

Seek Understanding, Not Miracles, Part 5

Jack Hughes

December 3, 2006

We are back to Luke 9:37–45—imagine that. We just can't seem to get away from here. I've been e-mailing Brad Kelly, who's working in Japan, and he said that he just listened to "Seek Understanding, Not Miracles" part 27, which was only a small bit of hyperbole. I'm enough of an imp that I thought, "You know, I could just keep preaching on that same verse so that when he comes back seven weeks later I'll still be on the same verse we were on when he left." But, we're moving on from that verse. We're going to actually finish up this section this morning, unless the Rapture happens, which is fine with me.

As you can see, Christmas is upon us. There are decorations, we're starting to sing a [few] Christmas songs, and I'm sure some of you are decorating and getting ready [for the season]. Invitations, Christmas cards, the perpetual Christmas letters—things like that—are coming in the mail. For those of you with children—especially young children—Christmas can be very fun, and if [your child is] really young, about a year old, it can be funny as well as fun. All the relatives are glad—grandma, grandpa, aunts, and uncles—that your child is celebrating his first Christmas, so he gets a ton of presents. You've got your few [gifts] and he's got a mountain [of them]. You decide on Christmas morning to open up the presents, and so you help your young one open up [his first] present and he loves the wrapper. He could care less about the present. He could care less about the other

presents. He just wants to chew on the wrapper. That's fine with him, but the problem is [that] he doesn't know the difference between the trash and the present.

We're going to encounter the same thing in our text today. This morning, as we look at Luke 9, I [am going] to give you some context. I don't want to torment you with this because we've gone over it many times, but it's just so important to remind yourself of the flow of what's happening in the passage. [Also, there] may be some [who are] here [today who] weren't here before and so, let me just remind you of what the context is talking about. Luke 9, toward the end, is talking about Jesus' ministry, [and] the end of what is called His "Galilean ministry." He has been ministering in and around the Sea of Galilee, or lake actually—the Lake of Gennesareth. He is there, ministering and preaching, teaching, performing miracles, raising the dead, calming the sea, things like that.

Luke has decided, in this last portion of chapter 9, to include [several of the disciples'] failures. Apparently, [Luke] wants us to know that even though these men have had three years of concentrated training with Jesus, they're still messed up. They still have a lot of problems in their lives and they aren't getting things right. Jesus takes [Peter, James, and John] up on the Mount of Transfiguration to pray, [and the disciples] fall asleep. They finally wake up when half the show's over, they get to see Jesus in His kingdom glory, they get to see Elijah and Moses, they hear the voice of God, but they totally miss the whole point of being up there. They leave, thinking, "What was that for?" They just don't know. Our text [in Luke 9:37–45] follows on the heels of this [event]. Jesus is coming down the mountain with Peter, James, and John, who were up there with Him. The [other] nine [disciples had been] left behind.

While the nine were left behind, a father approaches the nine and says, "I have a demon-possessed boy. Could you heal him?" They try, and they can't.

This, then, gives an occasion for the scribes to scoff at and get in an argument with [the disciples], saying, "I told you so. Jesus isn't the one. You

don't have the power." It gives them an opportunity to blaspheme God. In addition to this, there is this huge multitude [there]—maybe 20,000 people. We don't know [how many people there are because the text] doesn't give the numbers, but Jesus is at the pinnacle of His popularity. [At] other times [during His ministry], there have been crowds of 15,000, so it's very likely that [this crowd is even larger] than that.

What is interesting is that the nine who are left behind are seeking Jesus, the father of the demon-possessed boy is seeking Jesus, the scribes are seeking Jesus to argue with Him, and the crowd is seeking Jesus, but they're all seeking Jesus for the wrong reason—every one of them. That is the context of our passage. They're all seeking Jesus for their own selfish reasons, but no one understands that God incarnate, the Messiah of Israel, is standing in front of them, [so they're missing] that huge deal. Instead, they want to argue, they want miracles, they want whatever. That is what's happening. Follow along as I read Luke 9:37–45:

On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him. And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy, and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth; and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leaves. I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." While he was still approaching, the demon slammed him to the ground and threw him into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son

of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.” But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.

From this portion of Luke, we’re talking about four hindrances to spiritual vitality—four things that you need to make sure aren’t part of your life if you’re going to have a thriving walk with the Lord. We’ve looked at the first one so far: Don’t be unbelieving. We see this in verse 41, where Jesus describes [everyone present] as an “unbelieving and perverted generation.” Perverted is just a synonym for sin—an “unbelieving and sinful generation.” Unbelief is a refusal to believe God—to trust God, to rely upon God, to live according to God’s Word—and unbelief then gives birth to sin.

