

Part 35: Learning from our Mistakes

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Watching film is an important part of an athlete's life. It's where you get to slow down, focus and learn from your mistakes. There's one infamous story of a former NFL player whose growth plateaued because he was unwilling to do the hard work of studying his own film. His coaches sent him home with blank tapes to test him, and he would show up the next day letting everyone know he watched them.

As we resume our series in the book of Luke, we are entering one of Luke's big turns in the story of Jesus Christ, and the largest portion of his book: Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. After gathering disciples and wandering in northern Israel, Jesus now begins the road to the cross and as a result his instruction to his disciples heats up.

Jesus is preparing his disciples not only to understand the cross for themselves, but he's preparing them to live out cross-shaped, kingdom-minded ministry.

As the energy picks up in the book of Luke, what we have today is a film session for our own good. A passage of scripture which, just like that former NFL player, is to be neglected only to our own detriment. What we see played back for us today are four stories where the disciples didn't get it—four stories of incomplete pictures of what it means to follow Jesus which are meant to instruct, correct and encourage us as we attempt to be fit for the task at hand.

Our main point today is going to be this: **Disciples are humbled by the name of Jesus and driven by the gain of Jesus.** In Luke 9:46-50, we see two stories which show us what it means to do live and work "in the name of Jesus." What we will see in this portion is that **Disciples are humble not arrogant.** But secondly in verses 51-62 we see Jesus' own commitment to the cross and the kingdom of God and in seeing that we see that **Disciples are steadfast not vindictive** and **Disciples are kingdom motivated not apathetic.**

Let's begin by reading part of our text today, but I want to actually start with where Stephen finished last week as if frames our context a bit more: **Luke 9:43b-50.**

Twice now Jesus has predicted his death and while the disciples are wrestling to understand it clearly, what they understand clear enough is that Jesus is going to be missing for a season. And what does this lead them to discuss? Who among them is the greatest? If and when Jesus is gone, who is strong enough, bold enough, talented enough to be the leader? But this is where Jesus introduces his first point of teaching today: **Disciples are humble not arrogant.**

It says in verse 46 that the disciples began to argue among themselves. The Greek word there is one which means that they began to reason, to design, to form thoughts or opinions about themselves.

Andrew compared his Instagram likes to Judas'. Matthew reminded Philip who was older. Peter began talking about how stellar he was at leading in the home. James asked Simon what it was like to fail so hard at casting out a demon while he was talking with God the Father in the presence of a glowing Son on the Mount of Transfiguration.

As they all begin to measure themselves against each other, Jesus himself does some reasoning. Just as the disciples assessed each other, Jesus assessed not only the meaning of their words, but the reasoning of their hearts. Jesus here fulfills in full perfection **Proverbs 20:5**.

On a daily level our words and our actions might disguise the intent of our hearts from others, but Jesus sees with measured clarity the sinister reasoning of many of our hearts: we negotiate, we leverage, and we scheme in order to be seen, recognized and treated as the greatest.

And while these twelve grown men are arguing about who is the greatest, Jesus quietly pulls a child to his side, which was to put the kid in a position of greatness and he interrupted their external audit of awesomeness by saying this: **Luke 9:48**.

In the Greek it would read: whoever is *micros* is *megas*. The least is the greatest.

But what does this mean? It looks at face value like receiving a child. It's not that children are disgusting or distasteful. It's just that children, specifically in this day, were loved but culturally unimportant. They didn't contribute to the wellbeing of the collective whole. If someone wanted an important job or position, they got as far away from childcare as they could.

If you've ever been to an amusement park you've encountered signs that say: "You must be this tall to ride." Our world has those signs all over: "You must be this big to be great." But what Jesus is showing his disciples here is that greatness by Jesus' standards is never quite tall enough for the world's standards. To measure yourself by that mark is to always be lacking in regards to true greatness and to be frustrated with your own experience.

It would be as if Jesus says true greatness is not the man running the Fortune 500 Company, but the man who cleans the toilet of the man who runs the Fortune 500 Company.

