

## Luke 9:1 – 50

### Faith Calls for Unusual Choices

Luke 9 is very long, so I will only get through about 80% of it today, leaving the rest for next time.

When choices present themselves, we want to do well in advancing the kingdom or growing our own faith. We sometimes choose based on what seems reasonable at the moment as opposed to evaluating how various promises from God might impact that decision. Luke 9 has several scenes along that line, where Jesus sets people up to make decisions and expects them to choose differently than we would normally. Not bad choices, but rather rejecting the customary direction in favor of one that might look a bit odd.

So, let's get right into it. The first piece of history is when Jesus sent the Twelve out to preach the Kingdom of God, sort of like an advance advertising tour to stir up the people to be excited about when Jesus would come through later. The same event with much more detail may be found in Matthew 10, the whole chapter of 42 verses. Mark 6:7 – 13 has another condensed version. Here's the story from Luke 9: 1 – 6. I skipped verse 7-9 because they are about a reaction that Herod the tetrarch had to reports about Jesus. But in the first part of the chapter, Jesus teaches them, and us, that conventional promotional techniques are not what God has in mind:

*<sup>1</sup> Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. <sup>2</sup> He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. <sup>3</sup> And He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. <sup>4</sup> "Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. <sup>5</sup> And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." <sup>6</sup> So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere... <sup>10</sup> And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.*

Having the power to cast out demons and heal various diseases and maladies sounds like a good draw to me. But think about all the times Jesus did exactly that, and the crowd just wanted a sign (as though the healings and exorcisms were not enough) or He was accused of being in league with Satan to do such things. That does not sound reasonable to us. But, we see that kind of reaction in politics all the time. One side makes wild accusations against the other for the purpose of discrediting them. In matters of religion, reactions are just as unreasonable. So, if we had been among the Twelve, if we thought it through, we would not expect displays of miraculous power to work any better for us than they had been working for Jesus.

What did Jesus tell them? Take no supplies. That does not sound smart. Do not make the rounds of the wealthy to cast a wider net among those who might lend influence and money later. Jesus told them, “If no one responds and invites you home, move on to the next town. Don’t beat dead horses.” The part about shaking the dust off your feet was an insulting custom of the time, meaning, “I do not want to become contaminated by even the road dust of your town.” With that kind of exit, you are not likely to get a return invitation.

Jesus’ method here was to surface those in those towns who already had a notion about the Messianic Kingdom, who were interested, eager, and, as a result, hospitable. Note that Jesus did not encourage them to find the influential or the wealthy, just those who showed an interest, whoever they were.

How can we translate this to our time and place? We can’t cast out demons or heal diseases. The point is not the miracles but the evidence. They did not have a New Testament. They had not heard very many speeches by Jesus yet, and they probably did not remember much from those they had heard. We have New Testaments and mountains of evidence that the book not only was delivered to our time intact, but also that the descriptions are factually correct with multitudes of museum pieces as verification. The point is to avoid time-tested advertising techniques. Instead, talk with those who have an interest in finding something better for life. Many today think that they will find a better life through greater earning power and a comfortable existence. We are looking for those who already know that those goals do not work very well

if at all. So, those who are searching for something better are willing to consider something else.

But that means we need to use unconventional approaches. We need to ask questions that strike at the questions they are asking. Like, “Where’s the joy?” “How’s God going to accept me after all I’ve done?” “When stuff goes badly, does that mean God is mad at me?”

The great part for us is that we do not need to have all the answers at our fingertips. We can say, “Good question. Let me think on it a while and I’ll get back to you.” Then, do that. Or, talk to someone who might have suggestions.

We just need to be conversant with the promises of how Jesus paid off our debts to justice so that we could be judged by faith. That the early Christians were persecuted, and God wasn’t mad at them. Jesus’ life ended badly, and He was the hero of the story. Do you want to overcome yourself? Part of the message is that God promises that He will give that exact power to those who trust Him. Try harder; fail bigger. Instead, tap into the promises of God. Every person will have different felt needs and unanswered questions. Listen and respond with compassion.

