

VALLEY LIFE

LUKE 9:37-45

M.I. IF WE WANT TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THROUGH LIFE, WE MUST HAVE A REALISTIC VIEW ABOUT WHAT EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIVING IS ALL ABOUT.

I. STRUGGLING WITH WEAKNESS (VS 37-40)

We Have A Powerful Enemy That Wants To Destroy Us.

- A. NOSTALGIA (37)
- B. THE ENEMY (38-39)
- C. POWERLESSNESS (40)

II. STRUGGLING WITH FAITH (VS 41-43a)

It Takes A Great Deal Of Practice To Live In Faith.

- A. FAILURE (41)
- B. REALITY (42)
- C. GOD (43a)

III. STRUGGLING WITH TRUTH (VS 43b-45)

Many Christians Don't Like To Acknowledge That Living In Faith Will Include A Great Deal Of Suffering.

- A. LOOKING BELOW THE SURFACE (43b-44a)
- B. THE CHRISTIAN PATH (44b)
- C. FEAR (45)

Valley Life

Luke 9:37-40

From our last meeting, we left Jesus and the disciples up on top of a mountain where they had this incredible supernatural experience. They were praying, when all of a sudden Jesus was transformed before their eyes. His inner glory burned through His skin and clothes. They saw Him for Who He was. Elijah and Moses came from heaven and appeared alongside of Jesus. To top it all off, God the Father descended upon the mountain and spoke to them making sure there was no doubt that Jesus was God in the flesh and was doing the Father's will on earth. God made it crystal clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah and He was there to redeem us from our sins. After that kind of prayer meeting, how could Peter, James, and John go back to living a normal, everyday, boring life?

For those of us who have been Christians for a long time, we have all experienced a mountaintop experience where we felt the presence of God so powerfully, that we never wanted to let that experience go. In fact many Christians make the mistake of trying to continually go back to that time in their lives or try to make it happen again. Everyone wants to live on the mountaintop but as Jesus demonstrates in this morning's text, the majority of life is lived in the valleys of life. If we think that the Christian life is made up of one high experience after another, then we will be disappointed. In fact Jesus promised us tribulation in this life. Wrong expectations can get us in trouble or at least embarrassment.

For example, I was invited to one of our member's mother's ninety-ninth-birthday. As I was preparing to leave I said, "Now Ms Sarah, I hope that one year from this very day, I will be able to come and celebrate your one-hundredth birthday with you."

She looked me over for a minute and said, "I don't see why not! Besides being fat, you look fairly healthy to me!"

Obviously Ms Sarah was expecting to be there at her one-hundredth-birthday. My expectations may have been off.

Did you ever stop and think about what you expect out of life as a Christian? Most of us who have been raised in the United States expect life to go well if we place our faith in Jesus and live by the rules. Somehow we tend to romanticize those mountaintop experiences we have had in our spiritual lives. However, Christianity is meant to be lived out in our everyday lives. There were many times when I was just a pastor on staff that we used to take the board on retreat. The elders would cry, repent, pray, and promise to live better lives. Almost every year the senior pastor would ask me, "What do you think of all this? Isn't this wonderful?" My answer was always the same, "Let me see how they act at the next board meeting."

Then I will tell you what I think about this experience.” In other words, it seems to me that it is easy to get caught up in the moment when we are away from everything. But Christianity is meant to be lived out in our work-a-day-world. The main idea of this morning’s text is this. **IF WE WANT TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THROUGH LIFE, WE MUST HAVE A REALISTIC VIEW ABOUT WHAT EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIVING IS ALL ABOUT.** The disciples had a hard time grasping this concept and so do we. The Christian life is filled with everyday struggles.

STRUGGLING WITH WEAKNESS (VS 37-40)

In verses 37-40 we see the disciples struggling with weakness. **WE HAVE A POWERFUL ENEMY THAT WANTS TO DESTROY US.** We often forget that and underestimate the power of the devil. Listen to what the Apostle Peter said about the devil:

“8 Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. 9 Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are” (1 Peter 5:8-9 / NLT).

Jesus said that the devil comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). It will be fatal for us if we ignore that fact or underestimate the devil’s power or mal-intent.

