

How to Grow Strong in the Faith, Part 1

Luke 9:42-43

April 14, 2019

We are returning to Luke 9:37-45, so you'll want to turn there in your Bibles. And we are learning, here, the importance of having a strong, strong faith, the importance of believing God, the vital importance of trusting wholly and consistently in Christ and his Word, his promises, his truth. And as we saw last week, that's something that most of Jesus' disciples in his day, even the ones who were walking with him, did not do. They needed to be continually rebuked, confronted, reminded. Well, today we're going to start to see how Christ turns that around.

Let's begin by reading, well, the section we covered last week. We'll do a bit of review, and then we'll start moving forward. Luke 9:37: "On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. And behold, a man from

the crowd cried out, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child, and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him, so that he foams at the mouth. It shatters him and will hardly leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.'

"And Jesus answered, 'O, faithless and twisted generation! How long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

"All were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered unto the hands of men.' But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying."

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We ended last time with Jesus' rebuke in verse 41, saying to his generation, "O, faithless and twisted generation," saying to his disciples, "How long am I to be with you and bear with you?" And the passage started out with a drastic contrast. Luke portrayed it here in keeping this account together, there's the Transfiguration light and glory with Jesus up above, that's in verses 28-36. We covered that a couple weeks ago.

And then there's unbelieving and darkness and confusion down below. The darkness and the turmoil is pictured in the cruelty of demonic possession. It brought sorrow to this grieving father, who is at his wits' end. He's grieving and sorrowing over his son's torment and affliction. There's a crowd pictured here, hovering around the father as he brings his son first to Jesus' disciples for healing.

And the disciples, we see, they fail to cast out the demon. They fail to deliver the boy. And that pours fuel onto an already burning controversy that was provoked by the presence of the scribes, who were there to malign. The religious law experts, they were always dogging Jesus and his disciples,

following in their footsteps, trying to catch up with them, looking for an opportunity to discredit, to malign.

And so Jesus encounters this scene. He comes back down off the mountain, and he encounters this scene of, of sorrow and turmoil. He comes into this darkness and confusion. There's a severe demonic possession, and then failure. There's a failure for his disciples, a failure to cast out the demon. For the crowd, they're more interested in the, the controversy and the spectacle, and so for them it's a failure to care. For the religious scribes, it's a failure for them, even in all their learning and their study and their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. It's a failure for them to see through to what's truly important.

Down at the bottom all, of all this, at the root and foundation of all that Jesus is seeing as he encounters this scene, Jesus is able to look beyond the outward symptoms to see the heart of the problem. He's able to diagnose and see what is the cause and what is the cure. The very heart of the problem is unbelief. Unbelief is what he sees. That is what prompts his

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sighing and his grieving. That is what prompts this indictment of Israel's condition, this generation. That's what prompts his rebuke of his own disciples for failing to believe. "How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?"

We've been reading Luke's Gospel long enough to understand the simmering hostility in Israel's religious establishment, the scribes, the Pharisees, the priests. The crowds, they're easily impressed by the spectacle of Jesus' power, but they're just as easily turned against him in unbelief because they do not inherently believe. That's going to become more apparent as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, and we see, we're going to see that at the end of this chapter, and it's going to occupy the rest of Luke's Gospel, the long march to Jerusalem. He encounters with increasing hostility of unbelief.

But how is it, here, that Jesus' own disciples, who've been walking with him for two, two-and-a-half years, how is it that they have failed to believe? How is it that they have failed to stand firm and to act in faith? They had power and authority over the demons, Luke 9:1. And they exercised that power and

authority, that's recorded in verse 6 of Luke 9, also testified from their own lips in verse 10. When Jesus sent them out, they likely went two-by-two. But here, there's nine Apostles ganging up on one demon. And still they failed. What happened? Why the failure, here, of their faith?

Go back to verse 22 in Luke 9. Let's try to put ourselves in their shoes, have a little sympathy for them. In fact, we could call it empathy because we know exactly why they've failed. Peter had just made the good confession in verse 20, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Christ of God. But Peter and the others, they didn't know the significance of that statement. They didn't understand the fact that the Messiah had come to bear the sins of his people by dying on the cross. So Jesus, coming out of that confession, keeps him quiet about it. He doesn't want any impulse of the crowd to thr, enthrone him too quickly.