The second story (11 – 17) is commonly called the Feeding of the 5000. Parallel accounts may be found in Matthew 14:14 – 21, Mark 6:34 – 44, and John 6:1 – 13. Certainly, a big miracle happened. But the more important message is that Jesus challenges us to step up in faith, expecting the impossible to happen

*<sup>11</sup> But when the multitudes knew it [the Jesus was near Bethsaida], they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing. <sup>12</sup> When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.” <sup>13</sup> But He said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.” <sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of fifty.” <sup>15</sup> And they did so, and made them all sit down. <sup>16</sup> Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to*

*the disciples to set before the multitude. <sup>17</sup> So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.*

Notice that the disciples did not know what to do about the food needs of such a large crowd. Jesus' initial response was not all that helpful, "You give them something to eat." But, before we laugh at them, would we have done any better? The task at hand, providing food for such a large group, was definitely beyond what they thought they could do. But, look at the scene. Immediately before this, Jesus was not only teaching, but also was healing all those who had needed it. Yet, the disciples did not make the connection that providing food was no harder than healing physical problems. Both are miracles. Further, the Twelve had just come back from that two-by-two tour during which they had been healing. Note that Jesus did not stop to scold them for their lack of faith or for not picking up on the miracles they themselves had just recently been performing, or the healing that Jesus was in the process of performing. Instead, He set them up to participate in the process rather than just having them watch.

So, how do we fit in this picture? None of us have been trained to make food multiply itself. We did not just come back from a preaching and healing tour in which we had participated in the miraculous. We had not been listening to Jesus and observing His healings for several hours. How can our faith solve problems of similar scale?

The key lies in knowing what God has promised for the faithful, and trusting God to accomplish what He has promised. But, I do not know of any promises that say that we can duplicate food. However, I do know a few promises about multiplication of assets. Take 2 Corinthians 9:8 as an example, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." A similar promise is in the same chapter, verses 10 and 11. God does not reveal exactly how He is going to pull that off. But, having managed a 501(c)3 non-profit for nearly 20 years, I see money flow where there was none. God does not promise to put the cash in your wallet, just that the cash will be available for the good work. And, we need to participate, not just sit back and assume that God will take care of all the details. Be prepared for a miracle with money.

Other promises exist in the New Testament, hundreds of them, on a variety of subjects. Unless we know what they are, we cannot expect them to come to pass. I think that is the number one reason why we don't see miracles: church-goers tend not to know the promises. A close second is that we opt for the mundane because it is easier, instead of the scary prospect of explaining a miracle.

When Biblical faith is exercised, miraculous stuff happens. Let the observer be fully convinced that whatever is on the table simply cannot be done – like feeding 5000 men, not to mention the women and children, with 5 loaves and two fish. Then, let it happen.

As the next scene unfolds, Jesus sets up a conversation in which He will make several outrageous claims. Jesus expected His disciples to think things through, to come to conclusions, to recognize the direction that the work of God was headed, and be able to see the hardships coming, to see bigger promises (18 – 27). Parallel accounts may be found in Matthew 16:13 – 16 and Mark 8:27 – 30.

*<sup>18</sup> And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" <sup>19</sup> So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again." <sup>20</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." <sup>21</sup> And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." <sup>23</sup> Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God."*

Jesus had been performing the signs that were predicted by the prophets to accompany the Messiah for some time. Some got it, some did not. Jesus broached this subject with just his disciples to prepare them for the hardships to come.

As in every age, many religious leaders have been fond of complex theology. I suspect that they have done that, and continue to do that, because, (1), they expect theology to be complicated, (2), logical connections that tie up the loose ends are not expected, and (3), they gain influence over the masses by convincing the ordinary people that their lack of understanding is their own fault, not the fault of illogical teachings. Peter drew his conclusion from the utterly obvious evidence and just didn't worry about what others were saying. By reading the parallel accounts, we can get the idea that Jesus thought it important at this stage of their development that He begin to prepare the future leaders of this earthly Kingdom to be prepared for things to get uncomfortable. If He had let the persecution and opposition hit them unexpectedly, they might wonder if they had backed the wrong horse.

Certainly, this is good history of how the early disciples were trained by Jesus, but what does it have to do with us? We, too, need to prepare people for the obvious opposition that the gospel always faces. People in general, and Americans in particular, expect success to be characterized by comfort. Sharon and I have found that expectation in Third World cultures, too. Further, religious leaders still depend on complexity to maintain their authority. We need to adopt Jesus' methods, warning people of the guaranteed difficulties brought on by faith, and warning people that religious leaders will use complexity and poor logic to confuse the issue and cause people to accept explanations that they would never fall for in business. Church leaders generally reach out with doctrine instead of evidence.

