



Potomac Hills
Community Church, PCA
RELEVANT • RELATIONAL • REAL

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The Need for Perspective “Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke **Luke 9:37-45**

INTRODUCTION: *Miracle Lessons*¹

One of the things that attracts me to the miracles accounts in the Gospels is that they focus on Jesus and His work for our salvation. I can't think of anything more important for us than this ... to take our eyes off the world, off ourselves, off our works, and even off our faith, so that we may focus them on Christ.

In the miracles we find that Jesus does the work needed to deliver us from weakness and condemnation, from danger and sickness, from death and from the grip of the devil.

We do not have the power to save ourselves, much less other people, but the miracles point us to our only hope, the One who can and does save us.

Another thing the miracles instruct us on is how Christianity works. They bring alive a Biblical portrait of our own condition. We are the ones pictured by the lepers and paralytics, the sick and the dead and demon-possessed.

And in the miracles we see Jesus in action. We are shown His compassion, His willingness to heal and to touch and to save ... and most of all His ability to do so. We see here that Jesus is both willing and able to save us.

This morning's passage from Luke 9 is another miracle given not to **impress** us, but to **instruct** us.

This miracle occurs right after Jesus' transfiguration. After Peter's great confession, the high point of Jesus' Galilean ministry, He takes His three closest disciples up on the mountain and was revealed to them in all His heavenly glory. With Him were Moses and Elijah, and, **Luke 9:31**, "*They were glorious to see. And they were speaking of how He was about to fulfill God's plan by dying in*

¹ Several parts of this message have been adapted from Mighty to Save: Discovering God's Grace in the Miracles of Jesus by Richard Phillips, pages 157-172.

Jerusalem.”

Their topic was the cross as God’s plan to be fulfilled by Jesus.

Peter and James and John worshipped in utter awe and then they heard a voice from Heaven declare, **Luke 9:35**, *“This is My Son, My Chosen One. Listen to Him.”*

Our passage begins at **Luke 9:37**, *“The next day, after they had come down the mountain ...”*

They have left the glory of the mountaintop for the valley ... back into the world so to speak.

So just as Jesus had left Heaven to be born into this world, so now He leaves His heavenly glory and descends into a huge crowd of people.

First, we have to look at ...

Luke 9:37-43a - THE FATHER’S PERSPECTIVE ²

“The next day, after they had come down the mountain, a huge crowd met Jesus. [38] A man in the crowd called out to Him, “Teacher, look at my boy, who is my only son. [39] An evil spirit keeps seizing him, making him scream. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It is always hitting and injuring him. It hardly ever leaves him alone. [40] I begged Your disciples to cast the spirit out, but they couldn’t do it.” [41] “You stubborn, faithless people,” Jesus said, “how long must I be with you and put up with you? Bring him here.” [42] As the boy came forward, the demon knocked him to the ground and threw him into a violent convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. Then He gave him back to his father. [43] Awe gripped the people as they saw this display of God’s power.”

Put yourself in this man’s place and try to understand what his life is like.

His boy lies sleeping, curled up in his covers, in the shadows of the dying light of a small oil lamp. The father runs his hand over the boy’s head, gently stroking his hair. As he does, tears slowly slide down his face.

Tears for the trade the boy will never learn.

Tears for the wife he will never love.

Tears for the children he will never look at as they lie sleeping in their beds.

Satan has robbed his son of all these things.

The father’s role as a parent has been reduced to that of a caretaker.

He too has been robbed.

He’s been robbed of the simple joys of parenthood.

Robbed of all the dreams and aspirations that fathers have for their sons.

Robbed of all the little-boy noises, of all the childish questions, of all the

² Adapted from Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire, pages 187-191.

playful laughter, of all the father-and-son talks.

Anxious questions haunt his mind;

“What will happen to him when his mother and I die?

Who will take him then?

Who will feed him and look after him?”

His heart sinks for he knows the answer to all these questions ... no one.

No one wants a deaf mute prone to violent seizures.

The boy looks so peaceful, lying snug in his bed.

But his life is **anything** but.

The seizures that come upon him are sporadic and sudden. And when they attack, he is thrown into a frothing fit, grinding his teeth and foaming at the mouth like a rabid animal.

