

James & John learn valuable lessons

Luke 9:49-56

As we have seen in previous lessons, Jesus had an inner circle of disciples that consisted of Peter, James and John. While He spent time with and taught all of the twelve, we see in scripture that He exposed Peter, James and John to some other special experiences and lessons such as the Transfiguration earlier in this chapter. Jesus undoubtedly knew the future experiences that awaited each of these three in their ministries. Peter would preach on the day of Pentecost, and eventually be crucified. John would write books of the Bible and be exiled on the Island of Patmos. James would be executed by Herod. All three of them would become powerful witnesses for the Gospel, and would sacrifice their very lives for the sake of it.

As we look at them earlier in their lives though, we see that they had several imperfections in their character, and did not always truly understand what Jesus was trying to teach them. As we have seen previously, Peter often ended up learning hard lessons because he was so vocal and blurted out his thoughts and opinions which Jesus would respond to. In this lesson we see the other two members of the inner circle now having their turn to learn some important lessons from the teaching of Jesus. In these passages, one about how to deal with people who are not in your group; and the other about how to deal with people who reject you, Jesus shows James and John that their approach to dealing with people is not the way Jesus would do it. It should be the desire of every Christian to handle situations in life the way Jesus would. We see the following lessons here:

1. Be careful about stopping anyone from doing the Lord's work.

Just because we don't know someone who is doing God's work doesn't mean that God doesn't know them. It is God that sanctions peoples' ministry and service, not us. God judges whether someone else's service is acceptable, not us. John was wrong on this point.

2. God can use people who are not in your particular group.

Being in a particular group, whether it be a committee, church, denomination, etc... is not what qualifies people to serve God. It is the name of Jesus that validates a person's ministry and service. Anybody who is serving in the name of Jesus is accepted by God. There is power in His "name" that we do not give and cannot control.

3. Others who work "in His name" are on the same team with us.

Serving God is not about competition. All who are relying on the power of the name of Jesus are on the same team of witnesses whom God has empowered to glorify Him and build the kingdom of God. There is no reason for us to be jealous or competitive toward other Christians who are serving Him also.

4. Rejection is a normal part of being a disciple.

Jesus Himself was rejected by various groups of people in the bible. Just as He experienced rejection, we too will be rejected sometimes. When rejection happens, we must not take it personally. Sometimes we should just move on to another place where we will be received. We cannot make people accept us as disciples of Jesus Christ, but we can be assured that God will always provide for us when we are in need.

5. Violence and Retaliation are not how the Holy Spirit works through us.

James and John were so angry about being rejected in the Samaritan village that they asked Jesus if they should command fire to come down and destroy the village like Elijah did in the OT. Here we see how they misinterpreted what they had seen on the Mount of Transfiguration. Although they saw Elijah, Moses and Jesus talking, it was not so that they could use the revelation to retaliate against people who had rejected them. Jesus told them that they did not know what kind of Spirit was upon them. Jesus rebukes them for thinking they could use their spiritual power for the purposes of violence and retaliation.

6. Jesus came to save people, not destroy them.

The main purpose of Jesus' ministry was to save people. This was His chief aim and reason for being in the world. So too must we as disciples have a burning desire to tell people about the saving power of Jesus Christ. We must tell people that it is God's nature and desire to save them, not destroy them. This is the type of ministry that the Holy Spirit leads us to. Even for the people who reject us, God sees them as people who need salvation, not people to be destroyed.