In verse 41, Jesus asked two questions: “How long shall I be with you and put up with you?” These questions showed Jesus’ disfavor, or human exasperation—not in a sinful way, but his patience seems to be at an end. “How long shall I put up with you?” The reason Jesus was angry was that His disciples, who should have known better, and the father of the demon-possessed boy, and the crowds, were all unbelieving to a degree—some to a complete degree. They were not willing to believe in Jesus and yet they were asking for blessing. God does not like to bless those who do not believe in Him. [People say], “God bless America” when the terrorists attack, but then as soon as that goes away, [they] go back to living for self and Satan. God doesn’t like that. We noted that God does not like to bless those who are living in unbelief and that He really has to put up with them—both believers and unbelievers.

We noted that God is not indifferent to sin. Christ is not indifferent to sin. [People believe] He is *only* loving, and He is *only* out there just tolerating sin and letting us sin all we want, and He’s not going to come back and “judge the living and the dead” [2 Timothy 4:1], He’s just going to keep putting up with it. That is false. We got into a little discussion of the character and nature of Christ, and learned that a lot of people get their

view of Jesus solely from the Gospels, where we see Jesus in His humility. Jesus is pictured in the Gospels in a very different way than He was before the Gospels and after the Gospels. Now, He is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” [1 Timothy 6:15], “the Judge of the living and the dead” [Acts 10:42; see also 2 Timothy 4:1 and 1 Peter 4:5]. That is who He is now, and forevermore will be. He is not passive, and He is not allowing men to attack Him, and crucify Him, and blaspheme Him. He *will* judge sinners. Hence, we must not derive perceptions of Jesus only from the picture of Him in humility. That is what we’ve looked at so far under point one.

Now we come to point two: Don’t seek miracles without seeking understanding. There is a large crowd present, [and] the father of the demon-possessed boy shouts out, “Please! Look at my son, he’s demon possessed. I asked your disciples [to help him and] they couldn’t do it.”

Jesus then condemns the whole generation: “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?” Then He says this at the end of verse 41—look there: “Bring your son here.’ While he was still approaching, the demon slammed him to the ground and threw him into a convulsion” [9:41–42]. Everyone is watching, the demon realizes his prize is going to be taken away, and so he throws the boy to the ground. Mark adds, in Mark 9:20, that the boy “began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.” The demon, seeing that his prize is going to be taken away from him, tries to kill the boy, [to] do whatever he can to destroy the young man.

Mark adds quite a bit of additional information [in his parallel account]. [He] tells us that Jesus then asked the father [of the demon-possessed boy]: “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, ‘From childhood. It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him.’” Here we learn two things: One, that the demon had entered into this boy at childhood; and two, that the demon had constantly tried to kill the boy. We also see here the malice and hatred that demons have for Christ. This demon is doing what Jesus wants. We’ll see that in a second: when Jesus says, “Get out!” the demon’s going to obey completely. But the demon

doesn't like it. Yes, the demon has to submit to Christ, but the demon hates Christ nonetheless.

Also notice that when Jesus gives the demon the command, the demon obeys, compelled by God's divine will. There is this false perception that we have—mostly from Hollywood and the media—that God is here [at this level] and Satan's here [at just about the same level]. They're kind of equal powers and they're battling it out tooth and nail, hammer and tong, trying to gain supremacy over one another. Not even close. Satan is like an amoeba that has decided to attack and snuff out the sun. It's not even a possibility. There is not even a comparison. God is infinite in power and might. Satan is just this infinitesimal creature that He has created. Compared to us, yes, [Satan] is powerful, [but] compared to God, he is dust. God could just speak him out of existence. There is no balance of power. There is an all-sovereign God who, for His own good purposes, has allowed Satan to continue for a time.

Look at the middle of [Luke 9:]42: "But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy and gave him back to his father." We've already seen Jesus' power over demons in [Luke] 4, 8, [and] here again [in chapter 9]. We've gone over demon possession in detail. But by way of reminder, just note that He healed the boy at once. There was no holy water, no special prayer, no praying a hedge about the boy, no staging, no incantation—just a rebuke, and the boy was healed at once. Mark 9:25–27 says:

When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.

[The demon caused] this convulsion, [the] foaming at the mouth, and [the] rolling on the ground. It must have been hideous, and this whole huge

crowd is gathered around seeing the show. Jesus rebukes the demon, and it comes out, and the boy is perfectly still. The contrast is so great [that] the people say, “He’s dead! He killed him!” Jesus goes over and gets [the boy] up. And you know what, sad to say, this is exactly what the crowd was looking for. They loved this stuff. Wouldn’t you like to see something like this? A miracle? That’s why they were there. That is exactly why they were there. It was fascinating. This would make just premium headlines on the gossip tabloids: “Traveling Carpenter Casts Out Demon With a Word in Front of 20,000.” They just loved it.

