

# Disappointing Disciples

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Okay, I would like to turn back to Luke's Gospel chapter 9 and the passage we have read together. There is a small insert with the kind of headlines of the kind of structure of the sermon, if you want to look at that today. And also, I think the children got the worksheets of all the children that the worksheets have.

So there is a kind of vaguely related worksheet for the children who are not in the creche here today. And this is a passage where there is beginning to be a great change in what Luke's emphasis is going to be.

There is a change of direction. Jesus is moving from a kind of very visual ministry in Galilee, a very miracle based ministry where he has done a lot of things, he has done a lot of works.

He has shown himself to be who he is and he is moving now with real focus towards Jerusalem where he must go up and die. And in that intervening period which is about quite a number of chapters from Luke 9 to Luke 19 to kind of 10 chapters, there is a lot more emphasis on what Jesus says.

He has been showing them who he is and now he is wanting to tell them what it all means. And he wants to kind of explain more because the disciples have much to understand.

[ 1 : 29 ]     So there is a change of direction and with that a change of emphasis. At the very beginning of the Gospel, Luke says, I want to tell you about Jesus.

I want to tell you what people have seen and I want to record what he has taught. So there is this kind of dual aspect in Luke, the seeing and the teaching and the way the Gospel split is very clearly made known here.

And we have the actions of Jesus, we have looked at a lot of the miracles. Now we are going to turn towards more of his teaching. And that is a great balance, that is an important balance in our own understanding of the Christian faith.

Because we need both these things in our ongoing walk with Jesus Christ. We need to experience God, don't we? We need to experience his power transforming our hearts and our lives.

We need to know him in a very personal and a very real way in our own lives. The power of redemption, that action of God, not only what he has done in the cross, but how he has applied that to our own hearts.

[ 2 : 42 ]     But then it must be more than just that subjectivity. There must be objective learning so that we learn more about Jesus from his Word and from his truth.

There is the seeing, there is the experiencing and there is the knowing and the teaching that come from God's Word. As usual the gospels and the Bible is very balanced in its emphasis on what is important.

So it has all changed today and he is moving from the visual, the miracle, more, not exclusively, but more towards teaching. Because for the disciples there is a kind of wham, kind of experience they need.

They need a welcome to reality. They need to understand and see what it means to follow Jesus because up till now they have got a lot of misguided ideas as we always do ourselves.

And Jesus wants to draw them on and lead them forward in their faith. They haven't really understood that faith changes someone to the core of their being, to the very, very middle of their being.

[ 3 : 52 ] So that their whole mindset and their whole life direction is changed. And Jesus is beginning to want to show them that. Bringing them to a new reliance and a new understanding of Jesus.

And there is some great little cameo events here which Jesus uses to educate them a bit more. And also us a bit more about what it means to be a Christian.

Because we see in the first event that is recorded that they have a faltering faith. What has happened? Well we have the transfiguration the day before.

Jesus and the three disciples going up onto the mountaintop having a spiritual experience. Great spiritual experience. And then when they come down the mountain to the section that we read, they find that the other disciples who are left there are unable to heal this poor boy.

They are unable to heal this guy who is demon possessed among other things. Faltering faith. They were powerless when confronted with great need. Now you look at this story and you think, well, you know, it's a difficult situation.

[ 5 : 04 ] They are not Jesus. How could they do what Jesus expected of them or this father expected of them? Is it not a bit difficult? But you look back to chapter 9 verse 1.

When Jesus had called the twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons into cured diseases. And He sent them out to preach the gospel of God and to heal the sick.

They were given this specific gift and ability and authority. And yet here they couldn't work that out.

They couldn't use it. Why was that well? We aren't told exactly in some of the other accounts in the gospels which are more expanded accounts of this passage or of this event.

We are given some hints. But it may have been that they just became independent. They thought, oh this is great. I want to say in power is Jesus. And we can go around healing everyone.

[ 6 : 08 ] It's great. Or maybe they became proud with that. Or maybe they looked at this situation and said, well, it's too extreme. This guy is demon possessed. He's also probably an epileptic.

He's deaf and he's mute. Surely Jesus isn't giving us the power to heal someone like that. But in response, of course, it's not told us here, but in the marketing account we're told that Jesus said, well, these only come out through prayer, through dependence on Him.

