

Sermon on Luke 9:37-62 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Luke 9:37-62

Power in the Kingdom of God is contrary to the power of the world.

Last Sunday a nearly 300-page report was released outlining decades of covered-up abuse by pastors, harassment of victims, and repeated intentional harm done to save the brand within the SBC.

All to maintain influence, to keep the money coming in, and the pursuit of power. The very men proclaiming that there was no problem, for unity's sake, were guilty of assault.

Disgusting. Grave. Apocalyptic.

But it's not just there. It is everywhere.

Even in our own network, which dismissed a key leader and released an independent report in December cataloging how the reputation of a leader, the movement, and being the "greatest of us" was more important than being honest about the awareness of past abuse.

Still other stories of those called to care for the church "Lording over" those in their charge, abusive, controlling, cruel.

"Worse than wolves disguised as sheep are the ones disguised as shepherds."
Karen Prior

Some of us have experienced it. Seen it up close. Have the scars to prove it.

But even though we are not abusers... this pursuit of power can taint our own lives.

It is about the hunger for the wrong kind of power. We convince ourselves that "more" will make us greater. More money. More success. More "influence." More people in the seats on Sunday! More power.

Arriving at worldly power at the expense of others.

But the proclamation of the Kingdom comes in and turns all of that on its head.

The way of Jesus is upside-down in comparison to the way “the world works” and it is a way that isn’t to be taken lightly. It will require everything of you - but it is so worth it. It is where real power is found.

Power in the Kingdom is contrary to the power of the world.

Where are we in the story? The transfiguration has just happened. Revealing Christ’s glory - then the next day he is back with a crowd and a series of interactions point out the inclination away from real power and the invitation back to center - to what matters and a way of life from there.

Definite power. Desired power. Different power.

Definite Power

As Jesus and the three come down the mountain they are greeted by a crowd and a father whose son was tormented by a demon. Mark’s Gospel gives a longer description of this interaction - but here is a boy, the only child, and a spirit seizes him, he shrieks, has convulsions, and is left severely bruised and scarred. This spirit scarcely leaves him. And disciples couldn’t drive it out.

These are the ones that are just back from casting out demons and healing yet here they are incapable.

Jesus though, has real power, divine power. The demon knocks the boy down, Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

“And they were all astonished at the greatness of God.” -- **Luke 9:43** (CSB)

Astonished by the “megaleiotēti,” the “mighty power” of God.

Here is definite power. At the center of the Kingdom. This is what Jesus has been highlighting through his miracles and teaching. It is not systems, or institutions,

it is not celebrities. The Kingdom's power is the words of life, authority over darkness, and the mercy to heal.

A power that can't be controlled or contained - and if we are honest, this type of power makes us nervous! *Spiritual Power*.

It is real and it is meant to carry the church forward as we proclaim the Kingdom.

But we have run after other things. Convincing ourselves something more "tangible" is needed. Something we can manipulate. And we aren't alone... even his first followers went after the wrong power.

Desired Power

Even here in the moment - when all of the teaching and demonstration of real power is evident before them - the followers of Jesus miss it. They miss what they are supposed to be about. Happens in 4 ways here.

First, we see it in the inability to drive out the spirit harming the boy.

"Jesus replied, "You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long will I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." -- **Luke 9:41** (CSB)

Somehow, when their faith should be at its peak, they are faithless and clinging to the wrong things. They can't deliver.

"Their problem was, they had subtly moved from trust in God to faith in the process, which is to say faith in themselves. They had cast out demons before—certainly they could do it again." *Kent Hughes*

A rapid loss of humility and instead self-sufficiency which was not sufficient. And as if to spotlight their cluelessness, Luke tells us that right after this rebuke from Jesus, they fight over who is the coolest among them.

From the mighty power of God, the display of healing and liberation, followed by the revelation that Jesus would be betrayed, the 12 argue about who is the greatest of them.

This is so extra. A few of them had seen shining Jesus, in his glory. Yet it didn't humble them. Some couldn't heal the boy. Yet it didn't humble them.

They desire credibility, reputation, arrival! Where they should be worshiping they are arguing. "Often we end up in conflict with others because of our own egos, for we want to be the center of attention; we want to be noticed and praised."