But he, here, sets their expectations, first about the Messiah's mission, and then about their own discipleship. He wants them to understand what it is to be the Messiah, what his

mission actually is in this first advent, this first coming. Then he wants to understand what it really means if they're going to say they're going to follow them. What does that look like? He tells them in verses 22-23, the future involves suffering, suffering for the Messiah and suffering for all those who follow the Messiah. Verse 22: "'The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.' And then he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"

That is a radical reversal of what the disciples expected. They believed that they were walking with Jesus on an upward trajectory, heading from obscurity in Galilee, the mundane life of fishermen, other occupations, and they were heading toward glory in Jerusalem. This is exactly opposite of what they expected. Not suffering, but glory. The power and the authority of the Kingdom of God that they had all witnessed in Jesus Christ, that they'd all practiced themselves as Apostles commissioned by him, all that had come from Jesus. It's now at work in them. They believed they were destined to reign alongside the Messiah himself.

But now Jesus, he's disrupting all those visions of glory with a prediction of what sounded to them like abject failure. The rejection and death of Jesus? A bewildering, troubling message about self-denial and carrying, could it be a cross, a despised implement of torture? To say they were shaken, a disturbed, rattled, that is precisely the frame of mind that they were in. And for more than a week they'd been pondering this, rolling it around. You know how it is when you have fears that don't go away, and you keep thinking about it. You keep thinking about it. It's not resolved. It continues to trouble the mind.

As we said before, we looked in verses 28-36, Jesus took three of his disciples up on the mountain. When he first got up on the mountain, he started praying. He was praying for the strengthening of their weakened faith. He was praying for the stability of their confidence, the deepening of their conviction.

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And while Jesus is up there on the mountain with those three, he'd left the weaker disciples, the other nine, down below. There's tentative Philip; there's doubting Thomas; Simon the Zealot, the political monster; Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, who is clearly not one of their number, as we're going to see.

So up on that mountain, when Jesus prayed, he didn't just pray for the faith of Peter, John, and James. He prayed for them all. He asked God to remove their doubts and to strengthen their faith. And God answered. He sent heavenly messengers to three of the disciples. He sent demonic messengers to the other nine.

One demonic messenger came in the demon-possessed boy, but multiple demonic messengers came in the form of religious scribes, who were at their heart unbelievers, teaching what sounded like very good doctrine. They'd read all the books. They'd studied all the commentaries. They knew every argument from every different perspective, and yet they didn't worship God. Theirs was a demonic religion. Why did God send them? Again, it was an answer to Jesus' prayer. It was to strengthen weak faith.

Listen, sometimes our greatest failures teach us the deepest, long, most long-lasting lessons, don't they? And that's what these disciples would learn. All of them. That the way to stand firm in faith, the way to grow strong and mature in faith, is to gaze intently at the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's made most obvious up on the mountain, but it's just as true down in the valley. Whether on the mountain or down in the valley, same answer: Gaze at the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Listen, it's the same answer for us, isn't it? Nothing's changed. And we happen to live more in the realm of the nine disciples who are in verses 37-45, that's where we live, down in the darkness and confusion of the unbelieving world. We need to see what the other three disciples, the privileged disciples, saw up on the mountain, gazing at the glory of Christ.

But we, we live where the other nine are. We live amid unbelief, so this, this text is for us. That's where all of this has been leading, is to lead us into this text, this valley. The

question we want to ask and answer today is this: How do we strengthen our faith, which we've got to admit is often weak, often vacillating, inconsistent? How do we strengthen it?

When we live in the realm of the unbelieving world, when we live around voices of unbelief and mocking and scorning and slandering and blaspheming? When we live in a world of, saturated with immorality, pursuing other aims and other ambitions and other goals. Even when our own faith can be affected by all that, those voices, so weak and inconsistent. How do we learn to stand firm in faith, to grow strong in faith?

Well, the answer comes, as you can see from the outline in your bulletin in four points, four exhortations. We're going to cover two this morning and the next two we're going to cover next Sunday morning. First point for this morning, to remain steadfast in faith, to grow strong in faith, number one, consider the evidence of Christ's glory. Consider the evidence of Christ's glory.

After Jesus indicted Israel's unbelief, after he rebuked the disciples for failing to act in faith according to their commission, Jesus turned to the man, end of verse 41, the father, he commands him, "Bring your son here." "Bring your son here." That command had to have inspired hope, right? I mean, just the fact that Jesus wants to see the boy, and knowing who he is, that inspired hope and confidence. It also tells us everything we need to know about his intentions. "I will look at your son. I will look at your only child. I will take a look at this boy who's been held captive by this wicked spirit. I will do something about it. And I, in contrast to these, will not fail." Such comfort in Christ's command.