You can just hear the people in the crowd. A mother saying, “Son, see? I told you! The rumors are true! It happened just like we heard.”

There’s a guy there, going to a friend, “I told ya! This is the same thing He did in Capernaum. Let’s see if He does another one. In Capernaum He did this over and over again. I kid you not!”

[The friend says], “Cool!”

There’s a scribe sitting there in the back, going, “Yeah, but He’s doing it by the power of Satan.”

Look at verse 43, where we read: “And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.” The word “amazed” might be translated “shocked, or awestruck, or gripped with fear.” The word literally means “to be struck with a blow.” The demonstration of God’s power was so great they were just “struck with a blow.” Whoa! It was so incredible to see this happen, to see Jesus walk up to this boy [who was] foaming [at the mouth] and thrashing about, where everybody is crowded around, and just rebuke [the demon] and heal [the boy].

The crowd realized that [since] God is the one who does the miracles that God must have given this Jesus guy this power. But they were missing something. They were actually missing *the* thing. They were missing the purpose of the miracle. They didn’t understand who Jesus was or what He came to do. They liked Jesus because He was a good show, He was an instant cure, He was fun to watch, but they missed the big deal. We’ve already learned that God doesn’t do miracles just to keep us healthy, happy,

and fascinated. That is not the purpose of miracles. Miracles are called “sign gifts” for a reason: it’s because they are *signs*. The miracle is not the big deal, what the miracle *points to* is the big deal.

You’re driving to Yosemite National Park. You’ve never been there. You’re on your way there, and you’re following some people who have been there lots of times. You’ve seen pictures of the park, and you know it’s going to be great. You’re driving, [and] after several hours, you get to the first sign that says, “Yosemite Park 120 miles,” and you see your friends up ahead pull over off the side of the road by the sign, so you pull over, too, because you’re following them. They hop out of their car, and they go, “We’re here! It’s wonderful! Mabel get the camera,” and they start taking pictures of the sign. They’re all excited, “Get out the tent!”

What would you be thinking? “Hey! This isn’t the park! This is the sign that tells us how to get to the park. This isn’t the big deal—the park’s the big deal!”

This is exactly what is happening in our text. The crowd’s amazed: “Wow! Did you see that sign? Wha-ha-ha!” and they’re all excited about it. They’re missing the big deal: *God in human flesh* is standing in front of them! The Messiah is in front of them and they don’t even realize it.

Turn over to Matthew 12. The Pharisees were all bent out of shape in the context here because Jesus and His disciples walked through a field, picked some heads of grain, rolled them, and ate them, which was lawful to do even on the Sabbath. [The Pharisees] had forgotten that, [so] they’re all bent out of shape. Jesus gives an example of David who feeds His men with the showbread, which it was unlawful for David to eat. He also gives another example that the priests serve in the temple on the Sabbath and do work in the temple.

Then He says this in verse 6: “Something greater than the temple is here.” Now, to make a statement like that to the Jews back then was huge. The temple was everything. Solomon built the first one, then it was destroyed, and pilfered over the years, and then burned down by Nebuchadnezzar. Then it was rebuilt and then it was really rebuilt over many years by

Herod the Great. At this point [in Matthew], it was magnificent. Jesus says, “Something greater than the temple is here.”

Look at [Matthew 12:]38, where we read: “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’” See, this is what the Jews are into. Remember [that] Paul says that in Corinthians, too? “Jews ask for signs” [1 Corinthians 1:22]. They want to see a sign. “We want to see a sign.”

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign’” [Matthew 12:39], so they’re looking for a sign. But then, notice what Jesus says. What are they going to get? Verses 39[-40]:

And yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Of course, they aren’t going to get the sign for a little while—the death and resurrection of Christ—[so] they are totally confused. Verse 41 [says]: “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.” Jonah, of course, [was] one man who led the entire city of Nineveh to repentance—[he] was God’s instrument. One guy [helped bring about] mass revival. “Something greater than Jonah is here.” Look at verse 42: “The Queen of the South,” this is the Queen of Sheba who came to see Solomon in his wisdom, “will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon,” who was, of course, the wisest man who ever lived; “and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

Notice what’s happening here. Jesus is doing miracles, Jesus is telling them about great things, and says, “The temple? Impressive. Something

better than the temple [is here]. Jonah? Incredible prophet. Something greater than Jonah [is here]. Solomon? Super wise, super rich. Something greater. . .” Who was richer than Solomon? What [other] single prophet had led that many people to the Lord in one fell swoop? What structure in Israel was greater than the temple? There weren’t any! Those were all the pinnacle examples, and Jesus says, “Something greater than, something greater than, something greater than, something greater than.” Why? Because they were all excited about the wrapping! They were excited about the sign pointing to the park, but they were missing the park. They just weren’t getting it.