The first thing we struggle with as Christians is described in verse 37 as nostalgia. It seems as if Jesus, Peter, James, and John stayed up on the mountain all night after this incredible spiritual experience. But alas, Jesus had a mission to fulfill and it was not going to take place on the mountaintop. It was going to take place in Jerusalem. The disciples did not want the experience to end. Peter wanted to build three tents. However, life is not lived on the mountaintop but in the valleys. These spiritual highs are special gifts from God. The temptation is for us to want to always go back to or replicate these experiences. The disciples still have no idea how life is going to change for them. But Jesus now leads them down the mountain and immediately they are met by the mundane everyday concerns of life. A large crowd is waiting to meet them.

In verses 38-39 they are reminded that the enemy is always lurking behind the scenes waiting for someone to destroy. A man in the crowd calls out to Jesus, “... I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only child.” Again we run into a parent who has only one child. The widow from Nain had an only son who was dead and already being carried out of town in the funeral procession when Jesus brought him back to life and gave him back to his mother. Jairus, the local synagogue leader, had only one child. She was a little girl at the brink of death. In fact most people thought she was dead. Jesus brought her back to life and gave her back to her father. Let’s never forget that Jesus is the One and Only Unique Son of God the Father.

And here we meet another man whose only child is being tormented. Can Jesus help? The boy’s father hopes so and begs Jesus to help him. Here is the problem.

At no particular time, the evil spirit grabs him and the boy screams. The spirit throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. Look at the father's words, "It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him." Remember, that's what we were warned of earlier. Our enemy the devil is waiting for an opportunity to destroy us.

Let me comment on the fact that this looks a lot like modern day epilepsy. It is interesting that in verse 42 Luke uses the word *iaomai* in Greek which means to heal. This could certainly be a combination of epilepsy combined with evil spirits using the disease to torment the boy and perhaps even kill him. Jesus will deal with the physical and spiritual parts of this torment. But the evil spirit is trying to destroy this boy and his family.

Satan is trying to destroy people in our culture with sexual immorality, drugs, alcohol, pride, arrogance, and rejection of Jesus. Satan continues to try to destroy us with fear and unbelief.

Verse 40 describes the struggle we have with experiencing powerlessness to have victory of Satan all the time. The man has already begged the other 9 Apostles and perhaps other disciples who were present with the man and his boy while Jesus was up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John. In this incident, the impotence of the disciples will be compared to the power of Jesus. Sometimes, oftentimes, we find ourselves trying to do ministry on our own power, with our own talents, our own abilities, and our own ideas.

I want to remind us of another incident where someone was on the mountaintop experience this incredible communion with God while at the bottom of the mountain, people were failing miserably in the valley. While Moses was at the top of Mt. Sinai getting the Ten Commandments, the Hebrews were down in the valley worshipping a golden calf.

We should be careful to remember that if we are fortunate enough to have a mountaintop experience with God, we must remember that we must live out the lessons learned there down to the valley of our everyday lives.

Look, we are going to have mountaintop experiences where we think we are so close to God that nothing can harm us in any way. We think there is nothing that could ever come between God and us. On the other hand, most of our lives will be lived in the valleys of everyday life. Here we tend to forget that God is with us here as well as on top of the mountain. Because we forget that God is with us, we often find ourselves being tempted with sin, giving in to sin, and struggling to overcome it and defeat it. The next section will give us more insight into this struggle.

The point here is that since we are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, we will always struggle in this life. We struggle with romanticizing the past. We struggle with Satan, and we struggle with our inability to conquer sin. WE HAVE A POWERFUL ENEMY THAT WANTS TO DESTROY US.

STRUGGLING WITH FAITH (VS 41-43A)

In this next section, we will see how we will often find ourselves struggling with faith as described in verse 41 through the first half of verse 43. Here we will learn that IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF PRACTICE TO LIVE IN FAITH. It's easy to talk about living in faith. It's easy to talk theology and quote Scripture. However, it's not so easy to live and walk in faith. Since we all seem to fall down, it seems that Jesus could be talking about our failure as well as the disciples' in verse 41. It seems as if the remaining 9 Apostles and perhaps a group of other disciples who were following Jesus failed at casting out the demon that was tormenting this boy. After the boy's father begged Jesus to heal his boy and explained to Jesus that the disciples could not cast out the demon, Jesus does not rebuke the father or the boy. He rebukes the disciples. When you talk to faith healers today or people who deal with exorcisms, when a person is not healed, they almost always blame it on a lack of faith on the part of the victim. Jesus never does that. The lack of faith rests with the disciples of Jesus, not the boy or his father.