If it was today they would be comparing bank accounts, square footage, count of TikTok followers, weekly attendance numbers...

"If Jesus is going to be betrayed... who can take his place, who has the platform for it?" Desiring the wrong power. He knows their inner thoughts and corrects them.

But they are not done missing it...

John - who in his final years will annoy people by simply telling them to "love one another" - here in early days, he is worried about the brand.

Someone was driving out demons in Jesus' name but *he didn't use the ESV!* "We tried to stop him because he does not follow us."

Think about the compassion here. John rather the demons stay tormenting people than allow another disciple of Jesus to cast them out.

Jesus answers, "Don't stop him, whoever is not against you is for you."

Where they should be celebrating deliverance, they are out looking for enemies among people working in the name of Jesus!

This is how you get "famous" today. Writing books about how awful those other Christians are because they clap when they sing... or let women preach. Or.. whatever your niche is.

This is in the same vane as being the greatest - wanting to be exclusive - to be the only "faithful" church... Desiring the wrong kind of power.

Last one...

The travel to Jerusalem starts, for the next ten chapters we will be on the road with Jesus. And a Samaritan village doesn't extend a welcome.

Samaritans, descendants of the Northern tribes that broke away and established worship on another mountain. Jews viewed them as half-bloods. So, because the crowd was heading to Jerusalem (to worship) they didn't want them there.

James and John, being good students of the prophets and having just seen Elijah with Jesus at the transfiguration, remember when he called down fire. And they want to do the same violence to the Samaritans.

Jesus rebukes them and moves on.

These are his closest followers. They are with him day and night. They have seen all the miracles. They have heard all the sermons. They were there for the sermon on the plain.

“Blessed are you who are poor, because the kingdom of God is yours. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry now, because you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, insult you, and slander your name as evil because of the Son of Man. 23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Take note — your reward is great in heaven, for this is the way their ancestors used to treat the prophets.” -- **Luke 6:20-23** (CSB)

They knew this and still, they run after the things Jesus calls woe to. What has happened?

The lure of worldly power. Of influence. It is what has happened throughout history where those claiming Christ reject him by grasping at power they are never meant to desire.

And it doesn't smell right.

“This condition is typically very interior, but it has a telltale aroma, and others can smell it, especially those outside the church. Sometimes it is an acrid air of condescension or subtle, smiling hostility, or aloofness, or clubbish exclusivity, or

doubt about God's blessing on all who are not in the approved circle. This stench has kept multitudes away from the church and, more important, a knowledge of Christ." *Kent Hughes*

Here we stand in 2022, in what I believe is another correction point for the church.

Jesus is rebuking the unclean spirit in the church, healing us and giving us back to the Father.

When we see it, we are ready for the power he provides...

Different Power

Following Jesus will mean setting aside everything else - especially the pursuit of worldly power.

"Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." -- **Luke 9:58** (CSB)

"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God." -- **Luke 9:60** (CSB)

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." -- **Luke 9:62** (CSB)

Our assumptions, apart from Christ, about how life should work, about what should be valued, are wrong and the Kingdom serves up the difference daily.

"The call of Christ lays bare whether we are devoted to God's kingdom or whether we are split in our allegiance."

"Inherent in this passage are Jesus's themes of denial of self, the priority of the kingdom of God, and the single-mindedness needed for discipleship. Jesus does not accept excuses. He seeks volunteers who will give their lives for God's kingdom as he did. God's kingdom, not personal fortune or lists of rules, establishes the priorities in Christian ethics."

Jesus was saying that if you walk with him, you will sense that the world is not your home. There will be dissonance, discomfort, unease, and rejection. He was saying that to follow him, one must embrace a life of discomfort. A life like his.

Instead of a leader that rides a wave of popularity to power; instead of a warrior that burns down villages that oppose him; instead of a Savior that touts his greatness; Jesus says “let these words sink in: The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.”

“Son of Man—Jesus represents the supreme irony of history. The One sent to establish an eternal kingdom (Dn 7:13-14) was given over to human powers. The disciples could not believe the Messiah (v. 20) would die without establishing the kingdom. Jesus’s mission from God was to be King on the cross.”

