

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Truth and Greatness.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 9:43**.

We pick up right after Jesus effortlessly cast the demon out of the boy after the disciples had been unable to do so. Look with me at **verse 43**...

43 And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing (referring to the exorcism of the boy), **Jesus said to his disciples, 44 "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men."**

Notice it says He said this **WHILE they were all marveling**. It's almost like He knew how hard it would be for them to believe, so He interrupted their marveling to make this point. And notice the way He says this: **Let these words sink into your ears**. He sounds like a parent talking to a child: "Make sure you listen to me! Pay attention!"

There are a number of reasons it would be very hard to believe that Jesus would be rejected and killed...

1. First, as we've discussed before, there were all the prophecies in the OT that the Messiah would be a conquering king and military leader...prophecies that made Him sound like the opposite of someone who would be rejected and killed.
2. Second, a few verses earlier Peter, James, and John just saw the glorified Christ and more than likely told the rest of the disciples...which definitely didn't make him look like someone who wouldn't be rejected and killed.
3. Third, He just performed an exorcism, which showed the great power and authority He had over the demonic realm...would make him look powerful enough to not be rejected and killed.

So right when they're about to think, "There's no way this will happen to Jesus," He reminds them **AGAIN** that it will happen.

But not matter how He said it, look at **verse 45**...

45 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.

As far as why they were afraid to ask, I don't know. I looked at a number of commentaries, and it seems like nobody else really knows either.

The part I want you to notice is it says **it was concealed from them**. This is a divine concealment. God kept them from understanding until one specific moment. Please turn to the right to **Luke 24:44**...

The context is Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection...

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled (referring to His rejection and death that He told them about at least three times that are recorded).” **45** Then **HE OPENED THEIR MINDS TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES,** **46** and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.

This is when they finally able to understand what He was telling them about His rejection and death.

Now there are pretty obvious questions, which I'd like to try to answer...

The first question is: why would the Lord conceal this from them?

There are three possibilities and it could be any of these reasons or all of them:

1. First, they wouldn't have been able to handle it. They loved Jesus, and if they knew what was going to happen to Him maybe it would be too much for them.
2. Second, they might have lost all motivation associated with following Him. What did they think was in store for Him and them? They thought He'd be King, and they would rule and reign with Him:
 - a. We'll see in just a moment that they're going to start arguing about who's the greatest in Christ's kingdom...so they clearly wanted to be there ruling w/ Him.
 - b. Jesus will rule and reign – and the Twelve Apostles with Him – but:
 - i. How would they handle knowing it wouldn't be in the near future?
 - ii. How would they handle knowing He was going to be rejected and killed?
 - iii. Think about how they responded after He was crucified and you get your answer: most of them scattered and went back to fishing. So it was a real possibility for them to lose all motivation and abandon following Jesus if they knew He'd be killed.
3. The third possibility is they probably would've tried to stop Him. I say probably instead of maybe b/c:
 - a. We've already seen at least Peter try to stop Him. In Matthew's Gospel when Jesus told the disciples He'd be rejected and killed, **Matthew 16:22** **And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”**
 - b. When they came to arrest Jesus **John 18:10** **Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.** So it's very reasonable that if they understood Jesus would be killed that they would try to stop it.

So there were a lot of reasons for the Lord to conceal the truth from the disciples.

The next obvious question is: if the Lord wanted to conceal this truth from the disciples until after the Resurrection, why even tell them at all? Why tell people something, but stop them from understanding it?

The answer to this is pretty simple. This way they'd be able to look back and recognize what?

- Jesus knew this would happen.
- It was no accident.
- It was part of God's plan.

They would recall Jesus' different prophecies and they would NOT say, "Oh, this was some terrible accident, and God isn't in control."

And all of this reveals an important lesson for us...

LESSON 1: SPIRITUAL TRUTH IS DIVINELY REVEALED.

The human tendency is to think that:

- If we're smart enough we'll understand spiritual truth...we understand spiritual truth b/c we're smarter than people who don't understand what we understand.
- Or we understand spiritual truth simply b/c we're better Christians...we must have greater spiritual insight b/c we're better than those who don't.

But Scripture is clear that understanding spiritual truth is a gift.

Briefly look one chapter to the left at **Luke 8:9**...

Luke 8:9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant (referring to the Parable of the Sower, which Jesus just taught), **10 he said, "To you IT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO KNOW THE SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'**

The key phrase is **given to know**. It's clear that divine revelation is **given** versus earned.

