

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sky filled with soft, white, wispy clouds. The sky transitions from a pale blue at the top to a deeper blue near the horizon. The horizon line is a dark, solid black band at the bottom of the image.

The Order of Faith

Jerry D. Ousley

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By Jerry D. Ousley

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The Step of Faith (Part 1)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:1-6

I'll never forget the first time I rode my bike on my own. I was shaky and wobbly and it seemed that it was all I could do just to stay up on the thing. Mastering the brakes was a whole different story, "Yikes! How do you stop this contraption!" I'm sure that many of you have exciting and funny tales about your first solo bike ride as well. I believe this is probably a little the way the Disciples felt when Jesus gave them this announcement except it was much more challenging. There was no one there to pick them up if they fell except the other Disciple that was going with them and he felt just like the other one did.

After calling them all together Jesus transferred His power to heal and work miracles onto His Disciples. The Bible doesn't say how He did this but just that He did. It's probably a good thing it didn't say how because we'd have guys going around trying to do the same thing and probably charging for it. Anyway, this transfer was made and the same authority that Jesus had and demonstrated was given to these twelve followers.

But that wasn't enough. He then sent them out. But He didn't just send them out without instruction. Here's what they were told: (1) Don't take anything for your journey, (2) No staff, (3) No moneybag, (4) No food, (5) Not even a change of clothes! Wow! What a challenge! There was no packing up and getting ready to go. It was just, "I've given you what you need, now go."

They were also told not to put up with a lot of "bologna" for if they were not received, instead of wasting time, they were to

“shake the dust of the place off their feet” (in other words, sever all attachments) and move on.

We talk a lot about faith these days. Faith is essential to the believer. After all, our entire salvation experience is based on faith. Faith has been blown up to be this or that. Faith is simple really: We just believe and obey. These two aspects of faith are it. We believe what He tells us in His Word and in our hearts (incidentally, only believe what’s in your heart if the Word backs it up. That’s the safe way). We believe what He says, and then we obediently do it. A good acrostic for faith is: Full Assurance In The Heart.

I wonder how many of us today would go out just like Jesus told His Disciples to do? How many of us would be willing to not take any supplies with us? How many of us would believe that He really would provide our daily provisions? That’s what He required of these men. They did it.

The first order of faith is then taking that step of faith. It requires stepping out on nothing but what He instructs us to do. It requires us to take the first step on our own. We are fortunate here in the United States of America but we are also suffering from extreme “spiritual disability.” We are fortunate because we have freedoms that aren’t found anywhere else in the world. We can come and go pretty much as we please. We have the freedom to step out in faith without being put into jail or punished in some way (other than possible ridicule).

But we are also “spiritually disabled” because we have been programmed to be prepared. We have been raised to depend on the arm of flesh more than our faith in God. I know this sounds harsh, but it is true. If we examine our own lives we’ll find many instances of dependence on security.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not telling you to just quit your job and start waiting on that knock on your door for your daily provisions (unless that's what God has really told you to do). But I am saying that we need to realize that our true source is in Jesus Christ, not in the things we habitually trust in.

The other thing that disables us is the thought that God is our servant and we can just sit back, have faith, and He's going to shower us with a life of luxury. That's not going to happen. We must put the proverbial "horse back in front of the cart." The truth of the matter is that when God equips us He does so for a purpose. He wants us to go out. He gives us gifts to be used. The blessings we receive (and they are certainly a part of the picture) are coincidental to the equipping.

While in the Army stationed at Ft. Meyer in Arlington, VA, I read a story in the paper one day of a brother and sister who lived in a run-down shack next to the Potomac River. She had become sick and was found in the shack near death. Her brother lay in the bed, now dead for several days. His autopsy and her diagnosis showed that they were malnourished. He had starved to death and she was on the brink of doing so herself. It seemed that poverty had caught up with this unfortunate couple. She was so distraught that she was admitted into a mental hospital.

However, closer examination of their run-down shack revealed that there was more than \$100,000.00 stuffed into the mattress. These two individuals had hoarded up their money over the years, choosing to live in poverty rather than spend any of it and in the end cost him life and her sanity.

This story illustrates what many Christians of today in this country are doing with the blessings of God. Instead of putting them to good use and stepping out in faith as commanded, they "stuff them in their spiritual mattresses" and await death. We must begin stepping out in faith.

One may argue that the scripture passage above was spoken directly to the 12 Disciples, and they would be right. However, at the conclusion of the book of Mark, Jesus spoke words to all believers to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel . . . “ (Mark 16:15). God has sent us out and we are to go boldly. Why do we insist on “staying in?” We want people to come to us – to our beautiful edifices! We must go to them first. We must go into the “highways and hedges!” (Luke 14:23). It requires a step of faith.

Praise the Lord!

The Curious Attraction of Faith (Part 2)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:7-9

The things that Jesus did began to raise some curiosity, particularly of King Herod. He had imprisoned John the Baptist because John had spoken out against the unlawful and immoral marriage to his current wife. She had been the wife of his brother, and he had stolen her away for himself. In doing so, he had broken the Jewish laws against adultery.