J. Vernon McGee, in his down-to-earth way, said, “It’s like the person who finds a large sack of money in their front yard, dumps out the money, and gets excited about the sack.” That’s how it is in churches today—especially in charismatic churches [that] are all psyched about the sign, but they don’t get what the sign is for. Signs have a purpose, and it’s not just to make us happy, and healthy, and excited, and entertained. Signs point to something, and what they point to is Jesus. But many are not satisfied with Jesus. They want an experience, they want a feeling, they want a sign, they want a miracle, they want a dream, they want a vision, or epiphany, or whatever. They’re looking for some sort of religious “zap” to [excite them].

But once you get to the park and you see Half Dome, and you see those incredible waterfalls, are you thinking, “Man, I wish I could be back there by that first sign”? Is that what you’re thinking?

Someone gives you an incredible present and you think, “Wow, that wrapper was great!”

“Yeah, that sack that money was in—look at it! The cotton is so coarse.”

Listen, once the New Testament was complete, then the purpose of the sign gifts came to an end because now we have the Word of God. We’ve looked at this over and over again—I’m not even going to go there. But in 2 Peter 1, it says in verses 16–18, “And we were eyewitnesses of His majesty, when we went up to that mountain, and we heard that utterance—the voice of God.” They saw Moses, and Elijah, and Jesus transformed in His glory. After they get all of that, they are just *amazed*. They’re amazed.

Then Peter says, “We have the more sure Word of God, to which you do well to pay attention” [see 2 Peter 1:19]. “More sure” than what? Than the greatest experience that Peter ever had.

You see, you can have an experience—you can read a book or see some movie or whatever—and it impacts you, but the more times you [read it or see it] it just kind of wears off. It’s kind of like, “OK, it’s boring now, I’ve seen it fifty times.” But [once] you get the Word of God in you, the Word of God is energized by the Holy Spirit of God—God Almighty—and the Holy Spirit then makes the Word of God living and active. It can not only save you, but transform you into the image of Christ and make eternal changes [in you]. That’s why the author of Hebrews says it is living, it is active, it is sharper than any double-edged sword, it is piercing and able to judge [see Hebrews 4:12]. It is the hammer that shatters rock and the fire that consumes [see Jeremiah 23:29]. That is why the Word of God is “more sure” than experiences. Experiences are fine, but they point to something. If they’re from God, they point to something. Those sign gifts, those miracles—they point to Jesus. Once you have Jesus, then who cares about the wrapper?

Turn over to Luke 10:17. This illustrates this [point] perfectly. We often pray for miracles. We ask God to save somebody, or heal somebody, or fix some terrible situation in somebody’s life, and this is fine. Sometimes God does the thing we want, and we’re just like, “Oh! Praise God! It is so cool! God is so good!” We’re blessing God or praising God because He gave us what we hoped He would, or somebody else what we hoped He would give them. Somebody gets saved or whatever, and this is like way cool. But in this context here in Luke 10:17–20, Jesus gave the seventy disciples power to cast out demons and heal the sick just like He previously did the Twelve. So He first did the Twelve and now He did this bigger group. “The seventy,” verse 17 says:

returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And He said to them, “I was watching

Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.” [10:17–19]

Basically, Jesus is saying this: “Man, I have covered you with heavenly Kevlar. You are bulletproof.” But then notice what He says in verse 20: “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this.” [He is saying]: “When I give you a gift, when I give you a miraculous gift, and when you yourself are able to do miracles, don’t rejoice in this.” Really? Yeah. “But, rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” [10:20]. That is the big deal. Do you see that? That is the big deal—not miraculous gifts, not power over demons, but being saved from hellfire. That is the big deal. Don’t miss the purpose of signs and wonders and get all excited about the present, the Rapture . . . the wrapper—the sign. The Rapture is [a sign], too, but you know what? When you get to heaven you aren’t going to be all excited that you got Raptured, you’re going to be excited you’re in heaven with Jesus.

So, don’t seek miracles and miss the understanding. That’s what is going on in our text [in Luke 9:37–45]. [Point three:] don’t be hardhearted to the truth. Look at [Luke 9:]43[-44]: “But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears.’” And Jesus’ statement here is not to the whole crowd, it’s to the disciples, and it’s emphatic, which means “Let these words sink into your ears each individually.” I mean, He wants them to know that, “I want you to understand this. Get this,” in the vernacular, “through your thick, bony heads. I want you to understand this. I want you to know this.” Look at the middle of verse [44]: “For the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.” That’s what He wanted them to know.

