

March 31, 2019

“One Day: Let Me Go Over This One More Time”

Luke 9:37-45

ONE DAY at a time is the only way to actually live. We can fret about the future. We can regret OR romanticize the past. But the Bible tells us “THIS is the day the Lord has made!” (Psalm 118:24) God is a present-tense God, inviting us to live present-tense lives.

Part of being present with God is to acknowledge our present reality; including the truth that our days are filled with Mountain Tops and Valleys. The one unchangeable reality is that change happens: circumstances change, people change, we change – every day. Political parties change, economic realities change, our health changes – sometimes overnight. Kids change . . . slowly. Churches change. And while some of these changes are wonderful and full of celebration, other changes are very frustrating and painful – even fatal. We see some drastic changes from one day to the next in the ministry of Jesus. Geographically, Luke 9 takes us from a mountaintop to a valley. Emotionally, the joy and brilliance of the Transfiguration is followed by the frustration and failure felt by a father and Jesus’ disciples – AND (apparently) JESUS!

What’s going on here? In the disciples; and with Jesus in particular? And what does any of that have to do with this One Day we are living today – or any of the 24-hour days we have left? What does that moment have to do with this moment?

First, let’s touch on what’s going on in this boy physically. Our Western minds want a medical explanation for this event, and there may be one at some level. I think the more important work for us is to acknowledge there are spiritual forces at work as well. This boy is being tormented by an evil (or “unclean”) spirit. All three Gospel stories make it clear a “demon” is at work and needs to be rebuked and cast out.

While I don’t feel the need to be Pentecostal in my theological bent, I am compelled to say that we need to get over our Western discomfort with evil and spiritual realities which cannot be quantified. There is an Enemy who can never supersede God’s sovereign rule but – for some reason – has been allowed some amount of freedom by God, as long as it serves God’s overall purposes. You and I can come up with explanations for all sorts of evils in this world that are sociological and physiological – or economic and scientific – but we will miss the more important truth that there are “principalities and powers” (Ephesians 6:12) at work that we can only combat with prayer, fasting, and the armor of God’s Word. The disciples are trying to “cast it out” under their own power and authority, while Jesus’ power and authority are still something they just don’t get. We’ll get back to Jesus’ power and authority.

What's going on in Jesus? What is He feeling? He seems to erupt and lash out: "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" (Luke 9:41) I asked everyone at Wednesday in the Word to name what Jesus might be feeling here. Anxious was one of the words. That makes us a little anxious, doesn't it? Another word was Angry; someone else said Frustrated. Take a look at those three words, emotions, feelings. Nothing says Jesus couldn't feel these things, or that they are sinful to feel. We tend to suppress negative emotions in Jesus, probably because we are uncomfortable with them ourselves. Another word emerged in our discussion Wednesday that I think explains why Jesus was feeling all these emotions. And that word is **Urgency**. The fact that the disciples are not ready to step into the void about to be created by His death has Jesus very frustrated. Luke helps flesh this out in the conversation that follows this event. "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands." (Luke 9:44) In other words, 'Let's go over this one more time. I'm going to suffer and die.'

Time is running out for these guys to be apprenticed to the ways of Jesus. They will have to carry out His Kingdom work once He's gone. But they aren't getting it. Is it because they aren't hearing it or aren't comprehending it? Or do they not yet sense the **Urgency** of it all?

What's it like to be on each side of this equation?

Have you ever had to repeat something again and again to the same person?

And have you not really grasped the significance of something someone kept telling you?

How many of you have had to re-explain something vital to a friend, family member, co-worker?

This can go from the benign and somewhat humorous . . .

"How many times do I have to tell you to take your shoes off at the front door?"

"Can you PLEASE tell me when we're out of milk?"

"Put the toilet seat down!"

. . . to the very serious . . .

"You're not taking me seriously. You're not listening anymore."

"You have to buckle-down on your studies."

"No means no."

"We don't have any more money to spend on non-essentials."

"Your drinking/addiction to pornography is destroying us."

"I'm seriously concerned about your health."

The more urgent the consequence, the greater the intensity with which we communicate . . . and, often, the higher our volume. Jesus erupts: "You faithless and perverse generation! How much longer do I have to put up with this?"

And how many of us have been on the receiving side of someone's increased intensity and frustration? How many of us 'just aren't getting it'? [Our addiction, patterns, stubbornness, denial]

How might we be like the disciples?

What exactly is going on in the disciples?

It seems like a bad combination of two things. On the one hand they feel Powerless. They can't cast out this demon and help this boy. In Luke, they have yet to be sent out in pairs and yet to be successful in casting out demons. (see Luke 10:17) They also feel Ignorant. Sometimes we choose to be ignorant; it's a form of denial. That would be me and technology. [In Mark's Gospel they ask Jesus why they can't cast out the demon. He tells them something very specific about the need to fast and pray when casting out "this kind" of demon. (see Mark 9:29)] Powerless and Ignorant is a bad place to be. It is an especially difficult place for men to be. We don't do either well.

But there's something deeper than powerlessness and ignorance that the disciples are feeling. "And they were afraid to ask Him about this saying." (Luke 9:45) What they feel at the deepest level of their souls is FEAR.

So many of our days are spent in fear. Like the disciples, this fear can be fueled by feelings of powerlessness and/or moments (or entire seasons) of ignorance.

What they really don't understand – and maybe don't want to know – is that Jesus' days are numbered; that He won't always be with them . . . that the nature of His Kingdom is very different from anything they could get their minds around.

What we do know is that Jesus' disciples didn't get it. Get what? That the way Jesus understood and practiced power and authority were very different from the way they saw this whole thing playing out. They had been schooled by the prevalent Jewish thought that Messiah would bring redemption by taking over; kicking out the Romans and religious hypocrites; refilling their seats of power with . . . well, the disciples.

What they failed to get – which is why He had to go over it one more time – was that Jesus would exercise power and bring redemption through sacrifice and suffering. Here's what we know for sure: **people who are willing to sacrifice everything have more power than anyone.** People who no longer hold on tightly to life and stuff and reputation and title are the real strong ones. If you aren't afraid to die, you are very powerful. We saw this lived out tragically on 9/11. But we saw it played out brilliantly by those who chose to march from Selma to Montgomery over the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

Last week we celebrated the rescue of 4 teenager girls in the Dominican Republic who were trapped in sex trafficking. International Justice Mission (IJM) continues to experience victory over evil because of their deep commitment to prayer and the fact that those who serve with and for IJM are not afraid to suffer and sacrifice, and in many cases die, if it means following Jesus to bring “release to the captives.”

Victory over evil comes from a willingness to suffer. And that’s why following Jesus One Day at a time is the only way to find life that is abundant and victorious. It’s not the easy life or the comfortable life. But it’s a life of purpose and impact; a life in which evil itself can be defeated by a willingness to lose one’s life, status, financial resources, personal well-being.

There may be boys and girls and men and women depending on us to deliver them from the pain and evil in the valleys of their lives. May we be willing to practice the kind of power and authority Jesus modeled for us.