John the Baptist had no problem calling sin out for what it really was and so he offended the King. After imprisonment, King Herod had become fascinated with John. Here was a man who was not afraid of him or his power. Herod had visited him often. But when Herod's daughter had danced for him at a drunken party, he offered her anything she wanted. Herod's wife had instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist which, she thought, would put an end to this delicate situation. Sadly, Herod had to stay true to his word, and so he had ordered the beheading of John.

But now, the people were saying that John the Baptist had been resurrected in Jesus. This troubled Herod. He had heard many things about Jesus, including that He was the reincarnation of Elijah or another of the prophets of old. Surely something was up with this man, for He had worked great miracles. This made Herod curious, and so He desired to see Jesus for himself.

This is also true to life today. When we reflect Christ in our lives, and display our faith, it will naturally bring out curiosity from others. They just can't believe that we can have a good day despite bad situations that may arise.

The world cannot fathom the joy that living for Christ brings. They cannot understand how we can have victory even when our world is crashing down around us. They see our lives. They know that we aren't perfect and that we sometimes fail God, but they also see the repentance that comes from those failures, and they see the great victories that arise from our faith in Him.

If this is not true of our lives, then we probably need to take a spiritual inventory of where we are. I'm not remotely teaching that we acquire anything in Christ aside from grace. It is through His grace exercised toward us that we are anything at all in Him. If we do anything aside from His grace then it becomes unfruitful works that really mean nothing.

We must allow God to have all the glory. But as we come to Him in repentance over our failures, He begins to use those things to draw us closer to Him, and stronger in our faith.

You see, faith becomes stronger not by asking God for more but by exercising that measure of faith (Romans 12:3) that He gives to each of us. As we exercise it then we become more aware of it in our lives and it grows a little stronger. We can ask God for more faith, but what He will do is to allow things to happen to us that require us to use our faith. When we see it in action we become more aware of it's working in our lives and so the next time we stand more confident in it.

This will cause others to wonder about us. It is a part of being a "peculiar people" or "a set-aside people" (1 Peter 2:9). To be "peculiar" for God doesn't mean that we act goofy or do weird things. It means that God has set us aside for Himself. Now, our faith may seem weird to others. But that is because they are not set-aside to God. When they come to God in repentance and become a believer himself or herself, then they too will become "set-aside" people.

As our faith makes others curious, I hope it is said of us that they are made to want to see Jesus. God can use our faith to make others desire to have what we have. Our faith is not only good for us but then becomes a unique and powerful tool to witness for Christ. Our faith can open doors to witness for His Name.

We are living in a world where it is becoming more and more dangerous and difficult to witness for Christ. But our faith can become a powerful witness for Jesus. I'm not talking just about the miracles that can and will come from serving Jesus Christ. I am also talking about the faith that causes us to endure for His Name.

I read a story several years ago about a time when German soldiers were persecuting Christians. They had marched a group from the concentration camp out onto a frozen lake. The temperature was frigid and much below zero. They made the Christians strip off their clothes and walk out to the middle of the lake. They then told them that if they would renounce their faith they could come back to shore, put on their clothes and be warm and comforted.

As the soldiers watched these people shiver and shake, a few of them did come running in to shore and renounced their faith. But most of them endured their hardship and persecution for the sake of Christ. One soldier, upon viewing their faith, could stand it no more. When one of the believers recanted and came running to shore, he immediately stripped himself and ran out onto the frozen lake taking his place with the rest of the believers.

Their faith, though it cost them their lives as they froze to death, became a witness to this soldier and he immediately accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Our faith says more than a thousand words. Our commitment to Christ and the reality of how we allow Him to affect our lives will indeed cause others to become curious, and accept Him as Lord and Master.

Praise the Lord!

The Challenge of Faith (Part 3)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:10-17

The disciples, upon finishing their assigned task, returned to tell Jesus all about what had happened. It was an exciting time. As a young boy, I remember many times when I would have a new experience and I just couldn't wait to get home and tell everyone about it. I'm sure you've experienced that many times yourself.

Jesus took them to a deserted place to talk. Jesus knew that it was important to let them share their experiences, not to brag, or swap stories to see who had the biggest, but to just share and understand what God had done through them. The Bible doesn't record all that happened but I believe that many people were healed and many believed on the Name of Christ because of their work. How wonderful that time must have been for the disciples. It was but a foretaste of what was to come and what God would do through them for the Kingdom.

But the people followed them. Being popular and famous has its drawbacks. There seemed to be no place deserted enough to get away from the crowds. Everyone had needs to meet. Everyone had diseases or new of someone else who did. Jesus was surrounded most of the time by depression, sickness, death, and struggle. It seemed that it might be a good idea to send the people away and spend this quality time with the disciples, but always having compassion on the people, Jesus began to heal their sicknesses and disease. This is not being critical of Jesus. On the contrary, He is the Master and whatever He deems to be best must be best. We must remember that in our own lives.

