

**“THE GREAT GOD”**  
**LUKE 9:37-45**

In recent years, it seems that there has been a fair bit of talk about GOATs. Not goats, as in “domesticated, social, and intelligent mammals in the Bovidae family, related to sheep, known for providing milk, meat, and fiber.” GOATs as in the Greatest of All-Time. As in Willie Mays or Babe Ruth or Shohei Ohtani. Or Tom Brady or Troy Aikman or Roger Staubach. Or Michael Jordan or Kareem Abdul Jabbar or Larry Bird. Or Jack Nicklaus or Tiger Woods. Or Muhammed Ali. Or “2001: a Space Odyssey” or “Citizen Kane” or “Vertigo.”

It makes you wonder — just what makes greatness? Something new? Something uniquely powerful? Something newly influential? Something enduring? What *is* great? *Who* is great?

The debates about what constitutes greatness and who is great are not new. When the crowds considered Christ, they misunderstood greatness. They thought the healing miracles and the feeding miracle were great. And they were amazed by the powerful preaching. And they missed the true greatness behind His words and works — that He was the Son of Man, the expected Messiah.

Even the disciples misunderstood the greatness of Christ. After He stilled the Sea they asked, “Who then is this...?” (8:25). They knew He was powerful; they didn’t yet see His greatness. And in this account, His greatness is again on display, and we will see next week that they ~~entirely~~ misunderstood Him.

When reading the narratives of the Bible, we can often discern how the author is using the story by paying attention to the statements of the people and the author’s interpretations. And that is true in this account: how the crowd responds to the healing of the demoniac boy is the point of the story (though even they miss the true significance of their own statement): “And they were all amazed at the greatness of God” (v. 43a). *God is great*. And God revealed in the God-Man Jesus, is great:

**FOLLOW CHRIST (BELIEVE IN HIM) BECAUSE HE (ALONE) IS GREAT.**

Luke is continuing the theme of verse 23 — take up your cross and follow Christ. Believe in Him. Submit to Him. Love Him. Obey Him. Why? Because, these verses tell us, He is great. In these verses wonder at **two pictures** that reveal the one theme of God’s greatness.

**1. Christ is Great: He’s Greater Than SATAN and SUFFERING (vv. 37-43a)**

- ✓ He is COMPASSIONATE towards suffering (vv. 37-41)
- ✓ He is POWERFUL over Satan (vv. 42-43a)

**2. Christ is Great: He’s Greater Than SIN (vv. 43b-45)**

- ✓ He is HUMBLE to suffer (vv. 43b-44)
- ✓ He is SUFFICIENT to save (vv. 44-45)

## 1. Christ is Great: He's Greater Than SATAN and SUFFERING (vv. 37-43a)

### • He is COMPASSIONATE towards suffering (vv. 37-41)

- ✓ Luke tells us *on the next day when they came down...* After spending a night on the **mountain** and after seeing the splendor of Christ's essential nature, Jesus and the disciples came back down and were immediately greeted by **a crowd** — likely the same crowd He'd left two days earlier (**v. 23**).
- ✓ Only now the crowd is concerned about the health of a demon-possessed boy (vv. 38-39).
- ✓ [Aside: Matthew and Mark (9:14-29) both tell the story, but include different details and emphases; they focus on faith and trusting Christ, while Luke is concerned with the greatness of Christ.]
- ✓ The disciples have seen the Glory of Christ above (on the mountain) and now they will see it "below" (in the darkness of the suffering world). [Hughes]
- ✓ **There** is desperation in the crowd as Jesus and the three disciples arrive (the other nine are also there already — in some manner of humiliation, v. 40). How desperate were the people?
  - The father sees Jesus and immediately **shouts** — it is a cry for help and assistance. And he **begs** Jesus — a word that is commonly used for prayer; it is a humble, needy petition.
  - The father addresses Jesus as **Teacher** — typically the crowds or Pharisees use the term and it usually acknowledges the wisdom of Christ without affirming His authority (similar to today). It may be that the father is affirming the truth of Christ's teaching, but probably hesitantly.
  - He asks Jesus to **look at my son**; what is notable is the reason — **he is my only** boy. This appeal was made previously (**7:12**; 8:42) — that the boy was the man's only son was important for the son would be responsible to care for his father in his latter days (e.g., 7:11ff).
  - Cf. also **ln. 3:16** — Jesus is also the only unique Son of God; the term may also refer to affection...
  - The affliction of the child and the father are great (**vv. 39-40**):
    - ... **A spirit seizes him** = another occurrence of demon possession (**4:33, 41**; **8:2, 27**; 9:1). That the possessed person is a child and that the spirit **seizes** him both indicate that this is involuntary; the demon is unwanted; the boy and his family are sufferers.
    - ... The demon brutalizes the child: it controls the child's voice box so that he **screams** involuntarily, is **convulsed, foams at the mouth**, persists for a length of time (**only with difficulty does it leave**), and **mauls him**. The last term is particularly violent — he attempts to crush and shatter the boy; Mark says that the demon has often thrown the boy into fire and water in an attempt to kill the boy. The child had to be overwhelmed by pain and questions ("what's happening?") and the father and mother had to be exhausted from trying to protect the child. The entire family is suffering (which is often true of ailments).
    - ... *And when he went for help he didn't get it — I begged your disciples...and they could not* (**beg** is the same as in v. 38 — not getting help from the Twelve, they went to Jesus).