Now if we could get over the scandal of this, we might fall into another pit. We might go out and buy a toilet brush and scrub all the toilets, we might take all the kids in the world. And then what might we do? We might measure our toilet scrubbing and our day care in contrast to everyone else around us.

Our world loves, and it is a common grace that it does, to care for the vulnerable and the neglected. But this too becomes a carnivorous campaign of arrogance. We brag about our service, we boast in our generosity, and we wear our charitable causes like badges of honor which separate us from the self-indulgent commoner. But when we do this, it's not so much that we have humbled ourselves, but that we have simply changed the basis of our accounting.

But do you notice what Jesus says? This is not a race to receive a child for the fame of your name, but instead Jesus says, "whoever receives a child in my name."

This act of service, this denial of worldly greatness isn't done out of the fame of our name, but out of the fear of Jesus' name. We do not pursue these ventures because of what it means to us, but because of what it means to Jesus. Here is the test of humble discipleship.

How easy is it for us to measure our service and our participation by visibility and vibrancy? I am immensely grateful when people come up to me and encourage me on account of my sermons. But have you encouraged the person setting up the coffee? Have you thanked the individuals watching your children?

When you consider what it looks like to serve Jesus do you think only of those things which can be done famously and visibly? Do you find certain positions nobler than others, more fitting of an individual like yourself?

Charles Spurgeon once said to the men he was training for ministry: "Give me the man around whom the children come, like flies around a honey-pot: they are first-class judges of a good man."

The Lord has blessed our church with a hoard of kids who roam about like wild dogs after church. I myself am guilty of making haste to talk to big people about big things after church, leaving these kids as if they are only important once they are baptized or because their parents are important.

May the Lord cure our church of such blindness! I pray that our kid's ministry directors have to turn people away from caring for our kids because our church knows full well the glory of serving people and in places that the world attaches little value.

But it's here we actually find the greatest value. What is the value? At the end of the day the value isn't that those who serve amass a track record of awesome service. But it's that those who are willing to do small things, to small people, of seemingly small value, who show what they value most is not their name, but the name of Jesus. And to receive the name of Jesus, is to receive the greatness of the Father himself.

Here is the distinction of Christian greatness—our greatness is never how we are perceived by the amusement park markers of the world, but how we are perceived in Jesus before the Father. He is our greatness and when we have him, then we have the privilege of stooping lower than everyone else knowing that we cannot escape the affirmation and affection of Jesus Christ.

Worldly benchmarks lead us to constantly fear others or to constantly desire to trample others under our own accomplishments. This is the error John shows when he says, "Ok, us who are here might not be better than each other, but what about that guy over there?"

Look back again at **Luke 9:49-50**.

Now I want to be clear here. The issue with this man is not that he is a heretic. It's not that he's preaching another gospel. It's not that the church should not be concerned and guarded against false doctrine. How do we know this? Because just as the disciples were affirmed for whatever they do in the name of Jesus, here this man is doing his work in the name of Jesus.

So what's the perceived issue? John makes it clear: "He's not following with us."

He looks different than us. He isn't one of us. He's competition to our own brand, and a threat to our own exclusivity.

The potential offence of this man to the disciples is elevated all the more when we remember the last thing we saw the disciples doing. A father had a son oppressed by a demon and look what he told Jesus in **Luke 9:40**.

Have you ever been frustrated with how someone else is following Jesus? How someone else is pursuing holiness? How another church is preaching? How your co-worker shares the gospel? Often times our own frustration reveals that we are only upset because they are doing what we ourselves are not. An arrogant heart never celebrates growth in others, but instead only criticizes that which appears different.

It would probably be more fitting for this man to join Jesus' group of followers. That would probably be a more helpful experience for him. But look at what Jesus adds in **Mark 9:39-41**.

What's the difference between Jesus and John? John sees someone who is not where he should be and he wants to crush him. Jesus sees someone who is probably not yet where he should be and he says, "If he's genuinely seeking to serve me, he will not long afterwards appear so different." Jesus trusts the process of sanctification in this man, knowing that as he submits himself faithfully to the name of Jesus growth comes.