However, as the evening began coming on the disciples urged the Lord to send them into the nearby towns so they could get food and lodging. But Jesus said, “You give them food to eat.” It was impossible that they had brought enough food for even the 5000 men, let alone the women and children with them. If only half the men were married, and each of the married had an average of two children (remember, they had large families in those days, but we will be conservative here), there would have been at least 12,500 people present that day. That’s a lot of mouths to feed! Jesus saw the opportunity to teach His disciples another lesson, so commanded that the people be set down in companies of 50. They took an inventory of the food they had with them. Five small loaves or cakes of bread and two small fish – Not even enough to even feed their own group. But Jesus was the Master! He took the small cakes of bread, and the fish they had, gave thanks to God for it (is that a lesson in itself? To be thankful for what we’ve got?), began breaking it into fragments and so fed that multitude of people and had His disciples gather up twelve basketfuls of leftovers! What a miracle! We had seen Him heal the sick, raise the dead, calm the elements and now He supernaturally manufactured food! How could we ever doubt Him?

We sell Christ short in the Church of today. We talk about His miracles but are quick to follow what the world tells us to do. It is a downfall to our great economic system. Don’t get me wrong, I’m thankful to live here in the United States of America. I thank God every day for it. But we would have to be blind to not see the direction our great Nation is going. We are too dependant on ourselves to ever be dependant on God. The Church of America is at fault for this. It isn’t the drugs or the bars we should blame. It isn’t the crime that floods the streets of our cities. It isn’t the constant fascination with sex, or the killing of unborn babies that plagues us. And it isn’t the promiscuity and homosexuality that is the root of all our problems. Yes, these things are terribly wrong and we will be judged one day for it. But it is the fault of the Church because we are too busy fighting each

other, and trying to figure out who's right and who's wrong while ignoring the unsaved. We fight these problems and protest these situations and, don't get me wrong, we must stand up for what is right, but in the midst of this it seems to me that if we can remove the demand for these things by convincing people of their need for Christ, that many of these problems would just disappear. When there's no demand for drugs, the pushers will go away. When people aren't getting drunk anymore, our drinking problems will begin to disappear. When expectant mothers see no other recourse but to take responsibility for the child in their womb, there will be no need for abortion clinics. Church, let's do our job!

While these things are terrible and are destroying the very fiber of our Nation, the devil is performing miracles to get the attention of our youth and those who are looking for more than words while the Church is busy trying to justify its lack of faith. If we want to see souls saved, and our youth won back to Christ, we must roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Jesus put His disciples on the spot. He gave them a challenge of faith. They had seen God in action in their own lives. But then, they were dealing with much smaller crowds (as far as we know anyway). They looked down at their five cakes and two fish and looked at that massive crowd and it was bigger than they were.

All too often this is the case. Today we look at the massive problems we face as individuals and as a Church and it is difficult to have faith. Note that Jesus didn't say anything like, "Come on now boys. You just saw the power of God in action in your own lives. What's your worry?" No, He never once placed any doubt upon what they had already experienced but simply went to work while they watched. The lesson for the disciples was that the vision is always bigger. There is always room for more. Until we reach Heaven, there is never too much of God in our lives. We can

never have enough faith. There is always another plateau to reach for.

But we don't have to be overwhelmed by that because if we will relax ourselves in Christ and realize that whatever He has called us to do, despite how big it may seem and how small we are, He will open the doors, clear the paths, and lead us through if we will only trust Him.

The challenge of faith is that we trust Him. I tell a story in sermons from time to time of a man who was a high wire expert. One day he stretched a rope across Niagara Falls and the people began to gather around him. They cheered as he walked the rope back and forth across the mighty thundering falls. They held their breath as he did his dangerous tricks time after time, and then applauded him with glee as he completed them successfully. They said that he was the greatest tight rope performer they had ever seen. And then, he challenged them. He rolled up a wheelbarrow and took it across the rope and back. Again they cheered. Then he said, "If you really think that I'm the best and you really trust me, then I need one volunteer to climb into the wheelbarrow and let me push him across." The crowd fell silent. No one stepped forward. No one had the courage to back up his words.

Jesus is the great "Tight Rope Artist." We cheer Him and applaud Him as we read of the great things that took place in the Bible. But then, when He asks us to "climb into the wheelbarrow," we are reluctant. It is new ground for our faith. It is fearful. "What if He stumbles? What if He loses control of the wheelbarrow? I am afraid!"

After Jesus blessed the humble meal, He asked His disciples to take the pieces He had broken off, and begin to serve it to the people. I believe that they were afraid of failure, but they also trusted Jesus. So they took the first handful to the first group of fifty. Again and again they returned for more. They continued

handing out the food until all were well fed. Then Jesus asked them to gather up the leftovers - Twelve baskets full! Not only had Jesus fed this great multitude but He had provided the disciples food for several days to follow!

