. They didn't understand the fact that the Messiah had come to bear the sins of his people by dying on the cross. So Jesus, coming out of that confession, keeps him quiet about it. He doesn't want any impulse of the crowd to enthrone him too quickly.

But he, here, sets their expectations, first about the Messiah's mission, and then about their own discipleship. He wants them to understand what it is to be the Messiah, what his mission actually is in this first advent, this first coming. And

then he wants to understand what it really means if they're going to say they're going to follow him. What does that look like? He tells them in verses 22-23, the future involves suffering, suffering for the Messiah and suffering for all those who follow the Messiah.

Verse 22, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.' And then he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"

That is a radical reversal of what the disciples expected. They believed that they were walking with Jesus on an upward trajectory, heading from obscurity in Galilee, the mundane life of fishermen, other occupations, and they were heading toward glory in Jerusalem. This is exactly opposite of what they expected. Not suffering, but glory. The power and the authority of the Kingdom of God that they had all witnessed in Jesus Christ, that they'd all practiced themselves as Apostles commissioned by him, all that had come from Jesus. It's now at

work in them. They believed they were destined to reign alongside the Messiah himself.

But now Jesus, he's disrupting all those visions of glory with a prediction of what sounded to them like abject failure. The rejection and death of Jesus? A bewildering, troubling message about self-denial and carrying, could it be a cross, a despised implement of torture? To say they were shaken, disturbed, rattled, that is precisely the frame of mind that they were in. And for more than a week they'd been pondering this, rolling it around. You know how it is when you have fears that don't go away, and you keep thinking about it. You keep thinking about it. It's not resolved. It continues to trouble the mind.

As we said before, we looked in verses 28-36, Jesus took three of his disciples up on the mountain. When he first got up on the mountain, he started praying. He was praying for the strengthening of their weakened faith. He was praying for the stability of their confidence, the deepening of their conviction.

And while Jesus is up there on the mountain with those three, he'd left the weaker disciples, the other nine, down below. There's tentative Philip; there's doubting Thomas; Simon the Zealot, the political monster; Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, who is clearly not one of their number, as we're going to see.

So up on that mountain, when Jesus prayed, he didn't just pray for the faith of Peter, John, and James. He prayed for them all. He asked God to remove their doubts and to strengthen their faith. And God answered. He sent heavenly messengers to three of the disciples. He sent demonic messengers to the other nine.

One demonic messenger came in the demon-possessed boy, but multiple demonic messengers came in the form of religious scribes, who were at their heart unbelievers, teaching what sounded like very good doctrine. They'd read all the books. They'd studied all the commentaries. They knew every argument from every different perspective, and yet they didn't worship God. Theirs was a demonic religion. Why did God send them?

Again, it was an answer to Jesus' prayer. It was to strengthen weak faith.

Listen, sometimes our greatest failures teach us the deepest, long, most long-lasting lessons, don't they? And that's what these disciples would learn. All of them. That the way to stand firm in faith, the way to grow strong and mature in faith, is to gaze intently at the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's made most obvious up on the mountain, but it's just as true down in the valley. Whether on the mountain or down in the valley, same answer: Gaze at the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Listen, it's the same answer for us, isn't it? Nothing's changed. And we happen to live more in the realm of the nine disciples who are in verses 37-45, that's where we live, down in the darkness and confusion of the unbelieving world. We need to see what the other three disciples, the privileged disciples, saw up on the mountain, gazing at the glory of Christ.



But we, we live where the other nine are. We live amid unbelief, so this, this text is for us. That's where all of this has been leading, is to lead us into this text, this valley. The question that we want to ask and answer today is this: How do we strengthen our faith, which we've got to admit is often weak, often vacillating, inconsistent? How do we strengthen it?

When we live in the realm of the unbelieving world, when we live around voices of unbelief and mocking and scorning and slandering and blaspheming When we live in a world of, saturated with immorality, pursuing other aims and other ambitions and other goals. Even when our own faith can be affected by all that, those voices, so weak and inconsistent. How do we learn to stand firm in faith, to grow strong in faith?

First point for this morning, to remain steadfast in faith, to grow strong in faith, number one, consider the evidence of Christ's glory. Consider the evidence of Christ's glory. After Jesus indicted Israel's unbelief, after he rebuked the disciples for failing to act in faith according to their commission, Jesus turned to the man, end of verse 41, the father, he commands him, "Bring your son here." "Bring your son here." That command had

to have inspired hope, right? I mean, just the fact that Jesus wants to see the boy, and knowing who he is, that inspired hope and confidence. It also tells us everything we need to know about his intentions. I will look at your son. I will look at your only child. I will take a look at this boy who's been held captive by this wicked spirit. I will do something about it. And I, in contrast to these, will not fail. Such comfort in Christ's command.

Look at verse 42, first half, "While he was coming," that's the father bringing his son, "while he was coming, the demon threw the boy to the ground and convulsed him." So at this point we can go over to Mark's Gospel, Mark 9:20. You might want to turn there and follow along because it leads, leads to an important interaction here. But we turn to Mark's Gospel and find that Jesus at the point of the convulsion, as this boy is thrown to the ground in front of the crowd, in front of Christ, Jesus asks a follow-up question that leads to a vital interaction and we need to hear.