How often do we treat others with a gracelessness expecting them to be where we are while knowing Jesus himself showed grace to us over time? They might not look like you yet, but the goal of ministry is not that people would look like you, but look like Jesus. It is in his name we are saved and for his name we serve.

My wife asks ladies she's discipling a really helpful question that helps us apply this point to our own lives. She asks, "If you were not a Christian, what would be different about your life?" If our lives are not markedly different if Christ is taken out of them, then perhaps we have wrapped our lives around our own name and not Jesus'. But if that's you, take heart, and repent for there is more held out for you in returning to a life in Jesus' name than there is in the frustration of living for your own glory.

This is seen all the more as we transition to the next phase of Luke's gospel, and notice Luke's transition statement: **Luke 9:51**.

This is where Bible study is really important. At first reading we might just read: Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem. But why did he do that? Did you notice it? It was because the day for him to be taken up drew near?

What does that mean? Taken up? It means that Jesus knew his ascension back into glory was coming. Jesus knows his own glory, his own restoration, the accomplishment of his salvation for the lost was drawing near and what then did he do? He set his face towards Jerusalem.

This phrase communicates not only direction, but resolve—he was fixed, consumed with, determined to go to Jerusalem even though he knew what awaited him was his own death there. Correcting our arrogance is hard, following Jesus is hard, the cross would be terrible for Jesus in the flesh, but behind our temporary trials is the hope of greater gain. In Jesus' hope amidst trial we find our own.

This is important as we read our next scene: **Luke 9:51-55**.

So here we see on account of our gain in Jesus, **Disciples are steadfast not vindictive.**

This is the first time we encounter Samaritans in the book of Luke and that theme will be addressed more as we continue. But what is important to know here is that the Samaritans were racially mixed Jews. They weren't "pure bred," and were treated as such. There was also a dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews as to which place of worship was the true place of worship. The Samaritans worshipped God on Mount Gerizim, and the Jews in Jerusalem.

So it's probably on account of seeing that this Jewish man, who claims to be a Jewish messiah, who was destined for the Jewish religious center, that they refused to welcome him and his traveling band into their town.

Jesus had already warned his disciples that this was a possibility back in **Luke 9:5**.

Now when we hold these two texts in contrast we see that this story isn't so much about the town rejecting Jesus, but instead about the disproportionate response of the disciples.

Here, the guys who just failed to cast out a demon, think they can call down fire from heaven. Why? Because Jesus was rejected. Now, this in and of itself is not a trivial issue. This town did not respond rightly, they in fact responded to their own detriment.

But what is seen in the hearts of James and John is that they are driven by a vindictive heart because they are so offended at the arrogance of this Samaritan town that they themselves lose sight of what is going on. They become as Paul talks about in Romans 10, zealous for God, but without knowledge.

What is that knowledge? The work that Jesus was about to do on the cross. The knowledge that judgement is real, but because Jesus' face was set towards the cross, so too for the time being is the offer of grace.

How many times when we are mocked for our faith, or our evangelism efforts are scoffed at, do we become agitated with a desire to be vindicated in the eyes of man because we don't want to look like a fool. We want to be seen as right, we want them to be punished and exposed as foolish now. We want them to see us rightly. Those who reject God will be punished, those who mistreat the Lord's people and continue in unbelief will reap what they sow.

But vindication in this moment of time doesn't come by fire falling from the sky, but instead by the Son of Man being lifted up on a cross. Judgement will come. This is why Jesus needed to die, because the wrath of God towards sin is real. But because of the cross, this is also the age of mercy.

Each of us in our sins deserved worse than what James and John wanted, but on account of Jesus and the offer of grace on the cross, God is allowing those who reject him to come to him right now in mercy. We will never out vindicate the cross. We ourselves will never be vindicated more than Jesus vindicates us. We all are in need of mercy.

Today, in light of the cross, is the day of mercy. If you have never come to Jesus in faith, look at this Jesus who temporarily suspends this wrath, and has promised to suspend it forever for all who see his work in Jerusalem.