Today, Christ still challenges our faith. He still says, “Don’t be concerned just hand out the bread.” Whatever form He has issued the challenge to you to “feed” the multitude around you with the “Bread of His Word” don’t be overwhelmed by the magnitude of it, or the danger that might be involved. Don’t worry about the possibility of failure. If we are doing our work for Him, it will not fail. It can only fail if we stop doing what He has told us to do.

We must seek God’s face and be obedient to Him, not only in word but in trusting Him for the miraculous. This world needs to see evidence of Christ in us. We have many lessons to learn. But we must meet them straight forward. We have a challenge of faith. Follow the orders He has spoken your heart. You’ll be challenged to plow new ground, but you’ll glad you did.

Praise the Lord!

The Confession of Faith (Part 4)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:18-21

Jesus got few opportunities to pray alone. This was one of those times, however, His disciples were close by. At this point He asked them one of the most important questions He had ever or would ever ask them when He questioned, “Who do men say that I am?”

The answer, as you know, ranged from John the Baptist to one of the Prophets of old risen from the dead. Many opinions were floating about at that time. The world always has had and always will have, varied and many opinions about Christ. Even today the beliefs range from a good teacher, to a con-man. We have the right to believe what we want but bear in mind that just because we choose to believe or disbelieve in someone or something doesn't necessarily make our opinion right or wrong. Some choose to believe the Word of God and Its testimony about Christ while some choose to call it all a lie. We could offer many infallible facts to prove Christ's existence and that He was indeed the Messiah He claimed to be. However, those who are skeptics would still find reasons not to believe.

But the question Jesus really wanted to know from His disciples was, “Who do you think that I am?” After all, it was one thing to be popular with the masses. But when it came right down to it, the more important issue was what did those closest to Him and those whom He was training to carry on the ministry when He was gone knew in their hearts about Him. If they were following Him for the “loaves and fishes” as so many others were, then the future of the Church was in jeopardy. They identified Him immediately as the Messiah – the Son of God.

The most important question Christ asks of us today is the same. “Who do you think that I am?” It is the confession of faith. Our entire faith depends on our answer to that question. We can do as the disciples did at first and tell Him all the opinions and the theological assumptions. But when the rubber meets the road, what counts is what is witnessed from our heart. Does our heart really know that He is the Christ, the Son of God? Or, are there doubts hiding below all the supposedly correct answers? These are the questions we must ask ourselves before we offer answer to the Lord. Why do we serve Christ? Because it is popular, or because others we know do? Or do we serve Him from a positive confession of our faith?

If we really believe then we must live like we believe. People can talk about what we are doing in a good way or a bad way. But when it comes right down to it, what really matters isn't what others are saying but what our life is saying and what we know in our hearts about Jesus.

The disciples left everything – houses, lands, occupations, etc. to follow Christ. The Lord demands the same of us today. Now I'm not suggesting that you go out and sell everything that you own. Only Christ can give a directive like that. What I am saying is that we must recognize that to serve Him, everything we own, everything we are, and everything we desire must be given to Him. We realize that any provision we have comes from Him. We also realize that we must become like Him. We must do away with ourselves and let Christ be formed in us (Galatians 4:19).

To really have a close relationship with God through Christ, we must be willing to be swallowed up in Him. Does this mean that we must become weird fanatics? Maybe. It depends on how you look at it (personally, to become like Christ should be the normal thing to do and anything otherwise should be considered weird or fanatical, but the world will never see it that way).

We must confess Him to be the Christ, the very Son of God, the Messiah of the world. When we know it in our hearts, and we reflect it in our lives, then we are on our way to making the confession of faith that Christ wants from us.

Praise the Lord!

The Requirement of Faith (Part 5)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:22-27

Faith may be simple (it is believing) but there is a requirement that demand everything. While speaking with His disciples about who they thought He was, He ended their conversation by informing them that He would have to be rejected, suffer, be slain and resurrected on the third day. This He plainly told them in verse 22. But before they could recover from the shock of what He had just spoken, He immediately said that if anyone wished to follow Him, they must take up their cross every day.

These were challenging words. Today, when we think of taking up the cross we tend to think of displaying a stunning gold or silver necklace in the shape of a cross. But most people have forgotten what it really means to take up the cross daily and follow Him.

Let me remind you. When Jesus spoke these words about the cross they meant only one thing: The cruelest instrument of execution thought of by man. First the prisoner was beaten to a near death state. This Jesus endured but also was subjected to the crown of thorns that dug deeply into His head and scalp, and then was taken to Herod where He was blindfolded and then beaten by fists in the head while each of them asked Him “tell us who hit you.”

Next the prisoner’s arms were tied to the cross-member in such a way that they were forced to carry this weight with their arms outstretched away from them. Then he had to march up the hill of crucifixion carrying the full weight of this cross member as

its splinters dug into the freshly opened wounds from the scourging received earlier.