And that seems to have been the case. That their failure was based around the fact that they weren't reliant still on the delegated power that they'd been given by Jesus to do His work, His kingdom work.

And they'd become independent and therefore failed and couldn't see their faith having a relevance or a power in this poor boy's life.

Now that faltering faith is very common. Very common in my life if it's not in yours. Where we stop relying on the Lord Jesus Christ in that communicative, prayerful, humble, dependent way.

[ 7 : 22 ] When someone came to you last who's not a Christian with their life screwed up and in a complete mess, when did you last have the confidence to offer them Jesus Christ and His healing power?

And say, this is the answer for you, my friend. This is the way forward. Or has our faith become faltering? So we say, I don't think that person could become a Christian. I don't think Christ's big enough to change them.

I don't think I've got a message and a strength of character that can give them that. Or maybe we think we can heal them ourselves by our wisdom or by our thoughts or by our friendship.

And that we don't bring them before God in prayer. We're not reliant on God. We're not seeing our own life being transformed by grace. So we find it hard to believe that He can transform other broken lives, lives that need healing.

And so our faith becomes very self-reliant and very manageable, but faltering in the face of need. And you know, where people are surrounded by need both in ourselves and in those around us, the gospel is a gospel for people in need.

[ 8 : 38 ] And so Jesus is teaching about the importance of coming and relying and continuing to rely on Him. So we have this faltering faith which shows a powerlessness, but also a lack of understanding.

A lack of understanding. You know, Jesus says, oh, unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you here? Bring your son to me. There's a bit of unbelief in the earlier section.

And then He goes on to explain that He's heading towards Jerusalem to die. Son of man is going to be betrayed into hands of men. But they didn't understand.

It was hidden from them so they didn't grasp it and they were afraid to ask. So their faith was a faith which was lack power, but also lacked understanding. There was a mixture of things happening here.

They were hearing Jesus, but they weren't really listening. They were afraid of what Jesus was saying, so maybe they didn't want to ask Him a bit more.

[ 9 : 43 ] What do you mean? They're going to be handed over, betrayed into the hands of men. They're afraid. And also God was intervening.

It was hidden from them. It was complicated and difficult things there, but that all went to make up their lack of understanding.

And our faith will always be looking to learn more and to understand more. And we can often be belighted by the same issues that the disciples had here.

We're afraid of what God says and the consequences of His Lordship. We want to keep the Lord at a distance. We want to keep ourselves away from Him. We're afraid when He talks about death and crucifixion, He talks about self-denial.

And we don't want to hear any more. Or we listen to the Gospel, we can and we can't. But it never permits, I'm going to say a bit more about that in a minute.

[ 10 : 51 ] But sometimes as well, God stops us from hearing because we're not ready yet to have all of truth. There's a gradual learning process that we go through.

And we must all be part of that. God will take us forward at our own speed. We mustn't expect always that God will take everyone the same way and at the same speed with the same experiences.

Some of us might need certain experiences that will open our heart to hear Him more clearly. Because we might not be ready. But we must be sovereignly bow to His sovereignty and be willing to let Him lead us and give us the understanding.

So their faith was faltering. What does Jesus say to these disciples when He meets them? Well He says, verse 44, listen carefully to what I'm about to say.

Now isn't that interesting? Because in the previous chapter if you remember, God said on the top of the mountain, listen carefully to my Son.

[ 12 : 00 ] So God, the Father said it on the mountaintop. And now here's Jesus saying, listen carefully. And I think that kind of does give us a mark of the different sections here.

Moving from actions to the words of Jesus. And God says and now Jesus says, listen carefully. Come close.

He's saying to the disciples, come near. Fellowship with me. Be in contact with me. Do you know what it means literally, listen carefully in the original language around?

It kind of is like, let my word sink into your ears. That's the kind of meaning behind the words. That's the word pictures. Let my truth sink into your ears.

It's a great picture isn't it of sinking down, not just passing through quickly. But He says, listen carefully. Let my words be weighty. Let them sink into our being.

[ 13 : 00 ] And that's what He wants us to be as Christians, people who allow His words to penetrate our life and our will and our being.

And the core of what we are so that we are being saturated with Him. It's sinking in. It's taking effect. It's transforming and changing us.

Listen carefully, He says. So there's this faltering faith, which He says about, listen carefully. Then we go on to the second event of this section, which is an astonishing section, where the disciples are arguing about who's the greatest.