When the seizures fade away, the boy finds himself encircled by worried eyes. As he gets up, the people back away and scold him for being out on the streets.

Understandably, he is a child who's always off by himself, a lonely island surrounded by silence and the stares of others.

The neighborhood kids are warned to stay away from him.

Another robbery. His playmates are stolen along with his childhood.

His life has been picked clean of anything of value, and he stands looking like some decrepit building ... vacant, vandalized, and slated for demolition.

Around every corner lurks the potential for destruction.

A cruel spirit lies in wait for him like a bully waiting to pounce on a kid coming home from school. It sneaks up on the boy, jumps him from behind, and mashes his face into the dirt – all the while delighting in the tyranny.

This is our adversary, the Devil. This is who he is. In all his cowardice and cruelty. This is his way – to push and shove and brutalize.

Like a ravenous lion the Devil roams about, seeking whom he may devour. Seeking someone he can get his paws on and sink his teeth into. Preying on the weak, the innocent, the defenseless. Savagely. Viciously. And as a lion stalks other animals, Satan singles out the youngest, most vulnerable one, and ruthlessly runs him down.

When the father hears that Jesus is in town, he turns to Him in hopes that this Redeemer can somehow bring his son back from the clutches of Satan's paws.

He falls on his knees and clasps his hands in a desperate plea.

He begs as only a parent in deep pain can.

But Jesus has a different perspective ...

Mark 9:21-27 - THE SAVIOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Jesus sees the father's desperation and says, in the parallel passage in Mark

9, ...

*"How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was very small. [22] The evil spirit often makes him fall into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us. Do something if you can." [23] "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." [24] The father instantly replied, "I do believe, but help me not to doubt!" [NIV - **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"**] [25] When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, He rebuked the evil spirit. "Spirit of deafness and muteness," He said, "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" [26] Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy lay there motionless, and he appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd, "He's dead." [27] But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up."*

With tears streaking his face, this father looks into Jesus' eyes and appeals to Him, **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"**

And so Jesus acts decisively ... casts out the demon ... and heals the boy.

There is a tense moment as the father and the crowd stare at the boy lying motionless on the ground. It's a moment begging for belief.

Not just what will **happen**?

But what do you **believe**?

With His eyes on the crowd Jesus reaches down, grabs the boy's hand, and pulls him to his feet.

The crowd breathes a collective sigh of relief at the incredible uprooting of evil that had so tenaciously wrapped itself around the boy's life.

Jesus hands the boy over to the emotional embrace of his father.

Thus the Redeemer returns the stolen goods to their rightful owner.

To a tearful father He gives back his son.

And to the son, He gives back his childhood.

In this passage Jesus came down from the mountain to encounter two forces that must be overcome. First, He defeats Satan and the powers of darkness.

Jesus' ministry in the world requires Him to face, battle, and defeat the devil. This pattern started at His baptism when the voice from Heaven pronounced Him God's Son. Then, immediately after, Jesus was tempted by the devil.

Now the pattern is repeated after the transfiguration. The voice from Heaven pronounces Him God's Son and He faces and defeats Satan and the power of darkness.

This is the third demon possession described in detail in Luke's Gospel, although there are many others. And here we see that the devil's work is to enslave and distort people.

People made in God's image, but twisted into the devil's image.

The symptoms presented here resemble a severe form of epilepsy. The boy convulses and foams at the mouth, falling to the ground. But there is far more than that. Mark's account tells us that he was also deaf and mute. He adds that the demon has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him.

This is an excellent picture of what the devil is doing to people in this world.

We are not up against a silly man in a red costume casting little darts our way. The devil's powers work within us, within **our** hearts and minds, leading us to self-destruction. They scar and destroy men and women made to bear God's image in the world.

So don't think you're lucky to avoid such a fate simply because you don't show the symptoms this boy does. Many people, most people, are firmly in the grip of possessions that are stronger than this. Their minds have been captured by the demonic forces seen in everyday events and everyday life. They are the powers of materialism, ambition, pornography, and plain old selfishness. And if that describes you, then God's image is being just as efficiently warped as it was in this boy's life. Your destruction is more terrible because of the ease with which it is accomplished and the lack of effort it takes from Satan.

Now I know that is harsh language, even though it's true.

