



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Transfiguration

Sermon Notes

Luke 9:43b-50

August 5, 2012

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹ And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰ And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, 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.” 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. ⁴⁶ An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side ⁴⁸ and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.” ⁴⁹ John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.”

- On August 15, 2004, nearly eight years ago, we celebrated our very first worship service of Grace Reformed Baptist Church, in the dining room of Mike and Cindy Thompson. When we founded GRBC, we did so on the basis of a few basic principles, and one of those was the idea that the church should be the primary place where biblical doctrine is taught and the gospel faithfully proclaimed.
- In fact, in our first piece of printed material, entitled *What Does Grace Reformed Baptist Church Believe?* we quoted Reformed Baptist pastor and theologian Tom Ascol, who wrote: “**One of the greatest maladies that has befallen evangelical life in the last century is the church’s abdication of the work of theology to the academy. But theology, sound doctrine, the Word, belongs to the Church.**”

- Here at GRBC, we certainly believe that “the work of theology” belongs to the Church. However, over the past eight years, and especially more recently, I have come to realize another, related, truth. And, that truth is that the church must not only teach theology, but sound, biblical application as well. In other words, **every aspect of our theology has an application in the life of the believer, and it is the job of the church to make these connections.**
- If one considers the central doctrines of Christian theology, each one of them has a powerful application in the life of the believer.
 - The Trinity
 - The Incarnation of Jesus Christ
 - The Two Natures of Christ
 - The Atoning Work of Christ
 - The Bodily Resurrection of Christ
 - The Ascension of Jesus Christ
 - Salvation by Grace through Faith
- However, churches often teach application without theology, and this leads to a life that is devoid of any eternal fruit. For example, feeding the hungry, apart from the Gospel is an act of futility, for all we are doing is prolonging the inevitable reality of death for those we are feeding.
- Yet, the other extreme is where I fear we are often in danger of treading. And that is the teaching of theology without application. This can lead to arrogance and a haughty spirit that condemns others who are not as “biblical” as we are. As a pastor once told me, this is nothing short of “dead orthodoxy.”
 - But, as the great preacher Charles Spurgeon once declared, “No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.”
 - Therefore, we must draw the connection between theology and the Christian life, for without this connection, we become fruitless as well.
 - And this appears to be where the disciples were – albeit for only a short time – in this phase of their lives with Christ

I. Christ Supremely Humbled Himself

II. Christ Calls His Disciples to Lives of Humility

III. Christ Calls His Disciples to Lives of Unity

^{43b} *But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples,*

- Luke writes that “they were all marveling at everything he [Christ] was doing...”
- The point here is that, given the totality of Christ’s ministry (His miracles, signs, wonders, and exorcisms) the people were astonished and in awe.
- And it is in this context that Jesus will speak of His coming death.

I. Christ Supremely Humbled Himself

⁴⁴ *“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”*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.*

- Christ begins here by using a euphemistic phrase: “Let these words sink into your ears...”
 - In other words, Christ is saying, “**Listen very carefully to what I am about to say...**”
- It has been about a week since Christ first spoke to His disciples about His coming crucifixion:

²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Luke 9:21-22

- It is clear that, up until this point, the disciples had a view of the Messiah similar to that of the Pharisees. Unlike the Pharisees, the disciples recognized Jesus as the “Christ [or Messiah] of God.” However, just like the Pharisees, they had not concept of a suffering Messiah, even though it was declared in the Old Testament.
- In the midst of the amazement of the people, Jesus speaks to His disciples regarding His arrest and betrayal. Regardless of how amazed the people are now, things are going to soon change in very dramatic way.
- Jesus is clear that *The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.*
 - We know that within the band of Christ’s disciples, Judas would betray Him, handing Him over to the Jewish authorities.
 - We also read in Acts 3:13, the Peter said, “¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.”

- One could also say that the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate delivered Christ into the hands of the Roman soldiers to crucify Christ.
- However, the truth is that, ultimately, **God the Father delivered up His Son to death**, superintending the events of the life of Christ in accordance with His will.

Isaiah 53:10: “¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

Romans 8:32: “³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Acts 2:23: “²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

- By Christ speaking of His impending crucifixion, He demonstrated at least two things: (1) it was God’s plan all along and therefore not something that caught the Lord by surprise; and (2) He [Christ] was willingly and humbly submitting to His coming death by crucifixion.
 - That is, the words of Christ revealed that He was about to willingly and purposefully give Himself up for a ransom for all who believe.
 - **It is almost impossible for us to fully understand the depth of Christ’s humility here, in that He – the Son of Man – submitted to His death “at the hands of men.”**

Then, we read: “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.*”

- It seems that the disciple were much like we are, when we fear the reality of something that is imminent. “Perhaps,” we convince ourselves, “if we do not think about it, or discuss it, it will not occur.”
 - In our own lives as Christians, we even hope to ourselves that, “Surely, there is another way for the abundant life than through the cross.” “Surely Christ did not mean that ‘all of us’ must take up our cross and follow Him.” And so, we, like the disciples, fear the reality of the cross and hope for another way.
- Yet, the cross and Christ’s unimaginable suffering and agony were central to Christ’s mission and it is central to the gospel.