It's embarrassing pride that's being exposed here in this little section. And I think it's great in verse 47 where He says, Jesus, knowing their thoughts. So obviously they had this discussion out of earshot of Jesus, probably because they were embarrassed.

But can you imagine the argument? Who's the greatest? Can you imagine the disciples having that argument? Well, Jesus chose me and James and John to go up the mountain. We saw the transfiguration.

[ 14 : 14 ] We must be the greatest. He chose us. And you guys left behind, well you couldn't even heal that poor boy. So there was all kinds of arguments. We were closest to Jesus.

Well, I'm an intellectual. I'm someone who was first chosen. And they were arguing about who is the greatest.

Embarrassing pride. Now we have to ask if we are that different from the disciples. We often give the poor disciples a hard time. And it's not really fair because I don't know how different we are.

We might not consciously gather together down in the hall after church and in a corner away from the minister or someone else. Right, come on, let's have a... I think I'm the most important person in this church.

I don't think we would be as crass to think like that verbally and publicly, maybe, I hope. But we can intuitively have that kind of sense of gradation that we are more important than other Christians.

[ 15 : 19 ] That we can't be bothered with weak Christians or with immature Christians. And we categorize people. We do all the time. We categorize people. And we put people in different grades spiritually.

And it's kind of like we would do in the office. Like we would do in the world, like we would do in the football park. We grade people and we put ourselves above certain others or maybe sometimes even others above ourselves.

League tables of Christian endeavor and Christian importance. And when we're in cliques in the congregation or when we are unconcerned about others or when we make our own judgments and stay apart from certain types of people in any community or congregation, then that is an unveiling of that same kind of attitude.

What does Jesus say? Well, listen carefully again. Now I'm going to do a little. Well, if I can get a little bit of cooperation. I wonder if maybe Ross, would Ross come up with me and maybe Jerry?

He'd come up in front. I'm going to ask you some questions. Come here. Come here as well. It'll be nothing difficult.

[ 16 : 40 ] Just come up. Now you're two great guys, aren't you? I'm going to ask one or two questions. Are you an elder in the church?

I don't know. You're not actually an elder. You're not an elder either, are you? Have you ever preached here? No. Have you ever gone downstairs and made the tea for everyone?

No. Do you lead a house group? No. Do you teach in the Sunday school? No. This is easy, isn't it?

Do you do all the stuff up at the top there with all the sound system? No. So really you're not very important in this church, are you? No, that's not right at all, is it?

Because what I want to say to you today is that you, James, and you, Ross, are just as important as Billy Graham over there or me or Allie or anyone else.

[ 17 : 41 ] Just because you don't have a special job up the front or you're not a leader in the church doesn't make you any less than anyone else. You're just as important. It doesn't mean that you can swing from the lights, okay?

Because not even Billy Graham's allowed to swing from the lights. Okay? But you are as important as anyone else here in this church. And Jesus loves you just as much as he loves anyone else.

And this church belongs to you as much as it does to anyone else, okay? So never think you're unimportant. And never think that this isn't your home among all these people here because we're all the same together, aren't we?

Isn't that right? And don't ever think that anyone looks down on you here. Okay? Because this is your home and your church. Okay? Thanks for coming up to the front.

Is that good? I'll give you a sweet layer on. Because really that is what Jesus is teaching.

[ 18 : 46 ] He gets a little child before them, doesn't he? And takes him and says, whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me and who is the greatest among you all.

He is the greatest. And that's what Jesus is saying. He's saying when we come together as a people, when we are a community of believers, we don't have this gradation. We don't have this greatest and the least.

We have the children. And we have the grown-ups. And we have the educated and the uneducated. And we have the old and the young.

And we are one in Christ. And he's saying that there's unity in Christ and that there's equality. From our point of view, we are equal in Christ. And that we don't look down on different people.

And we don't have that embarrassing pride. We're not like the world in the way that we think, or at least we want to be. And he's saying that that is important. That children are important.

[ 19 : 50 ] As children in church, you know we spiritualize it all the time. Yeah, humble like a little child. Of course that's true. But there's the reality, the objective reality, of Jesus bringing a child and saying, children matter.

Because they're the least, you know, children should be seen and not heard or whatever the proverb was. But children matter. Children are important. They're the least in people's thinking.

You know, they're not educated and they're not mature. And they do things that are embarrassing. But they belong. And there's a practicalness about that teaching.