After an excruciating climb to the top of the hill which could have resulted in stumbling and falling flat on one's face several times, the prisoner was then forced to lay on the upright member of the cross. No care was taken as the individual was literally thrown down on the rough beam. Again I remind you of the deep wounds already in the back. Then, forcing the chin to the chest, the individual's head was held up while the soldiers nailed the cross member tied to his arms to the upright member (imagine the pain if they missed with the hammer a time or two).

The torture of the individual was maximized when they drove what we would consider railroad spikes through the top of the feet and through the wrists to hold the individual to the cross. Then, with a heavy thud, the cross with the individual now pinned to it was dropped into the hole that held it in the air.

Finally came the hours of waiting for death to come. While one may get numb to the pain of the spikes in their flesh, in order to breathe the prisoner had to literally push up on the spike in his feet, and pull up on the spikes through his wrists. This was done until the individual had no more strength and finally died of strangulation.

Unless it was a day like the day that Jesus was crucified. On the days before the Sabbath and Holy Days the prisoners were allowed to suffer until dusk when the soldiers would break their legs so they could not pull themselves up for air. However, Jesus had already died by the time they came to do that and so, as true to the prophecy, His bones were not broken.

To "take up the cross" to the disciples did not mean something glorious, but meant to follow Christ in death, and He had asked them to do this daily. What a strange request this was

coming from the One they hoped and knew to be the Messiah. I'm sure they were confused. In their estimation He had come to free Israel from these cruel Roman predators. But now He was asking them to "tie the cross members" to their arms and follow Him up the hill of crucifixion to their death. What a horrendous request.

He asks us to take up our crosses and follow Him daily. However, to my knowledge there are no nations still practicing crucifixion. Romans 6:6 tells us that as born again believers, our "old man" or past nature has been executed by crucifixion. Though Jesus was literally nailed to the cross in our place, He does require us to allow our old, past nature to be crucified in Him. Each and every day of our lives we must force the flesh to submit to God's will if we are going to follow Him. Most times this is a lot easier said than done. Even after surrendering our lives to Christ, each and every day we are tempted by the enemy to sin against God.

Yes, we have been covered by grace. The grace of God through Jesus Christ is enough for all of us. But we must make the flesh submit to what has been overcome in that grace. We can't just go along doing anything we want to do, never praying, never reading the Word of God, and never beating our human desire down for the glory of God and expect to be close to Him. How can we hear from Him if we aren't listening? Have you ever been in a conversation with your wife, husband, child, or a friend where, even though you may have appeared to be listening to them, your mind was actually a million miles away? Then when confronted about what they were telling you, you have no recollection of it because, quite frankly, you weren't tuned in.

It's the same with our relationship with God. In order to have a close relationship with Him and have our faith honed to a sharp edge, we've got to stay tuned in to Him and to do that we've got to take up our cross daily, and follow Him. We've got to put the flesh in its place and make ourselves listen to God. Human

nature doesn't want to do that. Human nature wants to busy himself with so many things that we literally don't have time with the One True God. That's the fallen flesh still subject to the devil and what he wants.

The requirement of faith demands that we put our selfish nature away and tune ourselves in to following Christ. To do that, we've got to be crucified every day. No, we don't literally do it, but we must put our old man to death at the beginning of each new day if we are going to follow Christ.

It's tough, but it's doable. It takes conscious effort, a willingness to put myself second, and a love for my Master that makes the task easier and easier every time. It is the requirement of faith.

Praise the Lord!

A New Revelation Because of Faith (Part 6)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:28-36

“But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:27).

He must have been talking about Peter, James, and John. On this day Jesus invited them to go with Him up on the mountain to pray. They followed Him with no idea of what was in store for them. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that while Jesus was praying the “inner three” fell asleep. However, when they awoke, I’m sure they rubbed their eyes and asked themselves, “Are we dreaming?” What they saw was their Master, Jesus transformed into His real and full glory. At that moment, if they had any hidden doubts about His claim to be Messiah, they were immediately dispelled for it was as close as any human could get to the glory of God and live to tell about it.

Further more Jesus was speaking with none other than the famous Moses and Elijah. The Bible doesn’t record the topic of their conversation but in a sense it was like they were making plans for the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) to be fulfilled in Christ.

Peter spoke “out of turn” but God quickly got him back into line when a cloud enveloped them. God spoke, “this is my most loved Son. Listen to Him.” God had privileged them with a special revelation of Jesus Christ that they dared not share with anyone until after His crucifixion and resurrection.

When we realize that there is a deeper walk in the Lord and we begin to hunger and thirst for it, nothing will satisfy until we see

that glorious revelation that is the only quenching for our thirst and the only fulfillment to our hunger. I'm not saying that the grace of Christ doesn't do a complete work. Yes it does. But we don't always realize it until we catch a glimpse of the glorified Savior. As our faith grows and we learn to trust Him more and more, our Lord will give us that revelation of Himself. When we get that new revelation our life will change forever.