Look at verse 42, first half, "While he was coming," that's the father bringing the son, "while he was coming, the demon threw the boy to the ground and convulsed him." So at this point we can go over to Mark's Gospel, Mark 9:20. You might want to turn there and follow along because it'll lead, it leads to an important interaction, here. But we turn to Mark's Gospel and find that Jesus at the point of the convulsions, as this boy is thrown to the ground in front of the ground, in front of Christ,

Jesus asks a follow-up question that leads to a vital interaction and we need to hear.

Again, they brought to Jesus, Mark 9:20, "And when the spirit saw him," saw Jesus, "immediately, it convulsed the boy. He fell on the ground and rolled about foaming at the mouth." Okay, so the same behavior that was described for us in Luke's Gospel, here it is again, "foaming at the mouth." Verse 21: "Jesus asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood, and it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him.'"

Again, as we pointed out last week, this is such a cruel, horrible, severe case of demonic opp, oppression and possession, especially when you think about the contrast between the, the demon's power and the evil in contrast with the weakness and the innocence of a child. It's a horrible contrast. And this boy's body is, is beaten, it's battered by this demon, it's burned in the fire, skin distorted and marred, disfigured. He's repeatedly fallen, fallen into the water, which probably means lung damage, breathing problems.

If all that weren't enough, Mark tells us in verse 17 that this boy is mute. It's not that he couldn't project his voice clearly. He did cry out; he screamed out. But it's inarticulate, mute, meaning the boy is unable to communicate. Verse 25, we see that Jesus rebuked the, the mute and deaf sp, spirit. So this, this boy can't communicate. He's mute, he's deaf. He's unable, this, this kid is incapacitated. He is in such bad, bad shape.

The severity of the case helps explain the father's reply in verse 22, "If you can do anything, Jesus, have compassion on us and help us." You understand the father is here because he does believe that Jesus can do something. He's asking because he believes Jesus to be compassionate, powerful to help, to save. In fact, he came to the disciples first, believing the same thing.

But then, as he speaks, there is an inconsistency that slips out. And Jesus stops at this point, and he doesn't let that go. "Jesus said to him, 'If you can? If you can? All things are possible for one who believes.'" Look what Jesus draws out

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of this man. "Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe. Help my unbelief.'"

That's a beautiful, beautiful testimony from the man, isn't it? Isn't it one you and I can identify with? I do believe. I do. There is a seed of faith in me. There is a kernel of belief, but sometimes it's suppressed. Sometimes through my own foolishness, I've hidden faith. I've suppressed it, I've doused it, I've poured water on the flame of faith. Sometimes it's through my own stupidity and foolishness.

Sometimes it's just through my own weakness. There are health issues, whether it's through chronic issues, whether it's through a, a long-term trial that just doesn't go away, whether a finance or relational issues, strife in family, all the rest. I do believe! Ah, but help my unbelief!

And the man, he's not defending himself. He's not saying, Well, I, I believe! He's saying, I do. I do. It's there. It, it needs to be lifted up. The problem is in my faith. The problem is in my lack of believing. The problem is in doubt creeping

in." Doubt is not something to be celebrated. Doubt is something to be eradicated, driven away. "I believe. Help my unbelief!"

Think about what's going on here, though, in this little conversation. I mean, there is a writhing, convulsing boy at their feet. And Jesus stops, in the immediate need he stops to correct this man's misperception and his error about the nature of faith. What's this is all about? Listen, this is so beautiful. Jesus isn't just interested in delivering this boy from a demon. That is going to happen, no doubt about it.

But Jesus is more interested in stopping at this point and dealing with this man's life beyond the healing of his son. So he stops to elicit from this man, first a profession of his faith, but then to reveal an inconsistency in his faith, a weakness in his believing. And it's the stress of the moment that betrays a weakness in this man's believing, an error in the nature of faith. He doesn't understand something, here.

So I ask you, what's more important? Exorcism, or teaching? Mercifully, Jesus, here, considers both to be important. But to

cast out the demon without correcting this man's error? Jesus sees that the one condition is as bad as the other, and the one is more eternally consequential. Jesus' power is going to take care of the immediate need, but it was the man's believing in Jesus' power, believing in the power of God, trusting in the kind intention of God, that's what would carry this man throughout the rest of his life, as he's going to raise up his newly restored son in the faith. So Jesus is thinking way beyond what this man can see in the moment of his crisis.

