

Commentary on Luke 9:28-62

The Transfiguration (9:28-36)

Eight days after Peter's confession of who Jesus is and Jesus' first prediction of what the Messiah must do, Luke picks up the story where Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray. As learned in the last lesson, when Luke mentions Jesus praying, it signals a big divine revelation.

In verse 29, we read that "Jesus' face altered, and his clothes became dazzling white." Luke's language here infers that there were changes to Jesus' appearance, not His nature, and that this change in appearance is now in accord with His divine nature.¹ In Scripture, when clothes are referred to as brilliant, it often signifies heavenly beings (Daniel 10:5; Matthew 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev. 3:4; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13; 14:14; 19:14).²

In verse 30, Moses and Elijah appear and are conversing with Jesus. Some commentators state that the appearance of both Moses and Elijah together with Jesus represent Jesus as the fulfillment of both the Law (Moses) and Prophets (Elijah). However, in Deuteronomy 18:15,18, Moses refers to himself as a prophet and speaks of another prophet who is to come that to whom the people must listen. Likewise, Elijah goes up to Mount Sinai (which was symbolic of the law) to receive the word of God (1 Kings 19:1-18). Moses and Elijah fulfill both roles as the Law and the Prophets. In verse 31, they converse with Jesus about His departure, or exodus, which Jesus is to accomplish in Jerusalem. The use of the word "exodus" ties together the Israelite's exodus out of bondage in Egypt to Jesus' upcoming death and resurrection in Jerusalem - an act which will deliver all of God's people out of the bondage of sin and death.

During this conversation, the disciples are in a deep sleep. When they awaken and witness what is going on, Peter states that they should build tabernacles (or tents) for the three of them - Jesus, Moses and Elijah. This proclamation shows Peter's desire to commemorate what is happening. They were witnessing Jesus' glory and by building a tabernacle, they would have a place where God's presence dwells (Exodus 40:34-35). That God would once again tabernacle with His people was a deep desire held by the Jewish people.³ After Peter's proclamation to build tabernacles, Luke states of Peter "not knowing what he said." This could be read to imply that Peter was merely bumbling about like a Galilean fisherman trying to fill up the space in the room with words. Or rather, in verse 34, we see Peter's proclamation come to fruition. "Before Peter's very eyes God's dwelling with humanity is present, for Jesus is the new tabernacle of God...the incarnation of God's glory!"⁴

In verse 34, a voice from heaven proclaims three things. First, "This is my Son." Here God is telling the disciples who Jesus is. Second, "whom I have chosen." Jesus has been divinely

¹ Edwards, James, The Gospel According to Luke Commentary (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids:2015), p. 281

² Edwards, p. 281

³ Edwards, p. 283

⁴ Edwards, p. 284

appointed by God to fulfill His role as the Messiah (Isaiah 42:1). Third, “listen to Him!” This is a direct command from God to the disciples. In verse 36, Luke notes that the disciples did not speak of this event “in those days.” However, Peter does mention this event in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

The Demon Possessed Son (9:37-43a)

The next day, upon coming down the mountain, Jesus, Peter, James, and John are met by a crowd which includes a man who has asked the disciples to cast out the demon from his only son. There is a longer parallel account of this in Mark 9:14-29. The father gives a vivid account of what happens: the spirit seizes the son, throws him into convulsions and makes him foam at the mouth. The spirit scarcely ever leaves him. The father states that he asked the disciples to cast out the demon, but they could not. It should be noted that in this crowd were 9 of the apostles whom Jesus had given authority to cast out demons in Luke 9:1.

Jesus responds to the father's request by stating in verse 41, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?” The generation Jesus is referring to is the people who are present that did not show enough faith for the healing of the boy. Jesus' questioning “How long?” shows His concern for the lack of faith and purpose for which He speaks. The people were seeing Jesus' miracles as wonders, but not as signs of God's presence and power.⁵ Jesus, however, does not seem to include the father in this statement as He asks the father to bring the son to Him and rebukes the spirit which has been violently tormenting him. Upon healing him, Jesus gives the son back to his father. Here we see another example of Jesus' divine power which leads to physical healing which leads to restored relationships (Luke 4:38-39; 5:12-16; 5:17-26; 7:11-15; 8:26-39; 8:42-48; 8:53-56).