- Not only this, but if any believer desires to live a life dedicated to Christ and His purposes, it will always include the cross.

1 Corinthians 2:2: “² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Galatians 6:14: “¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

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- From the words of Jesus here, we get a glimpse into the supreme humility our Lord exhibited in His submission to the will of His Father.
 - **And it is in the context of these words, that the disciples begin to argue over who among them is the greatest.**

II. Christ Calls His Disciples to Lives of Humility

⁴⁶ An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side ⁴⁸ and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

- It is somewhat hard to believe that in the midst of Jesus speaking of His coming death at the hands of men, His disciples start arguing of which of them will be the greatest in his kingdom.
- The Bible does not say how this particular argument arose. Perhaps Peter, James, or John began boasting about their “mountaintop experience” during the Transfiguration.
 - Regardless, it appears juvenile, petty and foolish given the gravity and significance of the work that Christ was preparing His disciples for.
 - Just a few days prior to this, Christ said the following words to His disciples: “²³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”
 - It is, indeed, incredible the degree of grace that Christ extends to His disciples (and us!) when they fail to grasp the most basic concepts He is teaching them. Yet, Christ uses this as an opportunity to redirect His disciples and teach them a valuable truth regarding the nature of God’s Kingdom.

- Rather than losing His temper and yelling, Luke explains that “*Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side* ⁴⁸ *and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”*”
- In other words, Christ simply took a child to His side and taught His disciples a most powerful lesson.
 - According to Philip Ryken, “Part of His point was that it takes humility to make friends with a child. To have a meaningful relationship, an adult has to get down on the child’s level and talk in a way the child can understand. According to Jesus, when people have the humility to welcome children in this way, they are really welcoming the triune God.”

Darrell Bock writes that, “In Judaism, children under twelve could not be taught the Torah, and so to spend time with them was considered a waste.” For example, we read in the Mishnah, “Morning sleep, midday wine, chattering with children, and tarrying in places where men of the common people assemble, destroy a man.”

- Like Christ so often does, He calls us to do that which He has already done. That is, in His Incarnation, our Lord gave up His unspeakable glory for a time in order to condescend to us in order to bring us to the Father.
 - I am reminded of John Calvin’s famous statement that God’s Word – the Bible – is like a mother whispering into a child’s ear.
 - In other words, through the Scriptures, God condescends to us and speaks to us in simple language we can understand.

“For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

- In this scene, Jesus makes **no comparisons** between His disciples; He simply states that the one who is least is great. It is a statement that can potentially apply to everyone.
- **God never judges our actions in comparison to another fallen human being.**

2 Corinthians 10:12: “¹² Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.”

- Christ’s words are simple and quite easy to understand. Christ is stating that, in God’s Kingdom, the one who sees himself as the least is great.
 - The reason for this is that none of us, as Christians, receive what we rightfully deserve, and that is God’s condemnation and wrath.

- The great Anglican theologian J.C. Ryle commented that, “Of all creatures none has so little right to be proud as man, and of all men none ought to be so humble as the Christian.”
 - I personally will add another level to this, that no Christian should be as humble as the Reformed believer who acknowledges the sovereign grace of Almighty God. Unfortunately, however, this is often not the case.
- In man’s kingdom, only the strong survive. In fact, we call this “survival of the fittest.” In God’s kingdom, however, it is the humble who will be exalted.
- It should not surprise us that God’s definition of greatness is fundamentally different than man’s.
 - The famous nineteenth century atheistic philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche condemned Christianity as the religion of the weak, describing what he referred to as the “will to power.” He defined the concepts of *good*, *bad*, and *happiness* in relation to the will to power. “What is good? — All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? — All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? — The feeling that power *increases* — that a resistance is overcome.”
 - Unfortunately, we have bought into this worldly lie that we cannot allow ourselves to appear weak or humble.
 - In fact, as fallen human beings, we often think that seeking forgiveness and repentance is a sign of weakness. As Christians, we often feel the same way.
 - Yet, when we do repent and humble ourselves, we learn that relationships are restored, reconciliation occurs, and God is honored in and through it.
- A proper theology of the Cross and understanding of salvation by grace would serve to correct our sinful mindset that humility and weakness are in some way a negative thing.
 - When we look at the life Jesus lived, He interacted with the dregs of society, even making some of them His disciples.
 - Because He was seeking to honor His Father, He sought out the weak and rejected of society. If we are seeking to constantly please man, we will name drop and seek out the wealthy and influential. However, if we are seeking to please God, we will do the opposite. We will embrace those that our society has rejected.

James 1:27: “²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

- The “payoff” is more immediate, however, when we seek to please man. However, when our hearts are on pleasing God, we seek the things He loves.