The immature and the mature together in Christ are one. But also there is another teaching which is that Jesus makes clear that the greatest from his point of view, and he's allowed to make judgments because he's God, is the servant.

The one who is working grace out without a fanfare. The one who isn't receiving the plaudits, who isn't up the front necessarily, who is faithful in a way that God sees.

[ 21 : 06 ] And God says they're the greatest. The ones who serve humbly and understand what grace is about in relation to other people serving.

So he's teaching there about a very radical way of living, isn't he? As a congregation for us and also in our lives. And then we conclude briefly with these disciples and their misguided zeal.

Now let's not be too harsh on them because they're very zealous in these last two little sections. But it is Jesus tells us it's misguided. And this misguided zeal, it straddles the two sections of the book that we've looked at.

There's this man who is casting out demons and he's not one of them. And the disciples want him stopped.

And then there's the Samaritans. And that kind of spans the divide of the book. So we're kind of spanning that divide. But in both cases there's misguided zeal.

[ 22 : 15 ] And the first is a misguided zeal based on intolerance. They're intolerant of other believers. Master said, John, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he's not one of us.

Do not stop him, Jesus said, for whoever is not against you is for you. The faltering faith led to this pride and I suppose it leads on to a jealousy in others.

He's not one of us. He's not one of us. He's not one of us. That's what they say. He's not one of us. Yet he healed demons from people.

It's interesting, isn't it, that this man who John is jealous of is able to do what the disciples in the earlier story are not able to do. That is to heal demons, someone whose demon possessed.

So this guy, who we don't know anything about, who we believe was a believer because he did it in Jesus' name and because he was successful in what he was doing, he is obedient and John is jealous of him.

[ 23 : 25 ] He's not one of us. As if the disciples in their zeal had to kind of claim the exclusive rights to knowing Jesus and what following Jesus was about.

Now we need to be careful. We don't know very much about this section. But surely within what Jesus is saying here in his response for whoever is not against you is for you, we need to be aware of being intolerant of others who are, as we say, not one of us.

Who don't think exactly the same as us as Christians who seem to be being successful or spiritually blessed by God and yet why they don't do things the right way.

They have the wrong pedigree, they are the wrong type of Christian. They don't understand how we understand things. So we'll not associate with them. And our mantra will often be whoever is not against us.

Which is not Jesus' mantra. We often say, whoever is not exactly like us must be wrong and must be dealt with.

[ 24 : 36 ] So we stop them. We're living in an age where we cannot think like that anymore. We're living in an age of secularism and godlessness.

And we can't stand on our own little private understanding of God as a denomination and not associate with any other Christian denominations or peoples because they're not one of us.

Because they're not exactly like us. Because they're not reformed enough or free church enough or not free church enough, whatever the case may be, whatever we angle we're coming from.

In the Lord's name, seeing the Lord's blessing. We're to have Christ's attitude, whoever is not against us as far as to cooperate and be tolerant and recognize the greatness of God and that we don't have exclusive rights to Him.

Doesn't mean we're not faithful. Doesn't mean we don't have a structured set of understandings that we believe and cling to and hold onto. Of course we do.

[ 25 : 47 ] But it's about our attitude to other believers who are not exactly like us. Intolerance of other believers and also very interestingly, judgmental spirit towards the world.

From verse 51, you know Jesus goes towards Samaria and the people don't welcome Him and so James and John say, Lord you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them.

Jesus rebuked them. So not only are they intolerant within the Christian community as it were, but they're also judgmental of the world. Yes, of course they're defending Christ.

They're hurt that Christ has been rejected by the Samaritan people. But they're ready, they're too ready to condemn. They're too ready to burn the Samaritan boat so that they will not hear the gospel.

They're quick to take God's place of judgment on these people. Now the Samaritans here, they probably weren't rejecting the gospel. They weren't rejecting the good news. They weren't rejecting Jesus as a Savior.

[ 26 : 50 ] It was probably a careless, vague, ethnic rejection of Jesus as a Jew because they didn't generally associate with Jews and if they heard they were going up to Jerusalem, well you find your own place to stay.

That doesn't make it right. But Jesus came not to condemn, but to save. Christ rebukes the disciples for trying to take His place of judgment.

And we must remember that ourselves. We can be quick to condemn the unbelieving world and tut, tut from a distance or call down God's judgment and fire upon.

