

How to Grow Strong in the Faith, Part 4

Luke 9:42-45

So as we turn our attention to God's Word, I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Luke chapter 9, verses 37-45. Jesus' prediction about the resurrection points to a triumph over death. And notice it's predicted. This is prophecy. He tells them about it before it happens. Pretty bold, isn't it? He's certain. He rose from the dead to guarantee the hope of eternal life. 1 Peter 3:18, he's put to death in the flesh, but he's made alive in the Spirit.

The fact that he was made alive in the Spirit after three days in the grave, you know what that tells us? We can trust every single word he's spoken, everything he's spoken. Everything that he affirms we can affirm, Old Testament, New Testament, everything in between. Wicked men who put Jesus to death, Acts 3:15, but God is the one who raised him from the dead. That means that God approved of the sacrifice. "Jesus

Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified," Peter said, Acts 4:10, "God raised from the dead."

Jesus once told Martha, the sister of Lazarus, he told her as she's grieving the death of her brother, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." After he declared that truth to her in John 11:25, Jesus asked Martha, a follow-up, a vitally important question, one that personalizes this for her. He says, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." That is eternal life, right? "Then he turned to Martha and said, 'Do you believe this?'" "Do you believe this?" That's the question for all of us: Do you believe this?

You've heard it said, probably said it for yourself, Seeing is believing, right? Seeing is believing. That is not what the Bible says. Many people saw Jesus, saw his power, saw his works of mercy, but they didn't believe in him. Seeing was not believing. They rejected him. They delivered him to be crucified. No, the Bible says hearing is believing. "Faith comes

from hearing," Romans 10:17, "hearing through the word about Christ." That's a fundamental spiritual principle, and it comes to us directly from Christ, right here. Faith does not come by seeing. It comes by hearing. Faith does not come by experience, but by knowing the truth, by understanding what you hear, then trusting the God who revealed that truth.

Let's put it in a way that confronts our, you know, the unbelief of our scientific age. Faith, I'll just say it this way, faith does not come by science. Rather, science comes by faith. Faith doesn't come by science. Science comes by faith. If you start with the words, "In the beginning God," Genesis 1:1, well that, now you have the theistic basis for all scientific investigation.

It is only by presupposing God that we are able to know anything at all. If you deny God, or you create a God in your own image and, and worship that God, that is not the precondition for understanding anything. The precondition for understanding anything, all scientific investigation, all knowledge, all truth, all the treasures of wisdom and, and knowledge, are hidden in whom? Christ. You have to presuppose

God. He, his reality, the reality of God and the essence of God, is the precondition for knowing all things.

So believe his words are true words. Embrace them for yourself. "Let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. They'll kill him. When he's killed, after three days, he'll rise." So put those words into your ears. Meditate on them. Think about those words. Ponder them. And ask God to give you understanding of all those concepts because he will. He loves to answer that prayer, Yes! Test him in that.

Well, like the rest of the crowd, we, too, can see the evidence of Christ's glory and his authority, his power, his mercy in healing the father's son. We can listen to the testimony about the majesty of God in Christ. But what makes the difference is whether or not we combine our seeing and our listening with faith. It is a heart of faith that makes all the difference. Which is, which is why we have to reflect on those words, words about the Gospel. And when we do, come to a fourth point, point in our outline, here. We can, number four, rejoice

in the unveiling of Christ's mystery. We rejoice in the unveiling of Christ's mystery.

Now when I use the word, mystery, I'm using it in a strictly biblical sense. Mystery is not talking about something mysterious, spooky, ethereal, unable to be known. Mystery, in a biblical sense, is talking about something that was hidden in the past, but now in Christ it's been made known. *Mysterion* is the Greek word, and it's, it means basically something that's held secret, something that's kept secret for a time.

But God doesn't intend to keep all those things secret forever. He unveils them, he unveils them progressively. There in verse 45, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man's about to be delivered into the hands of men." Then this in verse 45, "But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. They were afraid to ask him about this saying." There's a repeated emphasis, there on, this saying. First, they didn't understand, this saying, and then they were afraid to ask him about, this saying, repeated. And the saying is the one in verse 44, which is what Jesus said about the Gospel. It's repeated, then, not only in the

statement, but two times: this saying, this saying. That saying is pretty important. Okay. Just want, point that out. Keep that saying before your mind.