Betrayed into the hands of men.. to death. Definite power, set aside on the cross to deliver people who have been running after the wrong power since the garden. To free us from our captivity to the way of the world. To birth his Kingdom.

And the way into that Kingdom, to be “fit for it” we give all of who we are and come like children and welcome others like children.

“For whoever is least among you - this one is great.”

Though loved and cherished, a child was the smallest and most powerless individual in Hebrew culture. The Talmud regarded spending time with children to be a waste of time.

“He brings up children because they were at the bottom of the social ladder in the ancient world; they had no rights and were often considered a nuisance. Those who are truly great, Jesus teaches, welcome those considered nobodies in this world; they receive those ignored by a society trying to climb the ladder of influence.” *Tom Schreiner*

Recognizing our pursuit of the wrong kind of power is not solved by trying harder or doing better, actually pulling ourselves together. It is solved by humbly coming to Jesus. You don’t have to prove anything, you don’t have to be anything special.

As a child you are choice to Jesus. *Rejoice and rest in that.* His different power.

Power in the Kingdom of God is contrary to the power of the world.

What do we do with this?

Take hope. As citizens of the Kingdom, as followers of Christ, we are not defined by the categories of power in the world.

Repent - of the pursuit of the desired power of the world. It will require we evaluate what we have been running after. Our systems. The way we think of authority. The way we serve one another.

In our repentance, advocate.

“Protecting ourselves at the expense of others comes naturally for individuals and institutions. The Gospel flips the script. Because of Christ, we are set free from the nagging desire to protect ourselves and empowered to focus on the needs of others.” Raleigh Sadler

Believe - That Jesus’ definite power over sin, death, and the devil is what we need. Long to see his power move among us, to free, heal, and restore.

Be Astonished - by the mighty power of God. Be anchored in it. Don’t move beyond it.

As the church, small but for the least.

“The church has servants but not rulers. No human official controls the church; all serve Christ through the church. The church practices openness and acceptance toward all people. The child, the weak, the poor, and the powerless belong to God. Those who reject these little ones reject Christ. Those who accept the outcasts show they have accepted Christ.”

As Families and Individuals - no longer bound to the desired power of the world, you are his, follow him.

“We must be willing to go wherever and whenever Jesus wants us to go... Of course, we cannot follow him apart from his grace or apart from his Spirit in our

hearts. And, when we follow him, he will grant us joy inexpressible and full of glory. We will have no regrets or remorse for doing his will. We will be full of joy that the world does not understand.” TS

Putting aside personal hopes for success and surrendering to God’s plans is the way of authentic worship, obedient service, and true freedom. The way of real power.

“Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross.

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow — in heaven and on earth and under the earth — and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” -- **Philippians 2:5-11** (CSB)

Matt Pilgrim - Will You Do It?:

“At the doorway to the nations
I choke on a question
That swirls as a black cloud of doubt
Demanding confession

Lord, will You actually do it,
This ridiculous thing?
Of taking up a willing death
And causing life to spring

Is it the humble and lowly
Who You love to exalt?
Is it truly the servant hearts
That lead Heaven’s assault?

The world says it’s impossible

And my heart would agree
That it's not the weak and patient
Who earn the title "free"

But you have paved this other road
With blood and grief and tears
And no companion but Sorrow
Consistent through the years.

It is Your way, You've made it clear
In the life of Your Son
Who served and obeyed unto death
To show how Love is done.

So I ask, Lord, will You do it?
Are those promises true?
Will this road called "Weakness" lead
To more glory for You?

Lord, I believe You will - I must -
But help my unbelief.
Plant and tend and grow up in me
The faith that brings relief.

Because if I follow You down
I cast all hopes aside
Save for the hope that what I need
Is what you will provide.

That you glorify the humble
That you exalt the weak
That it's to and through the broken
You heal and change and speak.

So I step across the threshold
And choose to trust in You
That using weak, broken vessels
Is what You love to do."

He will do it. And he will do it among us. Giving our lives away because we have something better. Fit for the Kingdom of God.

Let's go!