If you look at the parallel texts in Matthew and Mark, you will see that Jesus also said, “Because I’m going to Jerusalem to die and be raised up on the third day” in [Matthew 17:]22, [and] He alludes to [the same thing] in [Mark 9:]31. So, three times in a very near proximity, He keeps telling them, “I’m going to die, I’m going to die, I’m going to die, and be

raised up on the third day. It's going to happen in Jerusalem. I'm going to be delivered into the hands of men." Now, Jesus wants them to know His death is imminent. You have to ask yourself why. Well, I think the reason He's doing this is because [He's trying to tell them], "Listen, guys, get your act together. I am going to die! It's time to get with it, you know, and start doing what you've been learning."

However, look at [Luke 9:]45: "But they did not understand this statement." Matthew adds, in Matthew 17:23, that "they were deeply grieved" but did not understand the statement. [It] is very interesting that Matthew added that they were grieved. Why were they grieved if they didn't understand it? I asked myself that. Sometimes I find things in here that I think, "Man, this is so hard I'm not mentioning it from the pulpit," because I can't figure it out. I never tell you that stuff, but here is an interesting one. They are "deeply grieved," but they didn't understand. Well, obviously, they had to be grieved because they understood that Jesus was talking about His death. So they understood that part: "Jesus is telling us He's going to die."

The question is: They did not understand the statement, so then what does that leave? What did they not understand? Well, I thought about this for a while, and again I'm just making [an] educated guess—this may be totally wrong. But here are some things [that], when you look through the Gospels, you see [the disciples] didn't quite understand or understand at all until later. One is [that] the Messiah had to die. They didn't understand that. They thought the Messiah would come, conquer Rome, [and] set up His kingdom. So, [they are] convinced Jesus is the Messiah, and now Jesus is telling about His death. [It] just doesn't seem to compute with them.

[The] second [thing they didn't understand about Jesus was] that He needed to die to make atonement for sins. They understood the purpose of the sacrificial system, but what they didn't understand is [that] you can't redeem a sinful human with an animal—you need a perfect human to redeem a sinful human. So you need a perfect human sacrifice, and the Messiah was the only candidate.

Third, they didn't seem to understand how Jesus now, at the height of [His] popularity, up north in Galilee with all of these people who love Him, with all of this power to do all kinds of miracles, could ever end up in Jerusalem, dead. It just didn't seem right. I mean, who would mess with Him? He raised the dead, He calmed the sea—the guy's got some power. It just doesn't seem likely that somebody is going to kill Jesus because Jesus is the wielder of God's power and [the disciples] know this. So it seems that when [Matthew 17:23] says they were grieved, maybe they understood that Jesus was saying, "I'm going to die," and they're thinking, "Oh, that's not good." But they didn't understand it because how could He die? He's the Messiah. And, "He's up here and we all like Him, and He does miracles, so how could He be dead?" They just didn't understand that.

Those are guesses. I don't know [why the text says they were grieved]. But one thing is obvious: part of their problem is unbelief. We've already established this before: they were of "little faith" [see Matthew 17:20], they weren't trusting God, they were doing things in the power of their own flesh—or trying to and failing. Whenever you have unbelief in your life, you get blinded. Proud, selfish people are usually clueless that they are proud, selfish people. Pride is that disease that everyone sees but the person who has it.

[This is the case] when Jesus talks to the religious leaders. I mean, they're religious leaders, and they have studied the Scriptures, and they have been in the temple, and they have been trained by the great rabbis, and here is this carpenter from Nazareth trying to tell them about the Word of God. They didn't want to learn from Jesus. Their pride blinded them, and that's why Jesus refers to them as "blind guides of the blind" [see Matthew 15:14], and "you blind [guides]" [see 23:16], and "you hypocrites" [see 15:7]. He constantly talks about them as being blind because their sin blinded them from the truth.

If you look at the middle of [Luke 9:]45, we read: "and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it." This takes it to a whole different level. Yes, I think partially it was their fault, being unbelieving,

and not trusting God, and not praying, and being selfish, having selfish motives, but here we learn that the truth was “concealed from them so that they would not perceive it.” Now, there are really only two candidates that [could cause this]: one would be Satan, who would blind all of them from the truth so that they couldn’t perceive it. But, [he] is an unlikely candidate. It is true that Satan, we know from Paul, blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they don’t “understand the light of the gospel so as to be saved” [see 2 Corinthians 4:4], but Jesus is talking to His disciples now. So the only other candidate is God. But this is interesting because if Jesus is God in human flesh, and Jesus is there to do the Father’s will, then why is Jesus trying to get them to understand and God the Father keeping them from understanding? That is a dilemma.