Notice Jesus doesn't say **TO EVERYONE it has been given to know the secrets**. Instead He says **To you** and then He says **but for others**. He identified two groups:

1. The first group contains believers who get to know **the secrets of the kingdom of God**. The **secrets** are revealed to them.
2. The second group – or the **others** – are unbelievers, and they don't get to know the **secrets**. Jesus' parables were concealed from them, like the truth of His death was concealed from the disciples.

Even think about Jesus' use of the word **secrets**. By definition a secret:

- Is something that's kept from people. That's what makes it a secret.
- If everyone knew it, it wouldn't be a secret.

Think about when Peter confessed Jesus was the Christ. Briefly listen to these verses...

Matt 16:15 [Jesus said], “Who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!

- **For you are so much smarter than everyone else that didn’t know this.**
- **No. Instead: For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.**

When Jesus said **flesh and blood has not revealed this**, He meant it had nothing to do with Peter’s intellect or effort. It had everything to do with **the Father revealing it**.

Here’s one more place making this clear...I know I mentioned this verse a few months ago, but it’s worth mentioning again...

1 Cor 2:9 “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—

We’re talking pretty serious spiritual truths here. It says nobody has seen, heard, or even thought of these things before.

This verse is commonly misunderstood. People quote it about heaven to say that **no eye has seen, no ear has heard, our hearts haven’t even imagined what God has in store for us**.

But then Paul says...

10a these things GOD HAS REVEALED TO US THROUGH THE SPIRIT.

It actually means the opposite of what people commonly say. Instead of NOT knowing, Paul’s point is we do know – and this is the important part – b/c the Holy Spirit has revealed it to us.

Let me give you two applications...

First, if you have spiritual understanding, instead of being prideful, it should actually make you humble, b/c it’s been given to you...

1 Cor 4:7 What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Regarding the spiritual understanding you have, be thankful and humble b/c it’s an outpouring of God’s grace.

The second application is since spiritual understanding is something we can’t earn, we must pray God reveals it to us:

- Pray God opens your eyes – and your children’s eyes – to understand spiritual truth.

- Come to the Lord humbly – like a child, as we’re about to discuss – asking your Heavenly Father to give you revelation.
- Don’t think you have it all figured out.
- Have a teachable, receptive heart.

And speaking of humility and children, please turn back to **Luke 9:46**...

Luke 9:46 An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.

We might assume a few things...

- We might assume the disciples always got along...they obeyed Jesus’ teaching about loving their enemies, so of course they were like best friends who really loved each other.
- We might assume they learned from Jesus’ example and were humble, and thought more of others more than they thought of themselves...

But this is one of those places in the Gospels that reveals this WASN’T the case!

Notice this wasn’t a discussion. It might have started as a discussion, but every translation says **argument**. This was heated. It was serious. It wasn’t casual. They were upset w/ each other.

As far as why they were having this argument, there are three possible reasons and it could be any of these or all of them:

1. First, they could’ve had this argument b/c Jesus had just chosen only three of them – Peter, James, and John – to accompany Him at the Transfiguration:
 - a. More than likely they came down from the mountain and told the other nine what they saw.
 - b. Maybe this made them jealous.
 - c. Maybe it fueled their competitive fires and they started arguing about who’s really the greatest.
2. Another possibility is Jesus just said He was going to die. Even if they didn’t fully understand what that meant, they could’ve understood Jesus might not remain the leader, so they start discussing who’s going to take over in His absence...and this discussion turned into an argument.
3. The third reason - and this is what I tend to think - is they knew Jesus was setting up His kingdom on the earth, and they want the highest position. They’re jockeying to be the Number Two Guy after Jesus Himself...kind of like James and John sending their mother to see if they can sit on His right and left.

I think we all know this is a terrible argument any time – there’s never a good time to argue that you’re the greatest – but this was a particularly bad time for the disciples for a few reasons...

First, they’re coming off a failure. They were just unable to cast the demon out of this boy.

- Look back at **verse 41**. Jesus just rebuked them: **O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?**

- They shouldn't be arguing about who's the greatest right after Jesus said this to them. It seems like Jesus' words didn't make much of an impact on their pride.

Second, look what Jesus just said to them in **verse 44**: **“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”**

You can't miss the contrast!

- You've got Jesus discussing His suffering and death.
- You've got the disciples arguing about who's greatest!