Again, we have become so comfortable doing church, I think that Jesus could get up, leave, and we would never know the difference. Jesus is the One Who makes ministry happen, not us. When we get to the point where we start doing things without first listening to God, we will experience failure. And with that failure will come rebuke. Notice that Jesus rebuked the disciples and then He will rebuke the evil spirit. When we underestimate the power of evil or overestimate our own power, we set ourselves for failure and Jesus' rebuke.

Verse 42 is sort of a microcosm of reality in Christ. I'd like to slow down a little bit and invite us to look at this verse as a visual demonstration of Jesus' upcoming mission and our life as followers of Jesus. Luke informs us that as the boy was coming to Jesus, the demon attacked him. I have noticed over the years that when someone decides to come to Jesus, the evil one throws up all sorts of roadblocks. For example, if a person has come to realize there are demonic strongholds that have him or her, and decide to come for help, the demons will start to work overtime convincing the person that this is just stupid nonsense. The person may face many obstacles in getting to the appointment. When people start to seriously think about giving their lives to Christ, again the devil will throw up all sorts of distractions. When people think about giving their lives to Christ, the devil will try and convince the person that being a Christian will suck all the joy and fun out of his or her life. The devil will try and convince us that God wants us to be unhappy and live boring lives. Please be aware of this. When we witness to people, we need to keep them in prayer because Satan wants to stop them. We should pray protection for them and that God speak to them with His Holy Spirit. I know I often forget this. It is a fact that as people come to Jesus, they will meet resistance from the evil one. As Jesus continued to march towards His destiny at the cross, He experienced betrayal, abandonment, and didn't get much support from His friends.

Look what the devil's goal is for each one of us. Luke informs us that the demon threw the boy to the ground. This is a very graphic word. It literally means to knock a person down like a boxer or a wrestler. It is a violent word. The goal of

Satan is to knock us down and destroy our walk with God. Satan knows he cannot defeat Jesus. He knows he cannot have our souls. He tries to defeat our successful walk with Christ. We are being constantly knocked down by the devil. Jesus will be publicly humiliated. He will be tortured. He will be knocked down time and time again. I want you all to remember this. In the Christian life it doesn't matter how many times you get knocked down. What matters is how many times you get up. We must always have the attitude that we will get up the number of times Satan knocks us down ... plus one.

Jesus then rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. As I said earlier, Luke uses the word for healing rather than the casting out of a demon. Jesus healed this boy, made him whole, and gave him back to his father. This father received his boy back healthy and whole. Jesus was knocked down over and over again by Satan. Ultimately Satan took his best shot. Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried. That was the best Satan could do. However, on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. He got up again. He defeated Satan once and for all. Every time we get knocked down by Satan we need to turn our eyes towards Jesus and get up one more time by the power of the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. That is an expectation of what reality looks like for the Christian.

But that's the stuff Christian testimonies are made of. The first half of verse 43 describes how people respond to the power of God. If we seriously pursue holiness, people will notice how God is changing us. The crowds were totally amazed at the power of Jesus. History has been totally amazed at the resurrection of Jesus. People will be totally amazed at how God can change our attitudes, our thoughts, and our behaviors. A proper expectation of how we will live out our faith is that we will often struggle with failure, we will struggle with the realities of the Christian life, and we will struggle with allowing God's power to make us mold us into who He wants us to be. One characteristic of the Christian life is this. **IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF PRACTICE TO LIVE IN FAITH.**

STRUGGLING WITH TRUTH (VS 43B-45)

We have seen that we often have to struggle with our weakness and with our faith. In the second half of verse 43 through verse 45 we will see that we will often find ourselves struggling with the truth. **MANY CHRISTIANS DON'T LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT LIVING IN FAITH WILL INCLUDE A GREAT DEAL OF SUFFERING.**

I think this attitude tends to take root in countries where Christians are not being persecuted. Let me give you a great example. In the United States where we do not suffer for being Christians, many Christians believe that we will be raptured before the final tribulation period at the end of time. They believe we will be taken out of this world before the antichrist makes his appearance. This is a very interesting view. However, this view is not widely accepted in countries where people are suffering, being persecuted, and being killed for their faith in Christ. We would have been hard pressed to convince Christians in China that were arrested, beaten, tortured, jailed, and killed under Mao Tse Tung that they would be raptured

before the tribulation. And we would have an even harder time convincing them that Mao was not the Antichrist.