Just as the disciples could not talk about their experience for sometime because it was so special, just so our Lord has a unique and individual experience especially for each of us. It is a personal relationship that words will never adequately describe. He has such a wonderful spiritual journey just like this for each of us.

Finally, Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah. As we mentioned before it was as if the Law and the Prophets were literally being hung on Love (see Matthew 22:36-40). We must learn to do this very thing in our lives. As we break the mold the world has placed on the Christian experience, the stereotype of "works," and plunge deeply in faith, we begin to realize that all the types of the Law and all the prophecies are summarized in our Savior of Love, Jesus Christ. I believe that when we move into this kind of relationship with Christ, He will begin to give us revelation that we'll have to study on before we can even share it! A new revelation because of our faith!

Praise the Lord!

Exercising Faith (Part 7)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9:37-42

The day after Jesus, Peter, James and John returned from their “mountain top” experience, they were met by a crowd of people. This wasn’t unusual. Jesus was used to great crowds thronging Him. The narrative soon looks past the crowd, however, and focuses on one man and his need. This man had a son that was demon-possessed. It was a very violent possession. The evil spirit would take control of his son, causing him to foam at the mouth, and would then physically abuse him so as to cause bruising to his body. This apparently would last for some time for the father of the boy expressed concern that it seemed the evil spirit would never let go of his son. The father’s love was deep because this was his only child.

Can we remotely relate to the desperation of this father? If this were one of our own children we would do everything that we could to help him. We would spend hours weeping with him. We would spend long nights trying to hold him down while this evil spirit brought his body into convulsions. We would spend every dollar available to us to try to get help to relieve him of this pain and torture. I’m sure this father did the same, but nothing seemed to work.

The man had brought his son to see Jesus, but He wasn’t there. However, His disciples were there. Perhaps they could help him. Now you’ve got to remember that they had returned from their own “missions trips” only a few days prior to this. They had seen evil spirits depart from people. They had healed the sick in the Name of Jesus. Great things had happened for them. Collected as a group except for Peter, James, and John, surely they could cast

this demonic spirit from this small boy. But they could not. What had happened? What had gone wrong?

As the man spoke with Jesus, he surmised the situation by saying that he had brought his son to Jesus' disciples but they could do nothing. I don't want to judge the disciples here. They could have been over-confident. Or, perhaps the man had no faith in them. We must remember that faith is a two way street. How many times did Jesus ask the question, "do you believe . . ." in some way or fashion before He healed? Many times. But we can't just play the "blame game" and try to pin the lack of faith upon any one individual. The bottom line is that the Master must be involved.

Granted, the other disciples had not witnessed what Peter, James, and John had. They had not seen the transfiguration of Jesus. But the story as a whole illustrates that after a new revelation of Christ, our faith will be tested. We will have to exercise our faith.

In previous parts of this series we have taught that faith grows by exercise, not by asking for more. Just as our physical bodies develop stronger muscles by exercise, so our faith is accessed quicker as we extend it. With every new revelation of our Master comes more responsibility. We are going to have to extend our faith more and more.

I suppose we could take on the attitude of, "Well, if that's the case, I just won't seek for a deeper revelation of Jesus." But if we really love Him we cannot help wanting to know more of Him and wanting to have a closer walk and revelation of Him. It is spiritually natural. It becomes a hunger and a thirst that can only be quenched with His presence.

What we really need to seek in extending our faith and exercising our faith is not to be like Jesus but to be in Jesus. The

disciples were trying to extend their faith towards the man and his son by doing what Jesus had done. They were trying to be like Him. There's nothing wrong with trying to be like someone who is a good and positive influence.

But to really exercise our faith requires us to trust Him. We cannot be satisfied with being like Him. We must be absorbed in Him. Only when He is truly present (through the avenue of the Holy Spirit) will miracles happen. Only when He is in complete control and our faith, not in ourselves, but in Him, tells us to stop and let Him do the work, does things begin to happen.

Jesus did heal the child. But before He cast that evil spirit from the boy He said, "O faithless and morally corrupt generation, how long shall I be with you and have to put up with you?" What a derogatory statement! What an accusation! He wasn't just speaking to the man but to all who heard Him, including His disciples. I'm sure they thought He was climbing their case. He was putting down the natural, fleshly man. Without Christ we are exactly what He called us: Faithless and morally corrupt. If you don't believe me just take a look around you and realize the morally corrupt and anti-Godlessness of our own generation. Every miracle is explained away by attributing it to something that could have happened naturally, and the whole of society is morally corrupt. If you don't believe me just look at what is being displayed in books, movies, and even commercials today.

Even the Church in general is concerned with natural things. The focus of the Church in general is not how to win souls for Christ but how to increase the business of our denominations. I say this in general. I know that there are many fine Church bodies and Ministries that are doing everything they can to win souls for Christ.