But we also see the steadfastness this kind of grace produces. Despite the fact that there was real rejection, Jesus didn't lose heart. He didn't say: "This is too hard, the cost too great, the resistance too strong." Instead, notice what he did. He went to another village. You see when we have a theology of a resurrected Jesus, we find the steadfastness to move forward in the face of hardship. For even death itself can't stop the progress of the gospel.

Dear Christian, do not lose heart even when Bible study, evangelism and holiness seem to be met with resistance in your own heart and rejection in the world. For there is a gain greater than sorrow held out for us, and because we have seen Jesus' own resurrection we know grace will get us there as well.

Lastly, we view our final scene this morning. And here we see that in light of what is gained in Jesus: **Disciples are kingdom motivated not apathetic.**

Read with me, **Luke 9:57-62.**

So what we see here are three would-be disciples, all of whom are wrestling with the idea of following Jesus. But what Jesus wants to show us in this interaction is that following him is more radical than we would initially think.

The first man seems to be all in, he says to Jesus, "I'll follow you wherever you go!"

What's interesting is that this man proves to be a good theologian but a poor disciple. He's a good theologian because Jesus doesn't say: "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, and disciples have no place to lay their head." Instead he says, "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

And this man being a good theologian knows that no man is above his master. If Jesus, the messiah would wander this earth as a sort of stranger apart from his final home, then so too would he as a follower. I wonder how many of us take our expectations of discipleship from what Christianity has looked like in the modern west instead of what it looked like in the life of Jesus?

I read this week of a Frenchman who was a believer and a knight of noble honor who was imprisoned for being a Christian. But because he was a cultural elite, the guards didn't put shackles on him when he was in prison. But the Knight responded and said, "Spare me not these chains for it is an honor to belong to a king of the highest order."

Following Jesus reshapes our priorities of belonging. This isn't because we find joy in suffering, or seek it out. But it's that we are reminded that all suffering takes from us reminds us of what can never be taken from us in the Kingdom of God.

Read with me: **Luke 9:59-62.**

What we see in these two potential disciples is again not a lack of desire to follow Jesus, but instead competing desires. They both offered something as of "first" importance. "First," let me bury my father—"first" let me say farewell.

Our problem often is not that we don't follow Jesus with firmness, but that we fail to follow Jesus with "first-ness." Jesus doesn't call us to not care about death, to not care about family, or to not care about friendships. But if when push comes to shove there are other "firsts" we miss the weight of this life.

Take for instance the funeral. Jesus says don't go bury your father, go and proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God where dead men never die! Why? The world doesn't need another funeral, the world needs another resurrection! This is what the kingdom of God promises! This promise of eternal hope is what drove Jesus to leave his Father and submit himself to sorrow in his life so that we might know eternal peace with him.

The last man tried to hold his old life and this new hope together. Even though he had already left his home, even though verse 57 told us he was already on the road, he himself told Jesus he would follow him after he returned back and finalized somethings with his old friends. Though he wanted the new, there was something attractive about his old life he didn't want to give up.

But Jesus said this: **Luke 9:62.**

No one who moves towards the Kingdom of God needs to look back. Why? Because we have something better before us! We have something of greater value. I remember my aunt had a magnet on her fridge growing up that said: "Tomorrow is the first day of my diet."

How many of us hear the call to follow Christ, hear the call to give up our old sinful ways, to change the nature of our old relationships while always wanting to start it tomorrow? There's always something else that comes up.

J.C. Ryle spoke about this when he said: **"Tomorrow is the devil's day, but today is God's. Satan does not care how spiritual your intentions are, or how holy your resolutions, if only they are determined to be done tomorrow."**

Right now, in the act of Jesus' death we have the certainty of forgiveness. Right now in the reality of the resurrection we have the promise of newness of life. We have the guarantee that what we seem to leave behind of our old life is rags compared to the riches we labor for in the Kingdom of God.

So let's stop waiting till tomorrow! Let's roll forward. If the name of Jesus is in us, and the gain of Jesus held out for us in the Kingdom, let our plow lines be straight even if for a moment they are hindered, and let us follow him fully.

I want to close us today with Paul's words in **Philippians 3:13-15.**