... The disciples had no ability; they were powerless to cast out the demon, even though they had been given power over demons in **9:1**. *They aren't great.*

... While the father makes a "complaint" against the disciples and their inability to cast out the demon, Jesus does not seem to address their failure, though the other writers say Jesus said it was a lack of faith (Mt. 17:19-20) and lack of prayer (Mk. 9:28-29). The lack of prayer and lack of faith may well be the same thing: because they lacked faith, they didn't pray. Here, Jesus points to the lack of faith and the perversion of this generation of Israelites (**v. 41**).

- ✓ **Jesus** used the occasion of the father's request to **answer** the criticism of the crowd. They evidently were mocking the disciples for their inability to help (and insinuating that Jesus was powerless; **Mk. 9:14**); Jesus corrects his statement and the crowd.
  - He calls them an **unbelieving** (faithless) **and perverted generation**. They are "twisted" in their unbelief — they are thinking in wrong ways about God and Messiah and like ancient Israel it left them unbelieving and disconnected from the Lord (**Dt. 32:5, 20**).
  - We know the disciples are connected by faith to Christ, so Jesus is not condemning them (and probably not the father either, who has faith, though it is weak faith, Mk. 9:24).
  - He is condemning the unbelief of the crowd. He has been with them some two years and they are persisting in their agenda and desires for Christ — and their unbelief.
  - This is also a demonstration of Christ's greatness as He knows what is in man (Jn. 2:25).
- ✓ YET, Christ is with them. **How long shall I be with you...put up with you?** He came from Heaven to be with His people (**vv. 26, 31**; Jn. 1:14). And He has been unwaveringly patient with them, waiting for their repentance and faith. He has endured them. He has been compassionate in their unbelief (**10:13; 13:34**). And He is compassionate with this grieving father — **bring your son here**. The expectation with this command is that He will act favorably towards the boy and his father. There is no anger, no exasperation, no weariness — Jesus responded to the need with kind compassion.
- And He is compassionate toward you.
  - ✓ What is your suffering? Hard relationships? Broken relationship? Diagnosed illness? Undiagnosed illness? Death? Loss that feels like death? Unbelieving children? Parents? False accusations? True accusations? Unrelenting battle with sin? Ungodly desires? Godly desires that are unfulfilled?
  - ✓ He is compassionate toward your need. He knows the need and He is tender toward it.
  - ✓ Did you notice that while there is a crowd, He is focused on the one man (as if all others have receded into the background)? In His omniscience He knows all and is focused on the one as if no others exist. He is aware of you and He is attentive to you (even when He *seems* silent)....
  - ✓ You will never find in Christ an instant of hardness; He is ever compassionate, moving towards us in our need (e.g., **7:13; 10:33; 15:20**). He knows we are dusty (Ps. 103:14). Cf. **Mt. 11:28-30; Jn. 14:27**.
  - ✓ He is compassionate to you and patient with you — but don't wait too long to go to Him (**Rom. 2:4**).
  - ✓ And along with His care for us, He is able to do something about our needs...