The same goes for Christians suffering in Muslim countries. Please track this carefully. The crowds are standing in amazement at the greatness of God and the power of Jesus. But in the second half of verse 43 and the first half of verse 44, we are invited to look below the surface. As Christians, Jesus wants us to look beyond the obvious. Jesus' interaction with this boy was a visual demonstration of His upcoming appointment with destiny in Jerusalem. Further it is a description of how life will be for us if we choose to follow Him. Remember, He told His disciples that if they wanted to be His followers, they would have to lay down their lives, pick up their crosses, and follow Him. Jesus promised us that we would win in the end. However, the way to glory was through the cross for Him and it is way for us. Listen to what Jesus promised:

“33I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world” (John 16:33 / NRSV)!

Jesus has been preparing the disciples for quite a while. If we read and study the Bible while journeying with Christ in our everyday life, it should become evident that Jesus has chosen the way of the cross for Himself and for all that want to call themselves followers of Jesus. Yes Jesus promised us that we will indeed face persecution and sorrows of all kind. But with that always comes two more promises. First, if we continue to stay connected to Him, we will be able to experience peace through all situations. Secondly, glory waits for us on the other side. Jesus overcame death by His resurrection. He promises us the same if we remain faithful to Him through suffering, sorrow, and persecutions.

If we don't get it yet, Jesus will make it crystal clear in the second half of verse 44 what the Christian path is like. Jesus got their attention, told them to listen up, and then dropped this bomb, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.” Not only is Jesus going to suffer and die, He is going to be betrayed. Betrayal usually comes at the hand of a close friend. We know that it will be Judas but the disciples don't know. Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples. They saw Him minister to people and teach people with the authority and power of God. What could make someone turn on a friend and betray them?

In verse 45, we can see that fear can cause us to do all sorts of stupid things. Jesus has been talking to them about His upcoming mission in Jerusalem. The disciples expected Jesus to go to Jerusalem, assemble the armies of God, defeat the Romans, kick out the unfaithful Jewish leaders and priests, and set up God's Kingdom on earth. Jesus had a difficult time convincing them all the way up to the end. When Jesus told them about His upcoming suffering, humiliation, and death; listen to how Peter responded:

“22But Peter took him aside and corrected him. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God’s” (Matthew 16:22-23 / NLT).

They just didn’t want to believe it. They had been waiting for the Messiah to come. Now that He has come, how could it be that He would die? Look at this interesting phrase in verse 45. Luke says that the full truth of all this was hidden from them so they couldn’t quite understand it all. It seems as if God blinded them from the full force of this truth. Why would God do that? The answer is grace. There are some things that God cannot reveal fully to us because the truth of it all would kill us.

God the Holy Spirit is gracious about not revealing all of our sin, all at once to us. If He did, we would probably drop dead on the spot. The Holy Spirit reveals our sin to us at a rate in which we can handle it, confess it, repent of it, and move on to the next sin we must conquer. God never gives us more than we can handle. So if you find yourself overwhelmed by sin, take heart in this promise; God is only allowing us to see it and fight with it because He knows we can win.

Even though they knew something was up, they were afraid to ask Jesus this time what He meant. They really didn’t want to hear the answer yet. Fear can cause us to deny Christ and make some very bad decisions. God knows that we are capable of doing all sorts of stupid things when we are afraid. That’s why we hear God and angels constantly telling us to “Fear not!” or “Don’t be afraid!” I know that we don’t like to hear this and that it goes against what many of us were raised to believe. But the point is that Jesus promised us that part of our Christian walk will be to suffer. It’s part of the human experience and it’s part of the Christian walk. We need to face up to this truth. **MANY CHRISTIANS DON’T LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT LIVING IN FAITH WILL INCLUDE A GREAT DEAL OF SUFFERING.**

However painful it is and however we must struggle with the truth, we must. We must acknowledge our struggle with our lack of faith and our struggle with our weakness. **IF WE WANT TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THROUGH LIFE, WE MUST HAVE A REALISTIC VIEW ABOUT WHAT EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIFE IS ALL ABOUT.**

We live in a culture and time that prefers to live on emotions and personal experiences. However, if we do not navigate through life with the truth of Scripture and good solid doctrine, we are doomed to failure, especially in these end times. The great theologian Bishop J.C. Ryle put it this way:

“You can talk about religious experiences all you wish, but, if it does not have doctrinal roots, it is like cut flowers stuck in the ground. They will soon wither and die.”

Admitting who we are and Who God is will help us overcome our weakness, our lack of faith, and our fear of the truth.