But know this, the battle described in this passage is between Jesus and the devil. We are not direct participants in this fight; rather we are its object. We don't give military aid to Jesus, nor does He need it.

Our work is to stand firm and in the words of Moses, **Exodus 14:13**, "*Don't be afraid. Just stand where you are and watch the Lord rescue you.*"

And look at the rescue ... verse 42, "***But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. Then He gave him back to his father.***"

The emphasis here is on the ease with which Jesus succeeds. The demon's power over the boy has gone unchallenged, but so is Christ's power over the demon. With just a word of rebuke, the devil's servant is chased from the field.

Three quick lessons here;

First, don't toy with the devil or with sin; their purpose is to destroy you.

Second, don't mistake yourself for the Savior, but stand firm in faith and rely on Him to save you.

And third, don't be afraid. God is mighty to save.

Martin Luther said it well in his famous hymn,

"And though this world, with devils filled should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;

One little word shall fell him."

The devil, however, is only one of the forces opposed to Christ.

The second opponent is unbelief, and here we see that Jesus overcomes the unbelief of those around Him.

The disciples who had been left in the valley when Jesus went up to the mountain with Peter, James, and John had already tried to cast the demon out of this boy. But they couldn't.

And Jesus cries out, ***"You stubborn, faithless people, how long must I be with you and put up with you?"***

We need to be clear here that Jesus was referring to the disciples, though I doubt the crowd was any less stubborn or faithless. The nine disciples, who had stayed behind, tried to heal this boy, but couldn't, evidently because of their unbelief.

Now ... what does Jesus mean when He says, *"How long must I put up with you?"* This is a figure of speech, not an outburst of anger or frustration.

It's like the teacher who says "How long must I put up with you?" to her students when she knows full well she's teaching them all year.

Or the mother who says, "How long must I put up with you?" to her kids when she's devoting her whole life to them.

Or the wife who says, "How long must I put up with you?" to her husband who seems unable to get home in time for dinner even though she has every intention of putting up with him for the rest of her life.

Don't think that Jesus bears any less sorrow for us as His heart is still wounded by our unbelief. How He must look on us who are no different from these disciples, and may in fact be quite a bit worse than they are.

He has given us faith to know that we are His, and yet we're so often unwilling to exercise that faith.

And how does Jesus overcome this lack of faith?

"How long," He cries.

Well, it is the rest of Luke's Gospel that gives us the answer: as long as it takes. Jesus overcomes our unbelief by His patient love and long-suffering grace.

The Apostle Paul wrote in **Philippians 1:6**, *"And I am sure that **God**, who began the good work within you, **will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.**"*

Note while Jesus was lamenting the disciples' faith, the unbelief of the father is rewarded.

Why?

Because he **admitted** it and **asked** for **help**.

He said, ***"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"***

And Jesus answers that simple, but profoundly honest prayer.

One pastor, Galen Dalrymple, said, "I've always been touched by the prayer of this father for his son. Being a father myself, I can identify to some extent with his anguish over a sick child. I've been beside the bed of my children when they were very sick, including standing at the bedside of a son with a broken neck and an uncertain future. And I've pleaded with God. Begged with Him. I've bargained with Him to the best of my mere mortal ability. When your child is sick, you'll do anything to get them the help they need. If they're seriously sick, you turn to God with a vengeance.

I understand this man. I've prayed for healings before. Sometimes it has happened. Sometimes it hasn't. My son still suffers from pain, but praise be to God, he has full mobility and is relatively unhampered by his injury. Was God good in that situation? Oh, yes! A thousand times yes! But when my prayers are sometimes unanswered, or when I have something serious enough to pray about, I recite the words of this man.

Do I believe? Yes, I do. If I didn't, I wouldn't be praying to start with. But I know that my faith is weak. I know my faith isn't nearly what it ought to be. And I am comforted that Jesus didn't tell the father that he would have to grow in faith before he would come and care for his son.

All that God has ever demanded or wanted from us is the same thing He wanted from the crowds of people who followed Jesus from town to town, village to village. He wants us to come to Him with whatever tiny seed of faith we have and a desire burning in our hearts for more."³

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" is a wonderful prayer ... the kind Jesus loves to answer.