Philippians 2:5-8: “⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

- Sound theology should humble our souls and bring us to our knees. Pride and arrogance; however, declare that we need to promote ourselves and look after our own interests.

James 4:10: “¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

1 Peter 5:6: “⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,”

- Yet, human weakness and humility are often some of the most powerful instruments in the hands of God. For, through humility and weakness, God most clearly reveals His grace, power and mercy in our lives.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10: “⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

III. Christ Calls His Disciples to Lives of Unity

⁴⁹ *John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.”* ⁵⁰ *But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.”*

- For the sake of context, we must read John’s words here as a **response** to the words of Jesus which turned man’s view of “greatness” upside down.
- Essentially, John is saying, “Lord, we hear you when you say that the least among you is great; however, what about this case...”
- John then speaks of a “freelance exorcist” who was “casting out demons in your name.”
 - He then explains that “we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.”

- The imperfect *ekolyomen*, translated “we forbade” may indicate that the disciples attempted repeatedly to stop the man.

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- Then, Luke writes, Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.”
 - The focus of Christ’s words here was not concerning the identity of the man, but the nature of the disciples’ hearts.
 - We do not know the identity of this man; however, it is entirely possible that he was one of the seventy who would have been given such power, as recorded in Luke 10.
 - We not only do not know the identity of the “exorcist” here, but we don’t know his motive either – and neither did the disciples.
 - Paul address a similar concern in His epistle to the Philippian church:

Philippians 1:15-18: “¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

- **There is a very interesting point worth noting here, however, and that is that in the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus sent out the twelve:** “¹ And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”
 - Each of them were given power and authority “over all demons and to cure diseases...”
 - But, then, as we read last week, **a father begged the disciples to cast a demon out of his son, “but they could not.”** ³⁸ And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹ And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰ And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.”

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Therefore, it is somewhat ironic that Christ called the disciples to cast out demons, and they failed to walk in faith; yet, they want to condemn a man who is (apparently) successfully doing, in faith, what they could not do. |
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- In the words of Christ, however, there is an underlying principle. As Darrell Bock notes that **“the disciples’ ministry is not an exclusive ministry, but will draw on many collaborators to complete the task (10:2).”**
 - Pride, it appears, had crept into the band of disciples. Pride can and will destroy the unity that Christ has called the church to exhibit.
- The Corinthian church was plagued by the level of jealousy and strife.

1 Corinthians 3:3-9: “³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not being merely human? ⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.”

2 Corinthians 12:20: “²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.”

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- We must never seek to force others to conform to our way of ministry. Rather, we must be grateful when the Gospel is proclaimed and lives are changed.

Lukan scholar Joel Green writes, “Jesus had implored the disciples to honor those of no status at all, but they have refused partnership with one who did not share the status they assumed for themselves.”

Writing over a century ago, J.C. Ryle remarked about how countless Christians “in every period of Church history, have spent their lives in copying John’s mistake. They have labored to stop every man who will not work for Christ in their way, from working for Christ at all. They have imagined in their petty self-conceit, that no man can be a soldier of Christ, unless he wears their uniform, and fights in their regiment... We forget no Church on earth has an absolute monopoly of all wisdom, and that people may be right in the main, without agreeing with us. We must learn to be thankful if sin is opposed, and the Gospel preached, and the devil’s kingdom pulled down, though the work may not be done exactly in the way we like... Above all, we must praise God if souls are converted, and Christ is magnified – no matter who the preacher may be, and to what church he may belong.”

- I stand before you this morning not knowing where that line is. That is, the line that separates the sincere Christian with whom we may disagree from the charlatan who is out for his or her own gain. However, given this passage of Scripture, I believe it takes a great deal of spiritual maturity and even more humility to be able to discern where that line truly is.

- Like we so often say here at GRBC, we must be about the business of affirming what we believe, and who we are more than denying who we are not and criticizing others for not being more like us.
- It is, indeed, much easier to isolate ourselves and condemn others who do not believe as we do than it is to build bridges and seek genuine Christian unity through humility.

R. Kent Hughes writes that theological pride and arrogance is “a telltale aroma, and others can smell it, especially those outside the church. Sometimes it is an acrid air of condescension or subtle, smiling hostility, or aloofness, or clubbish exclusivity, or doubt about God’s blessing on all who are not in the approved circle. This stench has kept multitudes away from the church and, more importantly, a knowledge of Christ.”

- I began this morning speaking of the importance of the church teaching sound theology and doctrine along with biblical application.
 - In the case of unity, we find the basis and source in the glorious Trinity. For here, in God’s eternal nature, we see not only diversity in the three distinct persons; but we also behold perfect unity. Christ Himself submits to the will of the Father, although He Himself was equal as God with the Father.
 - **Therefore, may we heed the words of the Apostle Paul who declared that we should have the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus, who although He shared the same nature as God the Father, did not seek to hold on that status, but supremely humbled Himself and became obedient to His Father, even to the point of dying as a criminal – and all of this for our sins.**