But our one and true focus should be to become consumed and absorbed in Christ. As Christ is formed in us (see Galatians

4:19) we may still look pretty much the same on the outside, but new attitudes emerge from us. New desires replace our former lusts. We are now in the presence of Christ and the reality of Him living in us takes on a whole new meaning.

As this takes place we not only get a new revelation of who Jesus Christ is, but we also begin to see that exercising our faith is not trying harder, but trying less and becoming more reliant on Him.

Praise the Lord!

Giving All Because of Faith (Part 8)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9: 43-45

What glorious things had been happening in the Ministry of Jesus Christ! He was preaching a message of hope and soundness of mind. Many people were being helped by these great words of wealth. If any one had a great ministry career ahead of them it was Jesus.

And the miracles spoke for themselves. The blind were receiving their sight! The deaf ears were being opened! Those who were hopelessly doomed with leprosy were being cleansed! Even the dead had been raised to life again! The witness of Jesus' ministry was there. No one could rightfully deny that. No other prophet, priest, or king had come with such a combination of the words of life and the demonstration of power that followed Jesus.

Had it been God's will He could have begun the Millennial Reign right then and there. He had the following; He had the Word; He had the power. Yet, while everything seemed to be falling into place for what promised to be the greatest ministry this world had ever seen, He had to go and say it. Why would He do that? Why would He risk the success and prosperity that was surely to come from their toil and hard work? But still He said, "The son of man will be delivered into the hands of men." In other words He was telling them that He was going to be given over to His enemies.

Those who had sought His life because His words were turning people away from their profitable programs and teachings were going to have their way once again, it seemed. It wasn't fair. The common people had always been stifled by the rich religious rulers. Jesus seemed to be their break. He would surely whisk

them away from all the bondage and oppression that had been forced upon them.

But no. Now Jesus was telling His disciples to listen closely. The King James Version says “let this saying sink deep down into your ears.” In other words, “Listen very closely to what I have to say.” How could this be? Why would God let them come to the very brink of success only to let them fall again?

It was, of course, because Jesus had an even greater ministry in store. He was going to be turned over to His enemies and face death because through His sacrifice all on the Earth would have a chance at true life. He shared this with His disciples because He knew that they were to be the ones to carry on the work of the Gospel. He was even then setting the example for them. It was an example of sacrifice.

Jesus did not shirk His responsibility. I’m sure that if I had been in His place, knowing all along what the ultimate mission was to be, I’d probably have devised some secret hideout that would have been impossible for my enemies to find and would only come out when I knew it was safe. Most of us would have done like that. But Jesus walked among His enemies daily. He was not afraid of what He would lose for He knew what was going to be gained. He was willing to give it all up because of faith.

He demands no less from us. Faith in Him requires us to give our all in sacrifice. Many Christians will live their lives without sacrifice and will be in Heaven because of their commitment to Him. But to really live a life close to the Master here on Earth requires that we give our all to Him. If we want to walk closely by His side daily, we can only do so by giving everything we are, everything we aspire to be, and everything that we have to Him. We must say it and mean it. We must be willing to back it up with our actions if it is asked of us. “Yes, Lord. I give all that I am and all that I have to You.”

Jesus, of course, was the only sacrifice required to pay the penalty of sin. He died in our place and gave His all so that we might be free from sin and gain eternal life. No one else could do that. His sacrifice took care of that once and for all. All we must do is accept His pardon in salvation.

But what we are speaking of now is a deeper life. That longing that arises in every believer at some point in time that gently speaks to our hearts and says, “You need more of the Lord.” He desires that not just of pastors and preachers, but of everyone who believes in Him. It is there because He provided it, but we must be willing to sacrifice ourselves and reach for it. We must be willing to lay down our lives in the flesh to receive in the spirit.

It isn’t easy. It never is. But it is possible only in Christ. He broke the ground and He paved the way. But we must make the trip down the road. We must be purposeful in this quest to live that deeper life that He desires for us.

No, it’s not a requirement to be saved. But it is necessary to get the weak flesh out of the way in order to be on top of the mountain in God’s presence. It requires us to follow Jesus in the sacrificing of our flesh. This is the sacrifice of faith. We must be willing to trust Him even in impossible odds and hopeless situations. Then, and only then can we begin to move into that deeper relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Praise the Lord!

The Results of Faith (Part 9)

A Study on Luke 9

Luke 9: 46-62

In this last section of the Order of faith, we see some teachings of Christ that are vital to our faith. These become the results of our faith, our belief in Christ. As we grow in faith, we will be challenged to take on these qualities, and we will actually begin to see them materialize in our lives naturally as we give the prominent place in our lives to Christ.

The first of these results is found in verses 46-48. The disciples began to argue who would be the greatest in the Kingdom when Christ took His power. They didn't think Jesus heard them but they forgot Who He was. He, being the very incarnate God, knew even what they were thinking. He could have jumped their case and began yelling something like, "Haven't you guys learned anything yet?!" but He didn't. Instead, He began to teach them visually as He often did.