So, what can we use to get across the simplicity of the Good News? Do we use the works of the Spirit as evidence, or do we stick with quotes from the Scriptures with which the hearer is not at all familiar? And, by works of the Spirit, these are not those flashy but unprovable acts that some use, or even prefacing every description with "The Lord caused this or that." No, we need to use the promises that are actually in the

Scriptures, like overcoming ourselves and having peace and joy in living rather than worry and anxiety.

And, just like Jesus did, do we ask people for their points of view? Too often, churches allow only the parroting of the approved doctrines of that denomination. Thinking and evaluation are not expected, or even desired.

In this series of scenes in chapter nine, Luke follows up with an example of how Jesus expected people to grow in their understanding, but was gentle when they produced shallow responses. The parallel accounts are in Matthew 17:1 – 13 and Mark 9:2 – 13. Picking up in Luke 9:28.

*<sup>28</sup> Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. <sup>33</sup> Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” <sup>36</sup> When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.*

The Matthew account reveals that Peter, James, and John had a simultaneous vision. Jesus was not physically changed and Moses and Elijah were not physically present. And, neither the means by which they understood that the other two people were Moses and Elijah nor the identity of the mountain are given, but, again, it’s a vision.

Peter’s reference to tabernacles probably refers to the brush arbors they traditionally built as shelters during the Feast of Tabernacles, the celebration in remembrance of the Wilderness Wandering period. During

that festival, all the people, even those who lived in Jerusalem where the festival was held, were to live in these temporary structures for a week. Brush arbors were to remember the nomadic lifestyle in the Sinai peninsula, as well as to remember what it symbolized: the afflictions of life on earth followed by obtaining the promised rest. I think that Peter's comment showed a fundamental understanding of the situation, but was a bit shallow.

The statement from God in a cloud was not a new thing. God had used similar cloud events in Exodus 13:21 – 22, 19:9, 19:18, 24:16, 40:34 – 35, and 1 Kings 8:10 plus Matthew 3:17 when Jesus was baptized by John. Here, God played off of Peter's tabernacle comment to emphasize that Jesus was superior to the heroes of the past.

So, how are modern Christians like the disciples in this scene? Just like Peter, we often connect the wrong dots. But this scene and its parallels in the other gospels give no indication that God was upset with them or held them in low regard. God knows us and our limits. He has promised us understanding through the indwelling Spirit, but Peter did not have that yet. And even after we do have that help with understanding spiritual things, God does not get tremendously upset when we are slow on the uptake. The various letters in the New Testament describe lots of missteps, yet the inspired writers kept on calling their audiences saints and brethren.

In the scene, the three disciples were described as fearful as the cloud began to envelop them. Surely they had watched fog roll in before, especially since these three who were professional fishermen. And, Jesus was standing right there. The message was, "Hear Him." The idea was not to worry about the complexities of the Law or the great men of the past. Just listen closely to Jesus.

The admonition is appropriate for us, too. While the Old Testament is inspired, the events recorded there really happened, and the truths included are useful, we should focus on what the New Testament actually states clearly and avoid complex theology and charismatic speakers. Why is that important? If we start with complicated stuff and a bunch of unfamiliar words, the learner will have no confidence in being able to understand. But, if we start with the straightforward stuff, whole chapters or even books at a time, not a verse at a time, the learner will be able to visualize

what is in the text and get the main points without complication. Better yet, with the uncomplicated story as the backdrop, the learner will be able to sort out which doctrines make sense and which ones don't.

In the next scene, some of the disciples got embarrassed when they failed to cast out a demon. Jesus solved the problem and proceeded to stack one huge realization on top of another, letting them know in no uncertain terms that He would soon be betrayed. The parallel accounts in Matthew 17:14 – 20 and Mark 9:14 – 29 give several additional details, but we will stick with the point being made by Luke, revealing hindrances to faith

*<sup>37</sup> Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him. <sup>38</sup> Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him. <sup>40</sup> So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup> Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup> And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, <sup>44</sup> "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." <sup>45</sup> But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.*

While Jesus, Peter, James, and John were up on the mountain, the other nine disciples were down below getting in over their heads. They tried to cast out a demon, something had done many times before, but this time failed. When Jesus returned, He solved the problem and made a comment that suggested that the problem was a lack of faith. The parallel accounts include an additional problem with a lack of prayer. I think we can sum it up with the idea that the disciples were focusing too much on the power that they had exercised in the past and forgot about where the

power came from and who was really in control of that power. The crowd assumed failure when the requested help was not instantaneous, also assuming that the power belonged to the disciples rather than belonging to God.