But you know what? It’s not any different than a lot of times we see in the Scriptures. [Let me] just give you one example: God tells Moses, “Moses, I want you to go tell Pharaoh, ‘Let My people go’” [see Exodus 8:1]. And so, God sends Moses, Moses tells Pharaoh, and then God hardens Pharaoh’s heart so he won’t let them go. Why? Well, Exodus 9:[16] tells us why: “But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.” Here He’s talking to Pharaoh through Moses, and just saying, “Hey, listen, the only reason you are existing, and the only reason I haven’t wiped you out and cut off you and all your people from the face of earth, is I want to show you how bad I am. I want My power and My name to be proclaimed through the whole earth.” God has a purpose sometimes in telling one person to do one thing and another person to do another thing. Which, apparently, in our minds, contradicts, but He wants this to happen in order to bring about some other result.

Do you remember what we learned, what [it] was called, when you tell somebody the gospel, or somebody reads the Bible? There’s a doctrine that relates to them understanding the truth. Do you remember what that is? It’s called “illumination,” God turning on the lights. Well, this is like reverse illumination. God makes sure the switch is off and keeps it off so that [the

disciples] could not perceive the truth. He turns off the switch. They heard the words, they just couldn't figure out what was meant because it was kept from them. This right here reveals the sovereignty of God over the situation, doesn't it? God is in total control, total control. Listen, if God wants you to understand something, you are going to understand something. If He doesn't want you to understand something, that's it. You will not understand.

This whole idea of God's sovereignty and His total control over men's understanding and their knowledge of His Word is very comforting if you understand it and apply it. Let me just explain how [with] this one example: You have an opportunity to share the gospel with somebody—maybe a coworker, a neighbor, or something—and the person seems kind of interested. Maybe you're sitting down for lunch, and they say, "Hey, I know you go to church. Tell me, how does somebody become a Christian?"

You're just thinking, "Whoa!" There you are, right in the middle of your bologna sandwich, and the person is asking you how a person becomes a Christian. Your heart starts racing, your carotid artery is thumping. And so, you start telling them, "Well, God is a holy God, and He must punish sin, and men are sinners..." and you're quoting different verses to him, and fragments of verses. You take him through the whole process, and you're defining all the key terms. You're trying to give him good examples. You spend an hour-and-a-half trying to tell him all about the gospel and lead him to the Lord. At the end, you [ask], "So, do you want to become a Christian?"

"No."

And you're thinking, "What was that? Ahhh!" He doesn't want to give his life to Christ, he doesn't want to follow Christ. Then what happens? Well, if you don't understand that God is sovereign over the situation, you leave and you start torturing yourself on the rack of your own grief, saying, "Oh, I should have told him that other verse. I should have used that other illustration. Maybe I pressed him too hard. Maybe I didn't press him hard enough. Maybe I should go back." You just start double guessing, and triple

guessing, and, “Oh, Lord, forgive me. I know I was so shoddy. I should study my Bible more.”

The whole time, you’re really acting like if you [had] done it right, you could have saved [the person]. But you will never save anybody. You will never give anybody illumination. That is something the Holy Spirit does. It’s your job to make sure they have the truth of the gospel in a clear, understandable way. And you know what? From [listening to] testimonies, you discover [that] bad presentations have saved a lot of people. People have come to Christ by reading verses all by themselves, and tracts when no one is around, and [by] just reading the Bible. Why? [It is] because the power to save somebody is in the Word of God. It is the “more sure” Word. We’re just the delivery boy.

I use the example of dynamite. The Word of God has the power, [you] just deliver the goods, and then God, when He wants, hits the plunger. Somebody [once] said [that] the Word of God is like a lion: you just let it out of the cage [and] it takes care of itself. You don’t say, “Now, Mr. Lion, don’t let anybody beat up on you.” No, the lion knows how to take care of itself. And so, when you understand God’s sovereignty over the situation, it just helps you relax because you realize [that] God’s going to do what He’s going to do. Don’t ever take upon yourself what God says is His responsibility. It’s your responsibility to share the truth; it’s God’s responsibility to do something with it unto salvation.

God commands you to repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus Christ. God says [that] if you “confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” [Romans 10:9]. That’s what you do. Those commands are not directed at God. The Word of God says: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” [John 1:12]. You know, “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” [John 3:16]. It just says over and over again. Those statements aren’t directed [at] God, they’re directed [at] us—sinners.

But see, some people start getting in their minds, “Well, then, Jack, how do I know if I’m one of the elect [see Mark 13:20]?” Believe and then you’ll know. “Yeah, but I don’t know if God has ‘chosen me before the foundation of the world’ [see Ephesians 1:4]; therefore I don’t know if I can believe.” Believe and you’ll be saved, and you’ll know you’re one of the elect. You see, the message [of] “you are the elect” is given to believers. The message to “repent and believe” is given to unbelievers. Don’t take the message given to believers and try and apply it to unbelievers because it will only frustrate you. Just do what God says.