“But they didn’t understand this saying, they were afraid to ask him about this saying.” They didn’t understand the full import and impact of the Gospel, and they were afraid to ask him about the implications of those words in the Gospel. They understood the words that Jesus used. In the parallel, Matthew 17:23, they were actually very, you know, greatly distressed about these words. No confusion about “being delivered into the hands of men,” that that’s a bad thing. They didn’t take Jesus’ words here as some kind of a metaphor and mystery of some spiritual reality that had nothing to do with his physical demise. They knew his death is imminent, and it troubled them.

But they didn’t understand it. It didn’t make any sense to them. And the problem was, first, it’s not that they didn’t understand the words themselves. They didn’t understand what the words meant, in terms of a theological reality. They didn’t understand what the future was. They didn’t understand what he was pointing to. They didn’t understand the reason for Jesus’

rejection and death and resurrection. For them, they're thinking, We're on an upward trajectory toward glory! This makes no sense! They understand the words, the lexical meanings, but they didn't understand the meaning, the interpretation.

And secondly, the problem is, probably deeper than that, they were afraid to ask about it. They've been walking with Jesus two and half years. They're afraid? That indicates something deeply askew about their trust. The two problems are connected. The ignorance and lack of understanding, it comes from a heart of doubt about Christ. It comes from an insecurity in their relationship with him. Luke uses a verb tense, here, that indicates the confusion, and it's a continuous state of mind for these disciples. So Jesus, here, is addressing their frame of mind, which is his deepest concern. Their weakness in believing, the inconsistency and instability of their faith, is due to an element of unbelief that still affects their disposition even though they're his closest disciples, his closest friends.

The explanation for their failure to understand, the explanation for their fear in getting clarification, notice the

explanation in the middle. It says, "It was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it." The question here is Who or what is doing the concealing? It was concealed from them, so who's doing that? What's doing that? What's to account for it?

Three possibilities. Maybe it's the disciples who are responsible for the concealment of the truth. That is to say, maybe they have their preconceived ideas, their false notions of who the Messiah is, what he would come to do and accomplish. Maybe that's what's blinding them to the truth, to their own expectations about the Messiah's trajectory toward glory and sitting on the throne of David and conquering the Romans. Did that prevent them from understanding, did it cause the truth to be concealed with them, from them so they couldn't perceive it?

Certainly that is true. That is definitely true. But it's not the whole answer. We know that because in the middle of the verse, some grammar clarifies the meaning. It says, where it says, there, "It was concealed," that's more accurately translated, it had been concealed from them, and then there's a purpose clause. The whole thing can be translated, It had been concealed from them in order that they might not perceive it.

Listen, this is intentional. Maybe it's Jesus himself who's the concealer. But we can immediately dismiss that. That can't be true. He came to reveal, not to conceal. In fact, he's the one telling them about his rejection and crucifixion, resurrection. And in the final sentence, the onus is back on the disciples for not asking Jesus any further questions about it. It's they who are afraid to ask, not Jesus who's reluctant to tell them about it.

The only other possibility about who's intentional here, about concealing, is that God is the one who has concealed the full meaning of the saying from them in order that they might not perceive it. Why would he do that? Why would God conceal? Short answer is this: God conceals things at times in the interest of fulfilling his eternal decree, to accomplish his saving purposes, according to his perfect wisdom. God sometimes conceals things. The Bible tells us that, Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever," but "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." There's a distinction, there. Proverbs 25:2, "It is to the glory of God to

conceal things.” “It’s the glory of kings to search them out, but it is the glory of God to conceal things.”

So, yes, God does withhold things at times. At times he conceals and he covers. But he does so only in the interest of accomplishing the purpose of his, of his eternal decree, in order to reveal the secret, hidden things of old.

So here, in order to fulfill his sovereign purposes of salvation, according to the wise administration of his perfect providence, God chose to keep some things concealed from the disciples, even if only for a time. And at the same time, to accomplish his purposes, God used, to accomplish those purposes, the disciples’ own wrong expectations about the Messiah. He works through their ignorance to fulfill his saving purpose in the Gospel. He made use of their, their fear. He made use of their distrust, their incomplete, imperfect relationship with Christ. He used all that as a means to accomplish their full restoration, to accomplish their complete salvation, to accomplish their eternal reconciliation to himself.

So God decreed, then God revealed, but not everything at once. God revealed the truth by degree, progressively in ever-increasing brightness according to his will. We see that. If you read from the Old Testament to the New, you see a progressiveness to his revelation, increasing glory, ever-increasing brightness.