So here are the thoroughly embarrassed disciples, probably feeling a little out of their depth at this moment, and what does Jesus do? He chooses this moment to tell them that He would soon be betrayed, which is totally disconnected from the situation at hand. They cannot make the leap, so are totally confused. And what do they do? The same as any high school class; they clam up and don't ask questions. Jesus challenges their faith right after helping them get past some hindrances to faith

So, what can we learn from this scene. Obviously, we are not going to go around casting out demons, since demons have already been locked up (Zechariah 13:2, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6). When might we step out on faith and flop, only to have the problem fixed and, wham, we get hit with another dilemma of even greater magnitude?

I think we should note that, although Jesus seemed a bit disappointed in the failure of the nine disciples, He did not fire them or demote them. In fact, by telling them about His impending betrayal, He demonstrated that He still had a lot of trust in them.

Do we ever encounter an impossible situation, recognize the opportunity to invoke one of the 800+ promises in the New Testament, and just plain fail at it? Those times are a real test of faith, whether we can continue to have confidence in the promises of God when one of those promises did not happen as we had thought it would. We need to remember that our perceptions of those promises may not be as on-target as we had thought. Our faith must be secure enough that our first thought is to doubt our understanding of the promise rather than doubting the promise itself. And, we need to remember that, after we have sorted it through and figured out where our misunderstanding was, when we get it right on the second try, the outsiders who observe it will still be super impressed. They don't get to do anything that is beyond normal human ability, so our getting it right on the second try is still really impressive. And remember, while the opposition may give you a hard time while you are trying to figure out what went wrong, remember that they couldn't fix it at all.

It seems that Jesus thought that the perfect time to step up to another level of faith was right after an embarrassing failure. The failure teaches us just how unreliable our perceptions of God's promises are, so we are ready to put the required thinking time into the next situation. Hence, it is the perfect time to move up in degree of difficulty.

One last scene before we stop for today. Keeping in mind the failure that had just happened, and the confusion over what Jesus meant by the betrayal line, immediately, the disciples begin to argue over which of them will be the greatest. Therefore, Jesus teaches them about humility. The parallel account may be found in Matthew 18:1 – 5 and Mark 9:33 – 40.

*<sup>46</sup> Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. <sup>47</sup> And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, <sup>48</sup> and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great." <sup>49</sup> Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." <sup>50</sup> But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side."*

The parallel account in Matthew reveals what Jesus meant by being like children. Our faith should be based on humility. Some teach that Jesus meant that we should just accept what we hear, like children, but that runs counter to what the New Testament says about evidence and testing what you hear.

When Jesus said, "Receives this little child in My name," He meant when we deal with a humble person, we should treat them as Jesus did, with respect and gentleness and patience. The phrase, "in My name," means "while being inside of Jesus' character." Many have taught that "in the name of" means "by the authority of," like in police shows when they use the line, "Open in the name of the law." But that is not how they used that line in Jesus' day. The "name" of someone was that person's nature or essence, not his or her authority.

The disciple John completely missed the humility and character ideas and responded from the self-importance attitude. "We walk with You, so

we are important. Anyone who does not walk with us cannot be right.” First, John missed that the person he wanted to exclude was actually able to cast out demons. If he had been listening in the previous scene, that should have told him something. Second, John was coming from the attitude of “My group has it right. If you are not in my group, you must be wrong.” Only those full of themselves come up with divisive doctrines. Jesus had just reminded them about humility right after that terribly embarrassing scene when they failed at casting out a demon.

What opportunities exist in the modern church for self-importance, for a lack of humility? Of course, we have the whole denominationalism fiasco. We have our clergy concept. We have our audience-style meetings rather than family gatherings that are focused on one-anothering. I could go on and on. But rather than either justifying those failures or being afraid to step out on faith because of our own histories of failures, we can let those occasions become a springboard for taking on another promise, trusting that God can handle us.

Jesus was a servant and humble, and at the same time He was active and a leader. So, act like Jesus.

The faithful need to stick together even when things are not going all that well.

Every task is important.

The question is, “Will temptation season us or consume us?”