Aren't you thankful God can see beyond your momentary crisis? Aren't you thankful that Jesus can see beyond your current trial? We're so myopic, aren't we? We stare at things in front of us, and we can't see beyond them. But our God is omniscient, and our Jesus is omniscient, and he sees way into the future. Jesus, here, is thinking far into the future, where this man is going to be raising this son. He's got immediate compassion for the immediate need; he's also got long-term compassion for the eternal need. Not just of the man, but of the boy, too.

Now let's go back to Luke 9:42 and consider these disciples. The disciples are witnessing all of this, and they, too, needed help beyond the immediate crisis. They needed to see their own failure as an issue not of power, not of ability, not of method, but they needed to see their own failure as an issue of their faith.

What did they trust in? Who did they believe in the moment? They needed to live and to act in accordance with "the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." So Jesus stops and gives them evidence of his glory. He does that to confirm their faith, to draw out their faith, to strengthen their faith.

And just a footnote on what I mean by evidence of Christ's glory. The word evidence, by, evidence, we mean that which can be seen, something that furnishes proof. Evidence is what makes something plain or clear. But evidence, and I want you to listen to this very carefully, evidence is useful only to those with faith. In order for evidence of God, evidence of his power, evidence of supernatural things, evidence of miracles, evidence

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of truth, in order for it to be useful and efficacious, in order for evidence to be effective in a person, there must be faith to begin with. Otherwise, it's of no effect.

If there is no faith, and all I have to do is point to Exhibit A, scribes and Pharisees, they saw all the evidence, but it was all filtered through the dark prism of their unbelief. Scribes and Pharisees, they saw Jesus' miracles, too, and what did they conclude after seeing the evidence? "He casts demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." I mean, they flipped truth on its head. They called light, darkness. They called good, evil. They called Holy Spirit effectual miracles demonically inspired. Demonically effective. Completely the opposite conclusion.

But for those who believe, for those who have faith, God uses evidence to confirm, to stabilize, to strengthen. Think about that when you go to an evangelism encounter. Understand that your evidence for the things that confirm and solidify and strengthen and stabilize you in your believing, that you trust the Scripture to be true, that you believe God is who he says he is in Scripture. For those who are unbelieving, they'll listen

to your evidence, and they'll come up with other explanations. Why? Because their heart is not changed. Their heart is not believing.

So with that in mind, look at verse 42: "While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground, convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father." There's the evidence. How does that evidence strengthen the faith of those who believe? How does that evidence teach the disciples? What are they to learn, here? What should we learn from this?

Listen, this is nothing less than the evidence of Christ's glory. We see his glory on display, here. We can see his glory, we can put it in three parts for your notes, maybe three subpoints, A, B, and C. Subpoint A: We see the evidence of Christ being glorified in divine authority. Divine authority.

Look at Jesus, here. He, says, "He rebuked the unclean spirit," *epitimao*. It's strong censure. It's strict rebuke. There's even a hint of threatening in this word. I mean believe

me, the demon heard Jesus speak, and he was threatened. He was looking around big-time for a safe space, wasn't he? Get me out of this. I'm feeling triggered. This is a traumatic event. Get me into a ss, safe space!

Mark tells us what Jesus actually said, Mark 9:25 "He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying, to him, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'" The demon was running! And Jesus is the living Word of God. He is the Creator and the sustainer of the universe.

John 1:3 says, "All things," that is, all created things. God is not a part of that set. Since Jesus is God, he is not a part of that set. He is not a created thing, but "all things," John 1:3, "were made through him." What does that mean? It means that "without him was not anything made that was made." If it's in the category of the created, if it's in the category of made, Jesus did it. That puts him outside the category.

What about invisible, spiritual things, like angelic and demonic beings? What about things that are not matter, but are

immaterial? Colossians 1:16 says, "By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Listen, it's comprehensive, all things created, includes the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. It includes the visible material and the invisible spiritual, even hierarchies of power and authority. Those, too. "All things created through him," and get this, created "for him."

Here in Luke 9:42, this wicked, unclean spirit is created for the glory of Christ. He is, this demon is here serving the sovereign purposes of God to glorify Christ. The demon has no power whatsoever to resist the authority of the one who created it, sustains it, the one who now commands it. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, providing the disciples with irrefutable evidence, and everybody else with irrefutable evidence as well whether they believe or not, irrefutable evidence of divine authority. Only God commands the spiritual realm. Jesus is God.

Subpoint B: Christ is glorified in divine power. Divine power. Luke's summary, here, is not, Jesus cast out the demon.