Again, they brought the boy to Jesus, Mark 9:20, "And when the spirit saw him," saw Jesus, "immediately, it convulsed the

boy. He fell on the ground and rolled about foaming at the mouth." Okay, so the same behavior that was described for us in Luke's Gospel, here it is again, "foaming at the mouth." Verse 21, "Jesus asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood, and it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him.'"

The severity of the case helps explain the father's reply in verse 22, "If you can do anything," Jesus, "have compassion on us and help us." You understand the father is here because he does believe that Jesus can do something. He's asking because he believes Jesus to be compassionate, powerful to help, to save. In fact, he came to the disciples first, believing the same thing.

But then, as he speaks, there is an inconsistency that slips out. And Jesus stops at this point, and he doesn't let that go. "Jesus said to him, 'If you can!' If you can! "All things are possible for one who believes.'" Look what Jesus

draws out of this man. "Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe. Help my unbelief.'"

That's a beautiful, beautiful testimony from the man, isn't it? Isn't it one you and I can identify with? I do believe. I do. There is a seed of faith in me. There is a kernel of belief, but sometimes it's suppressed. Sometimes through my own foolishness, I've hidden faith. I've suppressed it, I've doused it, I've poured water on the flame of faith. Sometimes it's through my own stupidity and foolishness.

Sometimes it's just through my own weakness. There are health issues, whether it's through chronic issues, whether it's through a, a long-term trial that just doesn't go away, whether a finance or relational issues, strife in family, all the rest. I do believe! Ah, but help my unbelief!

And the man, he's not defending himself. He's not saying, Well, I, I believe! He's saying, I do. I do. It's there. It just, it just needs to be lifted up. The problem is in my faith. They problem is in my lack of believing. The problem is in doubt

creeping in. Doubt is not something to be celebrated. Doubt is something to be eradicated, driven away. "I believe. Help my unbelief!"

So I ask you, what's more important? Exorcism, or teaching? Mercifully, Jesus, here, considers both to be important. But to cast out the demon without correcting this man's error? Jesus sees that the one condition is as bad as the other, and the one is more eternally consequential. Jesus' power is going to take care of the immediate need, but it was the man's believing in Jesus' power, believing in the power of God, trusting in the kind intention of God, that's what would carry this man throughout the rest of his life, as he's going to raise up his newly restored son in the faith. So Jesus is thinking way beyond what this man can see in the moment of his crisis.

Aren't you thankful God can see beyond your momentary crisis? Aren't you thankful that Jesus can see beyond your current trial? We're so myopic, aren't we? We stare at things in front of us, and we can't see beyond them. But our God is omniscient, and our Jesus is omniscient, and he sees way into the future. Jesus, here, is thinking far into the future, where

this man is going to be raising this son. He's got immediate compassion for the immediate need; he's also got long-term compassion for the eternal need. Not just of the man, but of the boy, too.

Now let's go back to Luke 9:42 and consider these disciples. The disciples are witnessing all of this, and they, too, needed help beyond the immediate crisis. They needed to see their own failure as an issue not of power, not of ability, not of method, but they needed to see their own failure as an issue of their faith.

What did they trust in? Who did they believe in the moment? They needed to live and to act in accordance with "the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." So Jesus stops and gives them evidence of his glory. He does that to confirm their faith, to draw out their faith, to strengthen their faith.

So with that in mind, look at verse 42, "While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground, convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father." There's the evidence. How does that evidence strengthen the faith of those who believe? How does that evidence teach the disciples? What are they to learn, here? What should we learn from this? Listen, this is nothing less than the evidence of Christ's glory. We see his glory on display, here. We can see his glory, we can put it in three parts for your notes, maybe three subpoints, A, B, and C.

Subpoint A: We see the evidence of Christ being glorified in divine authority. Divine authority. Look at Jesus, here. He, says, "He rebuked the unclean spirit," *epitimao*. It's strong censure. It's strict rebuke. There's even a hint of threatening in this word. I mean, believe me, the demon heard Jesus speak, and he was threatened. He was looking around big-time for a safe space, wasn't he? Get me out of this. I'm feeling triggered. This is a traumatic event. Get me into a safe space!

Mark tells us what Jesus actually said, Mark 9:25 "He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, 'You mute and deaf

spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'” The demon was running! And Jesus is the living Word of God. He is the Creator and the sustainer of the universe.

John 1:3 says, “All things,” that is, all created things. God is not a part of that set. Since Jesus is God, he is not a part of that set. He is not a created thing, but “all things,” John 1:3, “were made through him.” What does that mean? It means that “without him was not anything made that was made.” If it’s in the category of the created, if it’s in the category of, made, Jesus did it. That puts him outside the category.

What about invisible, spiritual things, like angelic and demonic beings? What about things that are not matter, but are immaterial? Colossians 1:16 says, “By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.” Listen, it’s comprehensive. “All things created” includes the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. It includes the visible material and the invisible spiritual, even hierarchies of power and authority. Those, too. “All things created through him,” and get this, created “for him.”



Here in Luke 9:42, this wicked, unclean spirit is created for the glory of Christ. He is, this demon is here serving the sovereign purposes of God to glorify Christ. The demon has no power whatsoever to resist the authority of the one who created it, sustains it, the one who now commands it. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, providing the disciples with irrefutable evidence, and everybody else with irrefutable evidence as well whether they believe or not, irrefutable evidence of divine authority. Only God commands the spiritual realm. Jesus is God.