There is what we would call [a] paradox between what God calls men to do and what God does. If you take what God does and try and transpose it on what men do, it gives you a brain cramp. Look at 2 Thessalonians 2 with me. This is just one of many texts we could use to illustrate this. This is similar to the text we’re looking at [in Luke 9] because in this case God is purposely blinding people from the truth. [In] 2 Thessalonians 2:8–12 Paul is addressing the time of the Tribulation and when the antichrist comes on the scene, He is called here “the man of lawlessness,” or “that lawless one.” Verse 8:

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

Now, did you see that? Notice that God doesn’t say, “They perished because I didn’t elect them unto salvation.” They perished, the text says,

“because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” They perished, the text says, because they “did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.” They damned themselves by their own sin. As we learned, when people are sinful and unbelieving, God does not like to bless them. He usually curses them. We see that in His response. He sends “upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false” so that they might be judged. Here we see both God and man. God is calling men to repent and believe. That is the message to the unbeliever. Once you believe, you have been chosen before the foundation of the earth. But [if] you try and take the message [that is] to the believer and try and stick it [on] the unbeliever, it’s just going to frustrate you because the Bible never does that.

If you’re out there [thinking], “Well, then, why witness? Why pray? If God is in charge of who gets saved and who doesn’t, then why pray?” Well, what you’re really telling me is: “The only reason I pray and the only reason I witness to people is so *I* can save them.” Is that what you want? It’ll never happen. You will never save anybody. God has chosen to use “the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” [1 Corinthians 1:21]. It’s your responsibility as a Christian to live the truth, share the gospel, and pray for the lost. It’s God’s responsibility to do something with His Word, to make it living and active, to grant [people] repentance, to open their hearts, to give them the grace and the faith they need to believe.

And so, here in our text [in Luke 9:37–45], we see that God, for His own purpose, has now cut off the understanding for the disciples. And the question is: Why? Why would He do that? And you know what? The text doesn’t tell us. It just tells us [that] He did. We accept it, and say, “OK, that’s what God has decided to do.” Now, when you come up on the sovereignty of God issue, this is such a big deal to people who want to be in control. People want to have a part in their salvation, [they] want to have a part in saving other people. To people who want to have some credit, yes, it’s a big deal. But when you realize you’re a sinner, and you deserve hell, and

that you can do nothing to save yourself, then you're fine with God being sovereign.

[Imagine that] you fall over [the side of] a huge oceanliner a few hundred feet into the water. If the fall doesn't kill you, by the time you've gotten to the surface [of the water], the [ship] has gone by—if it doesn't chew you up in the turbulence of the prop [first]. Somebody notices that you fell off, they finally get the ship stopped two miles away. They throw over a little boat, they drive back, and they fish you out of the water. Do you tell people, “Man, I fell [over] the side, but I saved myself. The ship came along and I grabbed on to the life ring. And I crawled up in my own power. If it wasn't for me, I would have been lost.” That is so absurd.

But in our case, it's even worse than that because we're dead in our trespasses and sins [see Colossians 2:13]. It's like you're dead and unconscious floating in the water, and they grab you, and then revive you, and then bring you back to the ship. That's the picture. We're fine with that. You keep in your mind what's your responsibility, and you let God be God and do what He's going to do. It's very comforting and helps you not to be anxious, or fret, or worry. You just do what you're supposed to do and let God be God.

[The fourth point is:] Don't be afraid to ask for help. Look at [Luke 9:]45, the very end: “they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.” Notice [that] they understood [that] Jesus was talking about His death, most likely, but they were afraid. Afraid of what? Well, probably afraid of the answer. These guys had left everything to follow Jesus. They had committed business suicide by siding with Jesus against the Jews. And here Jesus is, He's walking around the country, they've been following Him for years, [and] they subsist off of Jesus. They've cut off all ties with home, and made tons of enemies. And now, Jesus is saying, “I'm going to die.” Eek! That scares them. So they don't want to know the answer.

But, listen, people, God doesn't want you to be scared of the truth. Never be scared of the truth. Satan loves you to be scared of the truth. Satan would love you to maintain ignorance and be in the dark, [and] not have any discernment or clear understanding of an issue. God never wants

that. Sometimes the truth hurts, granted. [If] somebody sees some sin in your life, comes and rebukes you or confronts you, that's not fun. But, it's good. It's good to know that it's out now. A lot of times we're blind. It's painful to know there is a hell, and that people who don't believe in Christ go there. Maybe you have a relative who has died and [didn't] know the Lord, and you know what? You just don't want to think about it. You don't want to know the truth.

You go to the doctor and the doctor does some tests and says, "You know, I think you might have cancer. Let me do some tests. I'll let you know in a week."