Jesus' Second Prediction (9:43b-45)

While the disciples are still marveling at Jesus healing the demon possessed son, He urges them to “let the words I'm about to say really sink in” (vs. 43b). He proclaims that the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. It's interesting to note the play on words here in the Hebrew: the Son of Man (ben ha-adam) is going to be delivered into the hands of men (bene adam). Edwards states, “The man who lives among men will be rejected by them.”⁶ The disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying (it was hidden from them like the meaning of a parable!) and are too afraid to ask Jesus what this means. This is a reluctance to come to Jesus and ask when He stated in Luke 8:10 that the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven had been given to them (to ask Jesus about things they don't understand!).

⁵ Morris, Leon, The Gospel According to Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentary (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove: 1999), p. 191

⁶ Edwards, p. 289

Who is the Greatest? (9:46-48)

On the road to Jerusalem, the Disciples are arguing about who is the greatest. From the text, we can infer that Jesus didn't hear this argument, but He knew their thoughts and decided to answer their question for them. Taking a child, He states that whoever accepts this child accepts Him and whoever accepts Him (Jesus) accepts the one who sent Him. Unlike today where we tend to fawn over children, children were seen as a necessary yet inconvenient part of society in Jesus' day. They could not yet work and contribute to the labor force. In the Ancient Near East social strata, children were "the least among you." Jesus is stating that these "least, lost, lonely and left out"- like the child Jesus just received - are the very ones whom followers of Jesus should also receive. In Jesus' upside-down Kingdom, the way to greatness is to receive the powerless, the least, and the insignificant.

Anyone Not Against Us is For Us (Luke 9:49-50)

In verse 49, John reports to Jesus that the disciples saw a man casting out a demon in Jesus' name and that they attempted to stop him because the man was not "one of us." Instead of getting the expected pat on the back, Jesus rebukes John for his entitled, cliquish comment and commands him not to stop this person who is doing the Lord's work. Jesus states that whoever is not against them and is doing the work of advancing God's kingdom (casting out demons), is for God's kingdom. Edwards states, "Making known the name of Jesus is more important than who makes it known."⁷

Setting His Face Towards Jerusalem

In Luke 9:51, Luke states that "Jesus resolutely set his face towards Jerusalem." This statement marks a shift in the narrative so far (Luke 1:1-9:50). Scholars refer to this section of Luke (9:51-18:34) as the traveling narrative.

Jesus and his disciples are on the road for Jerusalem where Jesus has predicted what will happen to him. We see this "setting his face" language in Isaiah 50: 7 where He speaks of the suffering servant:

*But the Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have **set my face** like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*

Jesus is resolutely setting His face toward Jerusalem and what is to come: betrayal, suffering, death, and resurrection. The journey toward Jerusalem will have different purposes for Jesus and His disciples. For Jesus, it will be a journey to fulfill His mission as

⁷ Edwards, p. 292

the suffering servant. For the disciples, it will be a continued school of discipleship in becoming faithful witnesses of all they have and will see of Jesus.

Samaritan Rejection (Luke 9:52-56)

Right off the bat we see Jesus and His disciples journeying towards Samaria. Jesus sends His disciples ahead of Him to prepare the way. In verse 53, we read that Jesus is rejected because His face is set toward Jerusalem. Upon hearing this, James and John (aka the “Sons of Thunder”) ask Jesus if He’d like for them to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans to destroy them. This language is like 2 Kings 1:10-12, when Elijah calls down fire from heaven to destroy King Ahaziah’s soldiers. There are similar Old Testament texts about the Lord going ahead of the Israelites into Canaan to destroy them (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 7:20; Joshua 24:12). Animosity between Samaria and Israel was strong. It was not uncommon for Samaritans to refuse to accommodate Jews traveling through this region and that they would at times murder innocent Jewish travelers along the road. Given this history, along with James and John’s thunderous personalities, their question to Jesus is understandable.

Jesus, however, rebukes their response. He will not set the precedence of responding in violence, but instead living out the very things He preached in the Sermon on the Plain about loving your enemies and those who persecute you (Luke 6:27-31).

The Cost of Following Jesus (Luke 9:57-62)

In this section of text, we see three anonymous interactions between Jesus and His would be followers. These interactions highlight discipleship thus translating Jesus’ earlier teaching in Luke 9:23.

In the first interaction, the follower states they will follow Jesus wherever He goes. Jesus responds that foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. Edwards states “Animals can adapt to nature, but the Son of Man has not been sent into the world to adapt to it.”⁸ In Jesus’ upside-down Kingdom, our comfort isn’t in the homes and shelters we build for ourselves and may feel entitled to have, but rather remembering that this world is not our home. Our true home is in the coming Kingdom of God.