But there is one more perspective to look at and that is ...

Luke 9:43b-45 - OUR PERSPECTIVE

"While everyone was marveling over all the wonderful things he was doing, Jesus said to His disciples, [44] "Listen to Me and remember what I say. The Son of Man is going to be betrayed." [45] But they didn't know what He meant. Its significance was hidden from them, so they could not understand it, and they were afraid to ask Him about it."

Finally, this miracle, with its wide perspective on Jesus' ministry, reveals that the task Jesus came to perform, dying on the cross, is also the source of victory over all that opposes Him.

It's no surprise then that after Jesus casts out the demon down in the valley He speaks again of the cross to His disciples. Jesus came into this world not just to

³ Galen Dalrymple quote is taken from "Daybreaks," an email devotional by Galen Dalrymple, 8/29/00.

give a moral example, not just to establish of kingdom of power and glory, but to die for our sins at the hands of sinful men and then call us to join Him at that cross. That is the task for which He came into the world.

That is the theme of this chapter, as well as the point He was making to His disciples in **Luke 9:23**, *“If any of you wants to be My follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow Me.”*

If you think about it, this is an amazing turn of events.

Jesus is healing and performing miracles and crowds are gathering around Him. And at the same time, He’s telling the disciples that He’s going to be betrayed and killed.

What they are hearing and what they are seeing **don’t match**.

One Biblical scholar, I. Howard Marshall, explains this paradox, this situation that seems to be some kind of disconnect, as very deliberate.

He says, “It is the Jesus who has been transfigured who now appears to help men at the foot of the mountain; what the disciples cannot do, He can do. . . . The lesson of the transfiguration – that the gloriously revealed Son of God must suffer – is reinforced: the Son of Man who has power to heal must be betrayed by the unbelieving people whom He would gladly help.”⁴

Whenever Jesus says, “Listen carefully,” we need to do just that or we’ll miss something important. And He says that here.

There is a contrast here that makes this point abundantly clear . . . a contrast between the applause of the world and the cross of Christ. This is a key point of this passage. Jesus came into the world, and came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, to confront the devil and unbelief.

But by which route will He conquer these foes?

Will it be the way of worldly power and glory, as most of the disciples and the crowd expected it would be?

Or will it be the way of death and weakness and humiliation?

Jesus makes it plain that the way He will go, and the way for all **who follow Him** to go, is not the way of glory . . . but the way of the cross.

All of Jesus’ victories were achieved by way of the cross.

It was there that He defeated and disarmed the devil. He did so by paying the penalty for our sin, so that Satan can no longer accuse us or torment us with fear. Jesus’ death undermined the whole of Satan’s empire, because His atoning work sets us free and reconciles us to God.

It is also by way of the cross that Jesus overcomes our unbelief. It has been said that the cross wins our hearts by the fine example of love it sets. **That’s not**

4 I. Howard Marshall quote taken from The New International Greek Testament Commentary: Commentary on Luke by I. Howard Marshall, pages 389-390.

true. Certainly Christ's great sacrifice **ought** to win the love of anyone and everyone, but it does not and has not because of our sinfulness. It is not by moral influence that Jesus overcomes unbelief but by the power of the Holy Spirit that He earned the right to send into our hearts.

It is because of the Spirit's work that we are born again, so that with new hearts we receive what we would otherwise loathe and despise.

And then all through our lives the Spirit's work goes on, our unbelief more and more driven out and replaced by a willing faith.

The cross alone is Christ's banner in the world, quite the contrary to the way of glory. Martin Luther spoke of the difference when he described theologians of glory versus theologians of the cross. One way to tell the difference, he said, is through their opinion of suffering. To theologians of glory, suffering is a mistake, a problem, something to be explained and escaped. They expect to know and serve God apart from the suffering.

Not so the theologian of the cross. He regards suffering as the way to the knowledge of God. Not because suffering has any value in and of itself. But because suffering strips us of any earthly power and glory and forces us to look to God as our only hope.