But having said that, the disciples' refusal to press further, to ask about what they didn't understand, that's on them. Their fear and distrust is the reason for their own ignorance. Think about it. In light of who Jesus is, in light of who Jesus has shown himself to be so consistently, is there any good reason for the disciples to be afraid to ask him about anything?

Listen, the fault is in us when we don't draw near to Christ, right? When he tells us, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden," why do we hesitate? Why do we draw back? Our reluctance to ask questions of the one who describes himself in that context as "gentle and humble in heart," it reveals something about us, not about him. It reveals our sin. It just points to how desperately we need Christ.

The fact that these disciples lacked understanding, verse 45, that the meaning was concealed, that they lacked perception, they declined to ask any further on account of their fear, this is illustrating Luke's point in this whole text. The disciples, then, like all of us now, we need to listen carefully, deeply, often to Jesus Christ, and it needs to come from a listening of faith, of believing, of trusting the one who spoke.

We need to gaze upon his majesty. We need to meditate deeply on his words, listen to his sayings. We need to listen predetermined orientation of belief. And when we do, we're going to find ourselves grow in the knowledge and understanding of the truth. We will find the meaning of Scripture revealed to us wide open. We'll gain greater spiritual perception, and that will encourage us to keep coming to Christ, to keep asking our questions, to get help with all of our needs because the more we learn about him, the more we see there is no reason to fear, and every reason to run to him. We'll see him as he is, as our Savior and our friend, our merciful High Priest, our gracious Lord.

Now for the disciples, here, they could not discern all that we've just been talking about until after the death, and the burial, and the resurrection, and you know what? For those disciples who believed, they were there to see his resurrection glory. One disciple who heard this at the time was Judas Iscariot. He never believed. He was not there to see Christ's resurrection glory. But the rest were. All the evidence they saw, all the testimony they heard, all the words they didn't understand, everything became clear to them in perfect congruity, perfect harmony, perfect fulfillment, no contradiction whatsoever.

You know what's interesting? Everyone who witnessed the rejection, the suffering of Christ, everyone witnessed that, believer and unbeliever alike. Everyone saw his crucifixion. Everyone heard what he said on the cross, watched him die, believers and unbelievers alike. Believers and unbelievers alike knew where his body was buried, where they'd laid his dead body in the tomb. Only believers saw the resurrected Christ. Jesus only showed himself to those who believed. God kept his resurrection glory hidden from the unbelieving mind.

We've said this before, but God does not dance to the tune of unbelief. He does not perform for the sake of those who reject and who do not believe. He is under no obligation to reveal anything to anyone. He's God; we're his creatures. He is under no obligation especially to those who doubt and reject and scorn and scoff. God has given everyone the creation of the heavens and the earth and the world and all that it contains. Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Paul tells us, "What can be known about God is plain to all people because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that are made, so that everyone is without excuse."

Listen, when you walk around the mountains, these Rocky Mountains, is there any question that God did that? God has put creation here; creation makes his power and nature known to mankind. And so many in their pride, in their love of their sin, they suppress that truth in unrighteousness. They know it to be true. They do. They're just playing games. They just won't admit it.

But for those who humble themselves before the manifest glory of God, for those who see all that he has made and who listen to all that he's revealed in Scripture, who hear the words, who listen to Christ, well, the evidence confirms his testimony to the truth. They will see, they will hear, they will understand the truth. And the truth, beloved, will set you free.

At the beginning of the service this morning, we heard the testimony of the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 15. He said, "I delivered to you of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures," and then this, make sure this is a part of your Gospel presentation, "that he appeared."

And then it gives a list. "He appeared," number one, "to Cephas," that's Peter. Number two, "he appeared to the twelve." Number three, "he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom," as of Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 15, were "still alive, though some have fallen asleep," meaning

they've died in Christ. Number four, "he appeared to James." "Then," number five, "to all the Apostles." And then number six, "last of all to one untimely born," Paul says, "he appeared to me, also." You know that not one unbeliever is in that list of resurrection appearances? Not one. You can go back through all the Gospel narratives, you can survey the entirety of Scripture, and you can confirm for yourself that Jesus did not demonstrate his resurrection glory to the unbelieving, to those who were not his disciples.