In the second interaction, the follower states that he will follow Jesus, but he must first go bury his father. In ancient Greek and Jewish culture, proper burials were an act of honor and love for the deceased. These funeral rituals would last several days and involve wailing, mourners, and lots of crying. There were specific instructions in the Torah on proper burials (Exodus 18:20). Burials took precedence over the rhythms of everyday life including the study of the law, the Passover sacrifice and services for circumcision.⁹ Based on his comment, it can be assumed that the man’s father had not yet died. Jesus’ response

⁸ Edwards, p. 299-300

⁹ Morris, p. 197

shows that the affairs of the Kingdom cannot be delayed, and that the authority of the Kingdom of God has authority over Mosaic authority.

Finally, in the third interaction, we see the follower state that he would follow Jesus, but first he needed to go back and say goodbye to his family. There was a precedent for this type of discipleship in 1Kings 19:19-21 when Elisha goes and says goodbye to his family before going off with Elijah. Jesus states that no one who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is fit for the Kingdom. Jesus is stating that the work of the Kingdom is here and urgent! You can't follow Jesus on your terms or put it off until it is convenient for you.

Jesus' Upside-Down Kingdom

What do we learn about Jesus' upside-down Kingdom in these passages?

1) Through the transfiguration, we witness that Jesus is the new tabernacle of God - the incarnation of God's glory. John 1:14 states "The word became flesh and dwelled (tabernacled) among us." Jesus is a glorious King who dwells among His people in fullness and glory. Though, like Peter, James, and John, we may not fully understand the magnitude of this: we have an incarnational King.

2) We are reminded that King Jesus is a compassionate king who seeks to use His divine power to bring physical healing and restored relationships. His power, authority, and ability to do these things do not rest in our power or faith to believe them. He will bring them to fruition according to His timing and pleasure.

3) Greatness is found not be elevating yourself above others, but by receiving the least, the lost, the lonely and the left out.

4) The work of the Kingdom is urgent. There is no time for entitlement, privilege, and exclusion of those who are in the family of God doing His Kingdom work. Making known the name of Jesus is greater than the one who makes it known.

5) Discipleship in the upside-down Kingdom lays claim on three key aspects and obligations of each of our lives: property, family, and work. We cannot follow Jesus in any of these areas on our terms. "No reasons, no matter how worthy, can compensate for failing to accept the invitation to discipleship."¹⁰ This is yet a reminder of what Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 9: 25

"For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world (property, family, work) and loses or forfeits himself?"

Following Jesus in His upside-down Kingdom is an invitation to daily deny and die to ourselves: our agendas, our schedules, our control. Yet, King Jesus is showing us He is a good, loving, and just King who is worthy of our trust to yield to His leadership and call on our lives.

¹⁰ Edwards, p. 302

Discussion Questions Luke 10:1-24

Observation

1. What are Jesus' instructions to the 72 (v.1-12)?
2. What do you know about the cities mentioned in v.13-15 (Chorazin, Bethsaida, Tyre, Sidon, Capernaum)? Where are these cities mentioned in other places in Scripture?
3. What does Jesus tell the 72 when they return to Him (v.17-20)?
4. What do you notice about Jesus' prayer in v. 21-22?

Interpretation

5. Compare and contrast Jesus instructions to the 72 (10:1-12) to His instructions to the Twelve (9:1-6). What similarities do you find? What differences are there? Why are some of the instructions the same? Why are some different?
6. What is(are) the connection(s) between peace and hospitality (v. 5-6)? What is Jesus saying here?

7. Why does Jesus give His disciples (and us!) the warning in v. 16?

8. As we've learned in the last couple of lessons, when Jesus prays, it signals a divine revelation. What do we learn about Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father (v.21-22)?

Application

9. Once again, we find Jesus commissioning His disciples to carry out the work of His upside-down Kingdom. What encouragement, comfort and conviction do you find in these verses (1-12)?

10. Describe a time when you have experienced joy in the Lord as a result of the work/ministry He has called you to carry out. How does it make you feel when you read v.21 and know that Jesus rejoices in the work of His disciples?

11. Think of a time when you have experienced Jesus' protection and victory over evil. How does v.19 give you confidence in Jesus' promises and protection?

12. Take a minute and examine Jesus' prayer in v.21-22. How does His prayer offer you encouragement and strength as His disciple? What do you learn about how to pray from these verses?