Luther wrote of suffering that "in so far as it takes everything away from us, it leaves us nothing but God: it cannot take God away from us, and actually brings Him closer to us."⁵

Again, the Apostle Paul says much the same thing in **Philippians 3:10-12**, "*As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. **I can learn what it means to suffer with Him**, sharing in His death, [11] so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead! [12] I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.*"

CONCLUSION: Not in the Comeback⁶

In 1988 a tumor appeared in Dave Dravecky's left arm. He was a major-league baseball player, [I know, another baseball story] a left-handed pitcher. When a majority of his deltoid muscle was removed the doctor told him, "Outside of a miracle you will never pitch again."

Being a Christian, Dravecky began praying for just that, and in August of 1989 he was scheduled to pitch his comeback game.

"I don't care what anybody says to me," he recalls. "It was a miracle."

⁵ Martin Luther quote is taken from Luther's Theology of the Cross by Alistair McGrath, page 152.

⁶ Dave Dravecky, "*Hope in the Midst of Adversity*," www.lifestory.com. Dave Dravecky's complete story can be found in his two books; Comeback and When You Can't Come Back.

Imagine what went through his mind before that game. Dreams of triumph, the TV cameras closing in as he says, “I want to give all the glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

That’s how we plan things ... the way of glory, giving praise to Jesus out of our earthly victory. It’s not a bad thing to praise God should we achieve great things; but we should not think that this is the way to know or serve Jesus in the world. It is through the cross that Christ’s power shines into this world.

Things didn’t turn out the way Dave Dravecky hoped they would.

In the sixth inning of that comeback game, his arm shattered as he threw a fastball. He lay in agony on the grass and as they wheeled him off the field, he remembered the words a friend had told him just that afternoon that the miracles of God come by way of the cross and not by baseball glory.

He had multiple surgeries, and eventually they had to amputate his left arm. Dave Dravecky battled depression, fear, and pain. He found it a lot harder to praise God from the valley of his hospital bed than he did from the glory of the pitcher’s mound. But eventually he did learn to praise God there, for in his suffering he sought God and learned of His grace and love.

He writes, “What God does through the valleys of life is He shapes and molds us into the image that He wants us to be. He gives us strength to endure.”

That is something he learned not on the pitcher’s mound, but in the hospital bed. Not by the way of glory, but by the way of the cross.

Dave Dravecky never got to tell the world how happy God made him by making him a superstar millionaire comeback miracle. But through his suffering, he got to tell thousands of people about the God who sustained him through a terrible loss.

Because it is in those hard times that God comes to you, when you plead with God to do something, and honestly appeal to Him, with a broken and halting voice, ***"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"***

The only question is whether or not you **believe** in Him ...

... even if it’s just a little bit.

Because Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us. These texts **reveal** God at work; and show us how God **reveals His power** in order to call people who are **honest** about their **lack** of faith to “Come, be My disciple.”

God takes people who are “outsiders,” **and who can’t get in on their own,** and makes them “insiders” ... people who are involved **in a relationship** with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has **poured out His grace** on those of us who realize that, apart from Christ, **we’re the lepers and paralytics and possessed and dead people,** and we don’t have

the faith we pretend to have.

In fact, our lives are far too often **defined** by our **unbelief**.

But Jesus comes to us anyway, and He touches us, and He heals us, and He saves us. And that's **grace**, because we're getting what we don't deserve.

Luke brings us that same essential message of grace over and over again.

We see it in Jesus' teaching.

We see it in Jesus' healing.

We see it when He casts out demons.

We see it with lepers and paralytics.

We see it when He calls undeserving people.

We see it when He teaches the Twelve.

We see it with a Roman Centurion and a brokenhearted widow.

We see it with a doubting prophet at the end of his life.

We see it with a sinful woman and a self-righteous Pharisee.

We see it when He instills faith into weak and scared disciples.

We see it with a demon-possessed guy who gets clothed and sane.

We see it with a rich man and a poor woman who both have faith in Christ.

We see it in the message Jesus tells us to take to the people.

We see it in the eyes of 5,000 well-fed people and 12 wide-eyed disciples.

And now we see it with a father who can't stop crying when he watches his little boy run and jump and play with his friends.

It's all of grace from beginning to end ... that's the message.

Luke tells the story of how **Jesus revealed that grace**, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation. The church **must show what such grace looks like** ... starting by bringing that grace to those among us who are afraid to admit they don't have the faith they pretend to have.

And all who agree said, "Amen."