It's Jesus healed the boy. Healed the boy. It's no small feat. I mean, it's effortless for the all-powerful, omnipotent, divine Son of God, but it's quite a feat of strength from our perspective, from our point of view. Mark tells us that after the demon came out of the boy, "the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.'"

No wonder, right? After the demon has ravaged this boy's body, he's dead! "But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, up, and he arose." This is life from the dead! This is effectively a resurrection miracle. And I love the fact that Je, that Luke, here, doesn't just tell us about the exorcism, Jesus' authority to cast out the demon, and then leave it there. Luke is sure to mention that Jesus healed the boy. Perhaps it's his sensitivity as a physician, but everybody gets the point. All the crowd that's there get the point that day. Jesus' power is evidenced not just in demon possession but in a holistic healing.

Matthew tells us that at the departure of the demon, the boy was healed instantly. That is important for the sake of the

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boy and his father in the eyes of that community. They could all see the connection between the demon's condition, and wondering at the source, what makes him unclean, unfit, they could all see it's a demonic influence by that sudden, instantaneous departure at Jesus' command of that demon. It's the presence of an unclean demon that explains, explains the boy's seizures, and by the way his uncleanness, and so when Jesus heals instantly, here, it's restoration to the community. It's restoration in purity. It's *therapeuo*. It's making this unclean boy clean again.

But it's Luke who uses a different word, not *therapeuo* but *iaomai*. *Iaomai*. That has more of a medical emphasis. Think about the bruised and broken body. You can imagine fractures, blunt-force trauma, this beating of the body, now healed and made completely whole again. Disfigurement from the burns, any charred skin, deformed skin burned over with scars, now healed and restored like new. Internal injuries, whether from the breathing water into the lungs, or tears and strains and muscles and ligaments and tendons, now all of it fully healed, stable, strong.

Again, picking up from Mark's Gospel, we know this boy is mute and deaf. He's unable to communicate. So his inability to listen and to speak, healed, completely restored. He's been given the gift of communication, here, and listen, in addition to the supernatural healing, the miracle of creating new skin cells, I find this to be particularly wonderful.

Imagine being so long with no ability to communicate. Imagine your child unable to communicate in the formative years of instruction and learning. That stunts development mentally. But all the synapses, the brain's communication pathways, auditory nerves, the brain's interpretation capacity and ability to signal a response, appropriate response to the vocal chords, to the tongue, this boy is now fully restored, fully healed, able to communicate with others, like his dad. Luke tells us with a single word, *iaomai*, Jesus has healed everything that this demon destroyed. That's divine power.

Subpoint C: Christ is glorified in divine mercy. He's glorified in divine mercy. "Jesus," last phrase there, "Jesus gave him back to his father." It's precious. What started with

the father's plea ends with Jesus' answer of compassion and mercy to the father. And Luke is the only Gospel writer who adds this small but crucially important detail: "He gave him back to his father."

Listen, that is the point of the miracle, isn't it? To restore that relationship, to reconnect the son to his father and the father to his son. With a resurrected, healed body, the boy now has the capacity to learn from his father. Think about that as a parent and your relationship with your children. Think about that as a grandparent and your relationship with your grandchildren.

You're there to communicate wisdom to them. You're there to raise them, to teach them, to instruct them. Those children need you. And just because they're parents now, raising their own children, any parents, can I get an "Amen!" how much you need the wisdom of your elders to raise those children.

The father has been stabilized in his faith. He's been strengthened in his believing. And now the boy can communicate

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with his dad. He can interact with him. He can learn from him. He can grow for himself in knowing Jesus the Christ, who healed him. And as we mentioned earlier, in order to learn from his father, that's why Jesus needed to teach this father, to correct his error, to solidify his faith, so he has something to teach.

Listen, Jesus is not just a healer of bodies. He's a healer of hearts. His concern goes way beyond flesh and blood. It goes way beyond circumstance and situation. He's looking at issues of reconciliation. He's bringing together; he's uniting.

Jesus wants to see this father in a proper relationship with God in order that he'll be effective to teach his own son, to raise his own son in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I mean, what good is a restored son if he dies at the end and goes to hell? What good is a resurrection of a, a whole, physical body if our eternal soul suffers in torment?

So having experienced the love of God, having seen the power of his compassion, this father has a living faith. He has

a strengthened faith. He has something, now, to pass on and to teach.