That kind of seems kinda counterintuitive to us, doesn't it? I mean, if you wanted to prove that you were risen from the dead, don't you think you'd walk right up to Pontius Pilate and say, Greetings! Or walk into the Sanhedrin meeting, all those rabbis and scholars and everything else, and say, Hello, there, fellas! Remember me?

Think about the effect of Christ showing up after his death by crucifixion to all those unbelievers, scribes, experts in the religious law, who said, Can't happen. Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, elders of Israel, Pontius Pilate, Roman soldiers, and all the rest, the jeering crowds. Wouldn't his resurrection

appearance overcome their unbelief? No, it would not. Jesus raised three children from the dead during his earthly ministry, and the crowds who witnessed him do that powerful work and miracle still called for his blood.

Jesus illustrated this principle in a story he told once relating a conversation between Father Abraham and a rich man who had died and was now suffering in torment. The moral of the story? More than resurrection proof is required. All evidence requires the eyes of faith and the ears of faith to interpret it correctly.

In the story, the rich man asked Abraham to send poor, a poor believer, a believer named Lazarus, who had died and was now in Abraham's bosom, and this rich man is suffering in torment. And he's worried about his five brothers, who have, like him, rejected Christ, rejected truth, rejected God's way. He says, "'Abraham, send, send Lazarus down to my brothers so he can, so he can warn them lest they become, they come into this place of torment.'" And Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.'"

You know what Abraham's saying? "They've got a Bible. Let them read it." "He said, 'Oh, no, father Abraham, but if someone goes from the dead, they'll repent.' He said to them, 'If they do not hear Moses and prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

More than resurrection proof is required. There is a more basic, primary, fundamental miracle that must happen first, before you see the miracle of the resurrection. It's the miracle of regeneration. The Holy Spirit must cause you to be born again. He must give you a new nature, so that you have eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart that will believe and understand. It's that miracle of regeneration that leads to your faith, that leads to your justification by faith, that leads to your conversion. That's what has to take place first.

In light of Jesus' resurrection glory, those who do believe, for whom that miracle has taken place, by God's amazing grace, those who believe, they can go back now, they can understand the meaning of his rejection, suffering for sins.

They can understand the meaning of his crucifixion and death. They can understand the true glory of his resurrected life, as Paul told the Corinthians, "We, when we speak, we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory, but as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.' These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."

Prerequisite condition for seeing, experiencing, and participating in Christ's resurrection, beloved, the prerequisite is to believe. You must believe. Faith is the key. And for those who believe in Jesus Christ, it becomes our birthright to investigate everything thoroughly and reflect deeply upon what is revealed to us. And it becomes our joy. It becomes our bread, our meat to learn fully so we can do everything that Jesus caught, taught and commanded to us. We can walk in the wisdom of God. We can speak about him, show forth the glorious mystery of Christ, talk about this saving Gospel. That's what we get to do. That's our privilege, and that's the

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honor that is bestowed upon us. That's the meaning of Christ's resurrection power and glory, and as Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." The essential question for you, today, on this Resurrection morning, is put to you by Jesus himself. "Do you believe this?" Do you? I pray that you do. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you so much for this day of celebration, reflection, our joy in understanding what you have given us from your truth. We thank you for the beauty of Christ. We thank you for the, the beauty of his saving Gospel. We pray that if there is anybody here who does not know you, that they would see you for who you really are, high and holy and lifted up, that you are the Creator, you are the Law-Giver, and you are the Judge, that they would understand that they themselves have never kept your law, they have not obeyed your truth.

They've broken your Ten Commandments in thought, word, and deed. They've not loved the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. They've not loved their neighbor as

themselves. And that makes them guilty sinners before you, deserving of your wrath and judgment and punishment.

But we pray, Lord, that you would not leave them there, in the terror of your wrath, just and holy as it is. We pray, then, that you would follow through with saving grace, that you would lead them with clear, believing vision to Jesus Christ, to see him for who he really is, to hear his teachings, his sayings, his truth, his Gospel, that they might combine hearing with faith and so be saved.

We pray that you would lead them into faith in Christ and repentance from all of their sins, that you would wash them clean and set them before you, reconciled to you, Father, with Jesus Christ their brother leading them into fellowship, into relationships with you. We thank you for this resurrection truth, this Gospel of resurrection and the power of the resurrection, demonstrating your approval of Christ's sacrifice for all those who believe. We pray that you would save and sanctify many. In Jesus' name, amen.