Jesus found a child and sat him right by His side. As they sat, the contrast was made. The King of kings – The Lord of lords, and the little child who probably didn't have a long attention span and soon was fidgeting and sporting for something to play with. But this child trusted Jesus and so he became contented to sit there beside of Him. I can picture the child's little feet kicking and possibly looking toward the ground to see what interesting things might be found in the dust. He was oblivious to the argument that had been going on. It meant nothing to him; only the matter at hand.

With this picture before them, Jesus told them that whoever received the child in His Name, by His authority, received Christ. And whoever received Christ received the One who sent Him –

The Father! This didn't seem like the subject that needed addressing! They needed instruction on putting their brother before them and stop focusing on who was better than the other. But this did pertain to the subject because the first lesson is the comparison of a child against the Master! Of course the child was lesser and he knew it. It wasn't even in the child's nature to try to be greater than Jesus. And that is how we must receive Him – As the greatest individual, force, and God of the universe. Compared to Him we are but a child.

The key then to greatness in God's kingdom is to become the least. As the least we know that we must depend on Him. We know that our power pales in comparison to His. We are but an ant standing next to an elephant. We pale in His shadow. We must immediately focus all our attention on Him, realizing our insignificance and forget all around us. In His presence He is all that matters. As we concentrate on Him, it is no longer important who is greatest for it becomes obvious.

This is childlike faith. We realize who is in charge and rest in safety with this knowledge. Only then can we truly have peace in our lives.

The second aspect of the results of faith comes from fellowship with other believers, regardless their denominational affiliation. In verses 49-50 we see John reporting to Jesus of one who was casting out demons in the Name of Jesus and because he did was not part of the twelve, they told him to stop. Now, notice first of all that this was a response to what Jesus had just spoken to them about the faith of the child. It seems to me that John was feeling uncomfortable in being reprimanded by Jesus and was grasping to change the subject.

But all things serve for the purpose of the Master. Jesus gave John a simple solution to what had just been reported by

John. “Don’t stop him because if he’s not against us then he must be for us.”

We live in a time of organization. This is important, of course, but mankind has a tendency to over-organize. When we do that then we leave no room for the Master. Many are beginning to realize that regardless of denomination of choice, the basics are the same. If we believe that faith in the grace given us by Jesus Christ is what saves us, then we have a common bond. There are many other teachings that might make us differ, but the one thing that will assure us of being sons of God is this common bond. What either of us believes may make our journey less painful and difficult, but we will still receive the prize.

We are living in a time when we must realize that if we are not against each other then we are for each other. We are on the same side. Our mission is the same. We must make disciples for Jesus Christ, not our denomination or affiliation.

We have a common brotherhood and our fellowship is with each other. Our brothers and sisters are not just those with whom we go to Church but consists of all those who profess Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

I am not saying that must agree on everything to have the fellowship of faith. But I am saying that we must work together to see others come into the kingdom. The prize is not how many people we have convinced to come to our Church but making it to the end and taking as many as we can to Heaven with us whether they go to our Church or not. The kingdom is not made up of our Church or denomination but all true born-again believers in Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we must realize that there will be objection to us because of our faith. In verses 51-56 Jesus was headed for

Jerusalem. It was His last trip to Jerusalem. He was preparing to fulfill His mission on Earth on Calvary.

The trip would take them through the Province of Samaria. He had been well received there before, but this time, because He was only passing through, they rejected Him.

James and John wanted to call fire from Heaven upon the village. Elijah had done this and it seemed like the righteous thing to do. After all, they had rejected the Messiah.

Faith will cause rejection. Jesus knew there would be rejection that followed faith. They just simply went on to somewhere else. We must learn how to handle rejection. There will most definitely be rejection and objection to us because of our faith. But we don't handle rejection and objection as the world does by retaliating back. No, we move on because there will be reception also. We must learn how to handle rejection and objection to us because of our faith.

Finally we must learn discernment of faith. In verses 57-62 we see Jesus confronting three individuals. One approached Jesus wishing to follow Him. The other two were asked by Jesus to give up all and come with Him. We must always realize that Jesus knew what was going on behind the words of the mouth. He knew that the man who asked to follow Him really didn't have it in Him. He also knew that the excuses of the other two were exactly that – Excuses.

We must learn discernment in our walk of faith. We will encounter many excuses. Now, while it isn't ours to judge, we must discern and follow the Lord and not be taken up with the words and promises of man. We must have discernment with our faith.

We must know who the true enemy is and the true force behind rejection. As we grow in Christ we will find that the Holy Spirit speaks to us about situations and people. Now we don't want to judge but we must learn to follow what He tells us in our hearts and continually check that by the Word of God.

The results of our faith may make us feel different from the world, but that is only because we have new citizenship – We are citizens of Heaven. We will learn child-like faith. We will learn that rejection is not of us but of Christ in us. And we will begin to discern those things that God reveals to us that will take us deeper into our relationship with Jesus.

Praise the Lord!