Now I want to pause, here, at this point, and I want to deal with an issue of pastoral concern. For those of you who have struggled with chronic conditions or who care for those who are afflicted with some kind of physical suffering and pain, I'm guessing the thought has crossed your mind once or twice, I'm suffering through some severe, painful affliction. I know God doesn't heal through miraculous intervention today like he did through Jesus and his Apostles in the Gospels. But why not? I mean, why can't he send a little healing grace in my direction?

Perhaps it's not you. Maybe it's someone you love, and you're thinking to yourself, "Look, I'm in the position of that father. I've longed to see the suffering of my child lifted, relieved. I want to see my parents or my friend or my loved, I want to see them whole again. I want to see the suffering relieved. I want to see my beloved delivered. I know God can heal, so why doesn't he heal? Why doesn't he heal right now in the 21st century?"

Physical suffering can make people vulnerable to temptation, can't it? To distrust the goodness of God. That is actually the first temptation that came to Eve in the garden, to distrust the goodness of God. God has given everything, every tree, every fruit to enjoy, everything to eat, everything of the plants to eat and enjoy, all the garden to explore, all the world to explore, all the world to mine, to learn, to develop, to discover. One tree. "Don't eat of this." That's the test.

And Satan came to Eve and exploited that test. He got her attention on the one rather than the many. He got her attention on the singular rather than the all. He got her to say, Wait a minute! Wait a minute! What, what's this negative command, here. What's this? A tree I can't eat from? What's God got up his sleeve? What's he hiding from me? The best. He's hiding the best. He knows that when I eat this, I'll be like God. I'll be like him! What's she doubting, there? The goodness of God? She doesn't trust. It's a failure to believe God that led away from God. It's faith. That's why it's faith, and it's got to be faith, that leads us back to God.

This is all about the goodness of God. And physical suffering, there's nothing like physical suffering, or you could say trials, relational problems. There's nothing like, like financial concerns and issues, nothing like that to make us vulnerable to the temptation to distrust the goodness of God. Physical suffering, health issues, afflictions, maladies, diseases severe and crippling, all of that.

You'll find people turning to all kinds of false promises and faith healers, financial counselors, all that, because they reason like this: If God is a God of love, and if God is good, and if God can heal, then certainly he wants me or my loved one to be healed. He wouldn't want this suffering to continue any longer if he's loving and if he's good.

This is connected to what's called the problem of evil: the fact that God is, and at the same time evil and suffering exists in the world. In light of God's love and goodness, in light of his power to do something about it, why does evil exist? The formal attempt to get God off the hook is called, theodicy.

Literally, that means the justification of God. We have a hard time figuring out how God can be all-good and all-loving and all-powerful, and at the same time tolerate evil and suffering and harm and pain to us, his creatures, especially those, to those who seem so weak and vulnerable, like children.

So what's the answer? How do we get God, off the hook, so to speak? Well, first, we need to say, we need to say emphatically that God does not need us to get him off the hook, for anything. "Has not the potter right over the clay?" God doesn't need us to justify him or to justify his actions.

In fact, God leans into that. He takes full responsibility, asserting the absolute right of his divine sovereignty, Isaiah 45:5-7, "I am the Lord, and there is no other. Besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, there is no other." Get this, "I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord, who does all these things."

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Did you hear that? God makes well-being on the one hand, and he creates calamity on the other. Why? The text answers the question for us. So that we may know that there is no other God besides him. Why is that? So that we'll look to no other source for answers, for help, for salvation. Why? Because there is no other salvation. And that's why the problem of evil is really not a problem for any Christian. The problem of evil is a problem for anybody who denies God. It's a real problem for them. There is no other salvation; there is no other hope.

The very next chapter, Isaiah 46:9-10, God tells us, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

And you know what? He uses well-being and calamity to accomplish all his good purpose. What's the purpose that he intends to accomplish? The glorification of himself. The glorification of the only true and living God. And for us, for those whom he favors, he leads them to salvation in his son

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Jesus Christ. For us, for those who believe in Christ, his purpose is a saving purpose. It's a redeeming purpose, a reconciling purpose. It's all good. It's all grace.

So coming back to trials and afflictions, severe, chronic issues, health conditions, even crippling and debilitating illnesses, injuries, diseases, how do we understand those things in light of God's greater purposes for his glory, for our eternal salvation? Well, clearly, since God is all-good, and since he is all-loving, and since he is all-powerful, then clearly, God has an all-good, all-loving, all-wise purpose in allowing any suffering we experience to continue. Yes, not just in allowing, but in planning. He sends trial. He sends affliction. Why? To get our eyes off of any human solution, off of any solution in the world, that we look wholly and completely to him.