The next week comes and you think, "I think I might wait another week, or month, or year before I call up for the results." You just kind of don't want to know because you're afraid of the truth. But Jesus said in Luke 11:10: "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened." He said in John 16:24: "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full." There is a blessing in knowing the truth. You need to make it a habit not to be like the disciples here and be afraid to ask. Sometimes you might be entangled in some sin, and you know it's a sin, but you don't know how to get out of it. You don't really want to bring it up because you might get the solution. You kind of like your sin, and you're afraid [that],"If I bring it up, so-and-so is going to tell me what I need to do and then I'll be accountable. So, I'm not going to ask."

If it was my birthday, and my wife said, "I would be willing to make you any kind of cake you want."

I say, "OK, I want the Kalamazoo special."

And she says, "What's that?"

I said, "I don't know. I had it one time and it was great. That's what I want."

And she says, "OK." Now, does she just go to the kitchen and say, "Oh, I'll just throw some ingredients together. I'm sure it'll turn out OK. I'll just wing it. Or, I'll talk to other people who don't know and I'll do what they

say”? No, that’s not what she does. She gets out her cookbooks or gets on the Internet, she finds the recipe, and then makes it like she’s supposed to. That gets the product out there. Well, in the same way, when you have a problem in your life, when you have a trial, when you have an issue and you need help, what do you do? [Do] you go talk to the people who don’t know? [Do you] get on the Internet and look up what [some] worldly wise man has to say?

You know, a lot of people, they come to me with problems. I say, “So, what do you know about the Scriptures?”

“I don’t know anything.”

“What studies have you done to try and find the solution—the recipe—to your problem?”

“I haven’t done any.”

Man, that is the first place you go. Go to the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” [Isaiah 9:6]. Go to the Word and get the answers—the recipe—to your problem. That’s where it is. It’s in the Book, which gives us “everything pertaining to life and godliness” [2 Peter 1:3].

Somebody says, “Jack, listen, I’m not really a Bible thumper.”

You need to be. Faithful reading of the Bible will fix problems you didn’t even know you ever had. I mean, you just read the Bible [and] it shows you your problems and then fixes them.

But let’s just say, “OK, so you haven’t been reading your Bible. You don’t know the Book that well. You don’t really know what to do, and you don’t know where to look. So what you do?” Go ask unbelievers? Go look on the Internet? No. You go to somebody who can show you how to use the Cookbook. Any elder, any pastor, any mature believer can show you how. [That person will] say, “You know, there’s the book of topical index back here. Let me show you how that works. It’s a non-inspired book, but it’s very helpful because it takes you back to the inspired book and it has categories.” There are so many resources out there to help you get biblical

solutions to your problems. That's where you need to go first. "Ask and you will receive."

God isn't going to go, "Well, this person is really searching hard for answers in My Word, but I'm not going to show him." I mean, you heard [Pastor] Brodie [McClain]'s sermon, right? "If you seek for it as hidden treasure and search for it as [silver], then you will discern the knowledge of God" [see Proverbs 2:4–5]. And then it goes on and it talks about how God's Word guards you, how it preserves you, how it protects you, how it brings pleasure to your soul [see 2:6–10]. But first you have to seek, incline your ear, cry out for understanding. You have to do all those eight things at the beginning of chapter [2 of Proverbs] so you can get to the goods.

But just saying, "Well, I don't want to ask." That's just pride. Get the answers and they will bless your soul. You will have full joy then.

Miracle of God, we've finished this section. Don't be unbelieving. Don't seek miracles without understanding. Don't be hard-hearted to the truth. Don't be afraid to ask questions because these things will hinder your walk with the Lord. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You. We are so grateful for this section. What great truths are here—deep truths! Father, we are so blessed to know You, to know that You are a God who is in control, that You are sovereign. We rejoice that our names are written in the book of life [see Revelation 21:27], Father, that we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ [see Ephesians 1:3], that You became a man in the person of Your Son. And, Father, Jesus died on the cross, after living a perfect life, and gave Himself to be our substitute that through faith in Him we might receive the free gift of eternal life. That is the big deal: to believe upon You and be saved. Father, I just pray that if there is anybody here who hasn't done that, [that] right now in his or her own heart, as he or she has his or her head bowed, he or she would cry out to You, he or she would confess his or her sins, he or she would admit he or she is a sinner. That he or she would admit that he or she needs salvation, and, Father, that he or she would seek You with his or her whole heart. That he or she would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

that He is who He said He is—the Son of Man and the Son of God—who lived that perfect life, died, and rose again, and then in believing in that, he or she would receive the free gift of eternal life and that You would change him or her and he or she would have the present, he or she would have the park, he or she would have the money, he or she would have You. Father, we pray that You would cause that to happen. And, Father, help us to be faithful, to live Your truth, and share Your truth with others, knowing that You are pleased to use us to bring others to You. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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