God hasn't done that so why should we be calling on Him to do it? God is patient not wanting anyone to perish. Why should we be so keen to do so sometimes?

I've written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Not at all, Paul says, meaning the people of the world who are immoral or greedy and swindlers or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave the world.

[ 28 : 01 ] He doesn't want us not to associate with people in the world even though they are godless. He wants us to bring them hope and grace and the glory of the gospel. He wants us to share the good news of Jesus with them.

Judgment is God's strange work. Now I'm just going to close and I don't have time really to say what I want to say here but I want to finish just with a minute each just for two brief cameos here.

Looking at the whole picture. One of John and one of Jesus. It's very interesting in this section what John said about John. He's been on the mountaintop previously.

He's seen the glory. He's seen God in his glory. But yet he can't see the cross. Now any mature believer when asked about John, they will say, Who's John? And someone who knows the Bible and knows about the Bible will say, It's John, the apostle of love.

That's what they'll say because he's written five books of the Bible and he's known as the apostle of love, the one who was close to his saviour. And yet at the moment he's still John, a son of thunder.

[ 29 : 14 ] There's not much love about him yet in this passage, is there? He's possibly been the middle of this argument about who's the greatest. It's him that wants the other man who's casting out demons to be stopped.

He's also the one that wants to bring down thunder, fire from heaven. He's not quite the apostle of love yet. He's a work in progress. He's still a son of thunder. Much spiritual surgery to do.

He's zealous, yes, but he's exclusivist. He's harsh and he's proud. And these are signs of spiritual immaturity. Sometimes we make them signs of maturity.

You know, someone who is maybe exclusivist and harsh, immature. But he'll listen, listen carefully. He let God's word soak into his being.

And he became the apostle of love. Be encouraged by that. We're works in progress, every one of us. And we're probably all at different stages. Don't despair because we're not as mature or as godly as we would like to be or as you see in others.

[ 30 : 22 ] But listen to God. Let Him work in us. Let Him mold us. John is a work in progress, so are we. But then Christ, Christ hears the light of the world and He's so unique and He is so glorious and great, you know.

When He comes down from that mountaintop experience and the strength that God, the Father gives Him. He sees this mess and He says, oh, unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you here?

He's just embroiled in the mess and the darkness and the powerlessness and the hopelessness of people's condition, even those who have faith.

And He just longs for the perfection of heaven yet. He doesn't return there. He's compassionate. He heals gloriously this poor boy.

He embraces the child, the little child and uses that child as an example of salvation and of Christian maturity and of Christian attitude.

[ 31 : 33 ] He longs for the salvation of others. He's not judgmental. He's not narrow-minded. And while He has this great spiritual beauty in this passage, which is very different sometimes from how we are in our lives, His great spiritual beauty, great longing for souls, He's also single-minded, isn't He?

The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. And this is what this section is all about. You know, it starts there in verse 51, He resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

No one was going to deflect Him from that place of single-mindedness. He was going to go to the cross. Whatever else would be said, however the disciples would try and deflect Him from that, however much opposition He would face, however much temptation He would be whispered in His ear about going different ways, He was going the way of the cross.



Great spiritual beauty, deep, deep single-mindedness because He knew that the cross is the only hope for us. It's the only way that we can know in His death life for ourselves.

And we must thank God for Jesus that He was so single-minded in going to the cross. You know, nothing would deflect Him.

[ 32 : 59 ] This is God the Son. And so if we sit here today and say, well, Jesus is lovely but He didn't need to go to the cross. Or I don't think I need the work of the cross that Jesus has achieved.

I think the cross is peripheral to an understanding of God. I think there's a better way. Then we are putting ourselves above God the Son and saying, you don't really know.

And thank you but I don't really need you. Jesus says, listen carefully. Let my life and my words sink deep into your soul.

Let me be Lord of your life. Let my death and resurrection not be in vain for you. Believe and be transformed and see that you are a work in progress and being transformed by His power and by His grace.

Amen. We'll bow our heads very briefly together and pray, to God here as we ask, as we seek to offer you our listening capabilities but much more than that, our very wills, as we seek to give you our lives.

[ 34 : 31 ] And the great knowledge that you don't leave us to live this life on our own and provide all the resources, all the power, all the life, all that we need to be transformed by you.

Help us then we pray to know that in our lives as a people and as individuals for Jesus' sake. Amen.