- He is **POWERFUL** over Satan (vv. 42-43a)

- ✓ Have you ever made a promise that you couldn't keep? I'm not much of a mechanic. (I can identify the location of my car engine.) Many years ago the alternator on my car needed to be replaced; a seminary buddy took one look at it and said, "That's a fifteen minute job..." We broke two sockets, used a cheater bar *and stood on the end of the cheater bar* to attempt to loosen the bolt. Finally we were able to create the smallest gap in which we put a hack saw and we cut out the bolt. Then we discovered that when the alternator malfunctioned it created enough heat to melt the bolt into the alternator. *It wasn't a fifteen minute job.* And my friend couldn't keep his promise.
- ✓ When Jesus said, **Bring your son here**, there was an implied promise. And there was a glimmer of hope in a dad that undoubtedly had gone to many people for help and done all he could.
- ✓ Was Jesus adequate to overwhelm this persistent and powerful demon? *He was.*
- ✓ I said the demon was persistent — notice that while the boy **was still approaching, the demon slammed him...and threw him into a convulsion**. Because Jesus and the man were talking, the boy had to be in close proximity, and yet in that short distance, the demon still threw him to the ground (like a wrestler — likely more bruising and **mauling**, v. 39) and gave him an epileptic-like **seizure**.
- ✓ It's the last gasp attempt of the demon to resist Jesus.
- ✓ **But Jesus**. The demon fights and protests. **But Jesus...** He is not overwhelmed or perplexed.
- ✓ But Jesus **rebuked the unclean spirit**. He verbally denounces the demon. Luke doesn't record what Jesus said, but His rebuke is similar from what God did in Satan's original rebellion (**Rev. 12:7-9**). It is similar from what He will do one day in Satan's final judgment (**Rev. 20:10**).
- ✓ What did He say in the rebuke? Cf. **Mk. 9:25**, "You have no place here...get out..." With the rebuke, He **healed the boy**. (Another indicator that demon possession is a form of suffering.)
- ✓ And then He gave the boy **back to his father**. In a final act of grace, the boy is restored to the father. The father had possessed the son previously (and was vigilant to protect the boy, Mk. 9:21-22); the sense of the phrase is that Jesus gives the boy to the father in a *new condition* — he is healed and restored to full health. The father no longer must be attentive to protect the child from harm.
- ✓ What do you say after a remarkable meal, or a fun visit, or an exciting ballgame? Or a miracle?
- ✓ "That was great!" Luke uses two words to indicate their excitement — they were **amazed** (4:32) and their amazement was over the **greatness of God**.
- ✓ Their response was typical of the crowds that followed Jesus — amazed (**4:32**; 11:14), praised (**5:25**), and were fearful (**7:16**). They were amazed, but apparently not enough to believe.
- ✓ In this miracle Jesus was demonstrating to Israel what He would do for the nation if they repented.
- ✓ This is the final miracle (of 13) in Jesus' Galilean ministry in Luke. The miracles authenticated His claim to be the Son of Man; this then is the final testimony to them of His power and authority. And they rejected Him. Just as He was rejected after His first sermon (4:28-30), so they again reject Him and He leaves Galilee. For Jerusalem. For the cross. For the resurrection.

- ✓ Jesus was faithful to fulfill His (implied) promise to the boy's father because He is powerful. He is powerful over the most powerful forces in this world (Satan and His minions). He is powerful to keep His promises to you and care for you. Life may still be hard, but you will never be disappointed when you trust in Him. If you haven't begun to trust Him, will you trust Him today?...