One of the main purposes of God in sending trials into our lives, one of his good and wise purposes, is to expose what's in our hearts regarding our view of him. Do we believe him truly to

be good, or do we not? Do we believe him to be good and consistently so, or do we waver in that?

You may remember when Dr. John Street preached here last summer. Very powerfully illustrated this point. He said our hearts are like a full sponge, filled with something, and it's only by squeezing that sponge, by putting pressure on it, that whatever's in the sponge comes pouring out. When the pressure of trial and suffering is on, and when the healing doesn't come, what comes out of your heart? Trust in God's love and goodness? Rest in his wisdom and judgment? Confidence in the perfection of his plan for your life? Or is it something else?

You say, okay, you've convinced me. That makes perfect sense. I get it. I see it. I trust God; I'll continue to trust God. But then you ask, Look, just for the sake of understanding, not to complain against God's goodness and wisdom, not to find fault with him, not to get him to justify himself, the Creator, to the creature. Far be it from me. That's not what want. But I still want to understand why did the people in Jesus' day received such dramatic gifts of healing grace, yet we don't?

Because, beloved, God wants us to see himself revealed in Christ. And sometimes it's a perspective of history that reveals with more clarity what happened at a certain time. Most of Jesus' generation killed him. You want to be part of that generation? Or would you have it all written plain for you in the book, written in Scripture with the divine interpreter, the Holy Spirit, revealing it to you and explaining it to you and helping you to understand?

God wants us to see himself revealed in Christ. He wants us to see his heart of mercy and compassion in healing. In Christ, he wants his power to truly do something about our suffering, to be known. God wants us to know that this evil world, this suffering due to the curse, this groaning over sin, the pain, the sorrow, this is not what is going to last forever. Salvation is coming. We just need to hold on a little while longer, trusting in him.

"For we know," Paul writes, "that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And

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not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we await eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Christ came to reveal God. He came to show us who he is and what he is like. And during the time of his sojourn on earth, during the time of his first advent, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus. He anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent him “to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And the good news of the Lord’s favor culminated at the cross. It’s the watershed of God’s redeeming purposes, the center point of God’s self-glorifying work, the cross, the suffering. Suffering we face under the curse of the Law, it points us to the fulness of grace and truth in Jesus Christ.

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And so, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." Getting you out of whatever trial you're in, that's not the point. Steadfastness is the point. "Let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

That's what we're to learn, beloved. Right now. That's what's we need to learn when Jesus and his Apostles are not here to heal our diseases and to re, relieve our physical suffering. We're to trust that God's eye is still on the broken-hearted. His compassion is still for the suffering aff, and afflicted. We're to look to Christ, put our hope in what we do not yet see, wait for it patiently.

Pray. Pray that God would heal. Pray that God would restore because God still does that. He doesn't do it through Jesus and the Apostles, physical touch, immediate, full, comprehensive, like this boy. But does he heal? Sure, he heals. Pray for that. It's good, it's right. Looks to him in dependence and hope. Look, when God says, wait awhile, when God says, No, ride this

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one out, look, Christ shows us all our suffering has a good end. Our suffering will eventuate in eternal glory.

Beloved, it's through the eyes of faith, with a believing heart, anchored into the goodness of God, it's with the eyes of faith that look to a good and perfect and faithful God, that's how we're going to remain steadfast in faith. That's how we're going to grow stronger in faith when we consider the evidence of Christ's glory manifest in his authority, his power, and in his mercy.

How do we consider that? Well, by reading God's Word daily so we can reflect deeply on his Word, think carefully about what he's written, meditate prayerfully on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Christ came to teach us what God is like, and if we'll study his works, if we'll study his ways, if we'll think carefully, meditate prayerfully, react humbly in repentance and believing trust, we're going to stand firm in faith. We're going to grow stronger in faith. We're going to mature in faith. That's what needs to happen.

Second point. Second point. To remain steadfast and grow strong in faith, number two, listen to the testimony of Christ's majesty. Listen to the testimony of Christ's majesty. Just briefly, look at the beginning of verse 43, see how Luke records the reaction of the crowd. It says, "And all were astonished at the majesty of God, and they were all marveling at everything he was doing."

The conclusion that the crowd comes to is important, it's important for us to think about. After seeing the kind of power that was on display in Jesus Christ, the authority, the mercy, they know there is no other explanation for what they've seen than what they call "the majesty of God."