And this isn't the last time they have this argument. There's one more instance recorded in Luke's Gospel...

Luke 22:24 A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

The context of this argument also makes the disciples look bad, b/c this took place at the Last Supper. This means they were arguing about who was the greatest RIGHT UP to the last hours of Christ's life!

The third reason it's so bad for them to be having this argument is...they're the disciples...

- We're not talking about people who typically look bad in Scripture.
- This argument didn't take place between pagans, or religious leaders, or tax collectors.

It's the disciples"

- They've been with Jesus...
- They've been watching Him...
- They've been learning from Him...

Think about what happened before these verses:

- In verses 10-17 we read the amazing account of Jesus feeding the 5,000.
- In verses 28-36 we read about the most glorious event up to this point in Christ's ministry: the Transfiguration.
- In verses 37-42 we read about Christ effortlessly casting out a demon as the disciples watched.

Talk about witnessing awesome spiritual events!

Wouldn't you think after all of this they would have grown tremendously...they'd be light years ahead in maturity?

But then they had this argument!

If you're a parent, I hope this might encourage you!

Picture this...

You had an awesome time of family worship. You conclude and think, *“This is it. This is when our family changes for good. After a bible study like that surely my children will all reach their full potential in Christ.”*

Then what happens?

- An argument breaks out among your kids:
 - They’re selfish.
 - They’re prideful.
- They look like the disciples here!

There’s application for us as parents – or adults – too!

- We’ve gone to great Christian conferences...
- We’ve listened to thousands of sermons...
- We’ve read countless Christian books...

But...

- We still argue with our spouse.
- We’re still prideful.
- We’re still falling short in different ways!

So before we’re too hard on the disciples, we should consider that we do this...

- We might not do it outwardly like they’re doing – at least I hope we don’t do that – but we do it in our hearts...
- We think we’re better than others...
- We come up with all the ways we’re greater than others.

So we’re not better or different than the disciples.

And this is why I’m thankful that Jesus chose twelve men who would have an argument like this:

- Not b/c it makes me comfortable having an argument like this...
- But b/c I have my own weaknesses and failures, and when I see that Jesus chose these men with all their weaknesses and failures it reminds me that He can choose me and use me too.

But even though Jesus chose these men to serve Him, He’s still very comfortable rebuking them. Look at **verse 47**...

47 But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side

Although Luke’s Gospel doesn’t record it, the disciples were having this conversation and they thought they could keep it from Jesus. Mark’s Gospel records their embarrassment when He questioned them...

Mark 9:33 [Jesus] asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.

They tried to keep the conversation a secret, but **verse 47** says **Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts.**

The mention of their hearts is important, b/c they’re being prideful and pride begins in the heart:

- We read about the way they’re acting outwardly.
- But Jesus knew what was going on inwardly.

And Jesus confronted this. Look at **verse 48**...

Luke 9:48a and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

Go ahead and pause right here. We’ll look at this part of the verse first...

You can’t miss the key word: **receives**. It occurs four times in the sentence:

- Jesus says that to **receive this child** is to **receive Him**, and to **receive Him**, is to **receive Him who sent Him**, referring to God the Father.
- **Receiving the child** means serving and caring for the child.
- The disciples probably thought this was below them...they thought they were too important for this.

So Jesus brings this child close and says the way this **child** is treated is the way He’s treated!

Jesus lives in His people, so the way His people are treated is the way He’s treated, and this child – like all children – belongs to Him. The parallel account in Matthew’s Gospel makes this clear...

Matt 18:16 “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for TO SUCH BELONGS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

The kingdom of God belongs to infants, b/c they’re His...and Jesus says to **receive** – or care for infants – is to **receive**, or care for Him.

While the other accounts stress that we’re to become **LIKE** this child, Luke’s account has much more of a focus on service.

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: THE WAY WE TREAT CHRIST’S PEOPLE IS THE WAY WE TREAT CHRIST.

Here are some examples showing that Jesus feels treated the way His people are treated...

Matt 10:40 Whoever receives you (speaking to the Twelve Apostles) receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me (referring to the Father).

Christ's people are His ambassadors, and the way it works w/ ambassadors is if you receive one it's like you received the person who sent him; therefore, to receive Christ's people is to receive Christ.

Mark your place in Luke and briefly turn to **Acts 8:3**...

The context is Stephen was just stoned to death, and Saul was present when that happened...

Acts 8:3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Saul was terrible to Christians. He sounds like a monster the way he breaks into believers' households and drags off men and women and throws them in prison.