## 2. Christ is Great: He's Greater Than SIN (vv. 43b-45)

### • He is HUMBLE to suffer (vv. 43b-44)

- ✓ While *everyone was marveling*, Jesus pulled the disciples aside to talk to them.
- ✓ Matthew says Jesus and the disciples were "gathering in Galilee" (Mt. 17:22); Mark says something similar. They have probably left the area around Mt. Hermon and were traveling south.
- ✓ Note that Jesus did not respond to the crowd's excitement over the miracle (they were prone to only wanting the miracle without desiring the Son of Man). Instead, He immediately addressed the disciples to preclude any possible misconception they might have about the miracle.
- ✓ He also is pointed in how He addresses them — *let these words sink into your ears*.
  - We say similar things: "Listen up...pay attention...look me in the eye...what did I say?"
  - Every single word that Jesus said was truth and worthy of their attention. It was tempting for them to not always be attentive. This is Jesus' way of saying "this is really important..."
  - Cf. 8:8; 14:35 — "He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." He's fixing theology and perception: "Don't let My demonstration of power skew your understanding of Messiah..."
- ✓ As He has throughout Luke, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man (keep Dan. 7) in mind...
- ✓ That Son of Man who has all authority is *going to be delivered into the hands of men*.
  - The sense is not just "going to be," but "about to be" (ESV) — it will be soon.
  - And you can't miss the irony: the Son of Man is One who has authority over all things will *be delivered* (betrayed) into the *hands of* (mere) *men*?!
    - Even more astounding, in the OT, those who are "handed over to others" are under the divine judgment of God for their sin (Deut. 28:7; Jer. 21:10; 22:5; 32:4, 28; Ezek. 7:21; 11:9).
    - Men will have *this* authority over the only authoritative Son of Man?! There is no group of men that might have authority or power over Him. Yet they would. And they did.
- ✓ Now we are also to understand that it is not the authority of men that leads to this betrayal. It is the plan of the Triunity of God to bring this about (18:31-32; Is. 53:10; Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:32).
- ✓ The death of Christ was necessary to fulfill the plan of God and the Son of Man was humble to submit to the plan (and He was in full agreement with the plan).
- ✓ Jesus is reaffirming what He began this section saying: v. 22. The One who has all glory (28ff) is also the One who will suffer and die and be resurrected (v. 31).
- ✓ He must suffer and die (17:25; 18:33; 22:15; 24:26, 46). The cross came before the crown.
- ✓ And He willingly humbled Himself on that cross — for our sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

• He is **SUFFICIENT** to save (vv. 44-45)

- ✓ The disciples ***didn't understand***. They didn't have cognitive or spiritual comprehension.
- ✓ They didn't understand the plan of God, the person of Christ, the power of the cross. Everything that Jesus said was incomprehensible to them: how could Jesus be betrayed? Why would Jesus be betrayed? What is God's plan in the betrayal? What good was the betrayal?
- ✓ There were at least three other factors in their lack of comprehension:
  - The truth ***was concealed from them***. I.e., God closed their minds to keep them from understanding. It wasn't just a momentary hiding, but an ongoing process. It wasn't time.
  - ***They were afraid to ask***. Why were they afraid? I don't know. Luke doesn't say. But the statement does suggest that if they had asked He might have revealed what He meant.
  - They were preoccupied with their own self-exalting desires (vv. 46ff — next week).
- ✓ They didn't understand, they didn't get it, and at least at the moment, they didn't want to get it. But they would get it later — e.g., **1 Pt. 1:17-21**.
- ✓ And despite their lack of comprehension, Christ was able to save them. He is able to save them because their salvation is not dependent on themselves but on Him.
- ✓ They are insufficient and He is wholly sufficient. He is a sufficient Savior for your sin.
- ✓ Whatever your sin — even the sin of indifference that you may have had this morning — you can have and know the salvation and freedom of Christ, if you repent and believe. Will you? He is great.

**CONCLUSION:** The last painting by the Renaissance painter **Rafael** is of the transfiguration. It's 15ft x 10 ft. It's a massive depiction of the glory of Christ on the mountain. And in the foreground of the painting, Rafael has placed the scene of the **demoniac boy**. It is a contrast between glory and trouble, between greatness and humility. And the willingness of the glorious and great Son of Man to **humbly interject Himself** into the troubles of mankind — troubles like yours and mine.

How do we know God is great? He is great because He is exalted above all with a singular glory — and because He is compassionate towards our needs, and He humbly condescends to the worst affliction and death so that we might be with Him. This is the glory of our great God. He is the greatest of all time — the greatest before time. The greatest after time. He alone is great.

**BENEDICTION:** **Eph. 3:20-21**