The word is *megaleiotes*, which we can, calls attention to the demonstration of great power, in which case majestic is a very appropriate translation. It can also refer to the straight, state of greatness of somebody that someone possesses, and so maybe grandeur of the person, majesty of the person. I think they're referring to both things, here. It's a majestic

demonstration of power and also the majesty of the person wielding it.

The glory of God is so clearly evident and manifest in Christ, divine authority, transcendent power all combined with an immanence of compassion and mercy. The glory of his person and his work puts Jesus in a category that they know is outside creation. This is, this is something else. This is something, well, really, what believers understand, this is a non-created being. This is the Creator and sustainer of the universe. This is the Son of God. It's one who can only be described as sharing in the *megaleiotes*, greatness and majesty and glory of God.

And the people are utterly astonished and amazed, as well they should be. The verbs, here, of their reaction are interesting. Verse, first verb, the ESV translates it as, as astonished. It's *exeplesso*. The, the people are absolutely amazed. They are overwhelmed ast, with astonishment, with amazement. They're stymied. Second word, second verb, *thaumazo*, indicates that people are marveling at everything Jesus, they're admiring his works, they're in awe. They're astonished at what

he's doing, and they're wondering and marveling at the implications of all his works.

Just make a quick point, here. Folks, when, when was the last time that you stopped and thought about that? Have the narratives of the Bible become so familiar to you that you've become kind of become accustomed to the glory and amazement of God and the power of God, that this, this no longer amazes you?

Listen, if you're reading your Bible, and you're yawning through the creation of the world, or through the account of Israel's exodus from Egypt, or through the revelation of the law at Sinai, if you're maybe bored by the accounts of God's power demonstrated in the wilderness wanderings, the merciful provision of his people and also strong judgment. If you're unimpressed with prophetic judgments and promises of salvation, particularly those things that concern Christ, what's written about fulfillment in Christ, my friend, you need to pray that God will awaken you.

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You need to pray that God will lift your heart. Return to your Bible, and let your time of reading be saturated with prayer. When you find as you read your heart is cold and unmoved as it can be among us who are weak and inconsistent in faith, take that like, like nerve endings signaling to your bodies some kind of pain that means something's wrong. "Mm! Hot! Oh, pull my hand away from flame!" That's the idea.

When you see coldness, deadness, your heart unmoved, that's a nerve ending, a spiritual nerve ending. Let that drive you immediately to prayer, to say, God, something is wrong! I'm not amazed with your glory. I don't find joy and satisfaction and contentment in what's written about you. Something's, something's wrong. I believe. Help my unbelief.

Listen to the testimony to Christ's majesty, here, all the things he said and did recorded in the Scripture. It's the Apostle John that tells us, "There also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose the whole world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

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John says, though, the things that are written down for us, they're written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." When he says, "By believing you may have life in his name," the life he's referring to and writing about is not characterized by yawning and boredom and disinterest and indifference.

It is a life that gives power and energy. It bears fruit in our lives. So if you see fruitlessness in your life, oh, beloved, fall to your knees and beg God. He loves to answer those prayers. Ask, seek, and knock because who, for everyone who asks and seeks and knocks, God answers.

We are invited, even commanded, to gaze full-on at the majesty of Christ, to listen to those who testify to it, to marvel at who he is and what he has done. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

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Well, beloved, we're going to come back next week and finish this text, which happens to be the perfect text for Resurrection Sunday. And all of it points to Jesus saying, "Listen, set aside what your eyes can see for a moment, and put your heart and your thinking on what I say, on what I speak. Listen and hear and heed." And everything he has to speak and to say has everything to do with the Gospel truth. So we'll come back to it next week. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you that you have chosen in your perfect wisdom to send the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of your glory. He is manifest goodness, incarnate goodness, a majestic display of your glory.

And our Father, I pray that you would, for everyone here, for everyone can hear this message in the future, every single one of us, let us never doubt your goodness. Let us look to you and be content and satisfied, no matter what our circumstances are, no matter what the situation, no matter what the trial and

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the affliction and the suffering and the pain. That pain is only a prelude to glory if we believe, if we trust you.

Oh, so please help us, Father. We do believe. Help us in our unbelief. Eradicate all doubt and all despondency of despair and unbelief. Cut through the darkness and shine your light on us. Let us be lifted up to glory, to see that through the cross is the glory of the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the enthronement of our Lord Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us even now to point us to you. It's in his name we pray. Amen.