Turn one chapter to the right to **Acts 9:4** to see what Jesus said to Him...

Acts 9:4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul never met Jesus before this. So what would you expect Jesus to say? **Why are you persecuting MY PEOPLE.**

Look at **verse 5**...

5 And [Paul] said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Jesus said Saul was persecuting Him, b/c the way we treat Jesus' people is the way we treat Jesus.

I'm not going to have you turn there, but in the Sheep and Goat Judgment, listen to what Jesus says to the sheep that receive the kingdom of God...

Matt 25:35 I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' **37** The righteous [asked], 'Lord, when did we [do these things?]' **40** And [Jesus said], 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, **YOU DID IT TO ME.'**

Listen to what Jesus says to the goats...

Matt 25:42 I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 [The unrighteous asked], ‘Lord, when did we [not do these things for you]?’ 45 [Jesus said], ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, YOU DID NOT DO IT TO ME.’ 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The point is, the way we treat Christ’s people is the way we treat Christ.

- Nobody can say, “I love Jesus” when they don’t love His people.
- People who don’t love His people don’t love Jesus.

So I’d ask...

- How are you treating Christ’s people?
- Are you serving the Lord by serving your brothers and sisters in Christ?

This is an important question, b/c we serve Christ by serving His people!

Look at the rest of **verse 48**...

Luke 9:48b For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

This is one of the many paradoxical statements of Jesus: the way to greatness in His kingdom is by being the least, which is really to say the humblest...and this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: GREATNESS IS DETERMINED BY HUMILITY.

The best way to understand the relationship between Jesus’ statement and the child He brought is to think about the way children were viewed in His day. Briefly turn a few chapters to the right to **Luke 18:15 [says people] were bringing infants to [Jesus] that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.**

This is another low-point for the disciples. Why would they rebuke the people?

- Children weren’t well-esteemed...
- People didn’t really want them around.
- Children couldn’t be taught the Torah...think of Jesus being unable to go to the temple until He was twelve.

So Jesus uses a child as a picture of being least...and He says, “Be like this!”

The parallel account in Matthew’s Gospel makes this clearer...

Matt 18:4 Whoever HUMBLER HIMSELF LIKE THIS CHILD is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

This would've been even more humbling for the disciples than it might first look for us, b/c here's what really happened...

- The disciples are arguing about who's greatest in Christ's kingdom.
- Jesus pulled them way back and started talking to them about simply **MAKING IT INTO** the kingdom.

He starts telling them about the humility needed to enter the kingdom.

And why's humility needed to enter Christ's Kingdom?

Think of all you have to recognize:

- You have to recognize you're a sinner who deserves punishment.
- You have to recognize you can't save yourself.

Plenty of people don't have this humility...and as a result the kingdom isn't for them.

And this is why children are such a great example:

- They are humble...
- They aren't trying to impress...
- They're helpless...
- They're dependent...
- They know they can't save themselves!

This is why in the parallel account **Mark 10:15 [Jesus said], "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God LIKE A CHILD shall not enter it."**

The key word is **receive**...children receive beautifully!

If you think of the way children receive, it can tie the whole sermon together...

We were talking about **receiving spiritual truth**, and children are a great example:

- Children aren't skeptical. They're trusting...which is what faith is...
- They're inquisitive...they want to learn...they don't think they know everything...
- Things are pretty simple to children:
 - You tell them Jesus loves them and they believe that.
 - You tell them Jesus wants to be their Savior and they **receive** that.

If you want to learn spiritual truth, be like a child!

The word **receive** also makes us think of gifts...and this is another reason children are a great example: what child doesn't want to receive gifts?

- Salvation is a gift, and the way children receive gifts is a great picture of the way we receive salvation.
- When you offer children a gift...
 - They don't try to earn it.
 - They don't think they deserve it.

They simply receive it!

Let me conclude by saying this...

We recognize this is a low point for the disciples, but they have one thing going for them...

At least they wanted to be great in the kingdom of God. They wanted to be part of that kingdom, and that alone is commendable. For some people, being part of God's kingdom is the last thing that comes to mind. For the disciples it was a big deal. They're still light years ahead of people who don't even care to be great in God's kingdom.

My prayer for you is that you would have the disciples desire to be in the kingdom of God, and that you would have the humility of a little child to repent of your sins and look to Christ in faith.

If you have any questions about anything I've shared this morning, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service, and we'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.