

LUKE—WEEK 12

FAITH AT WORK



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is The Transfiguration

by Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1430–1516) on display at Museo di Capodimonte, Naples

At last, Peter gets it and announces who Jesus is. This is roundly confirmed on the mount of transfiguration. This leads to the next level of revelation—crucifixion.

The apostles aren't going to understand this until after it happens.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Luke 9:18–9:45 — Faith at Work
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1 Luke 9:18–22 (ESV)

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

This passage proves an important theory. The reason that Jesus wouldn't let people (or demons) talk about His true identity is that it could disrupt His plan to be crucified. The second paragraph above says it all. Jesus is on a path to the cross.

Think about what that must have felt like. He's living on death row. Jesus knows what's coming—even more than people on death row. Yet somehow, He doesn't let it get to Him until His arrest is imminent.

That's focus.

Have you ever wished you knew your future? I have, but the more I think about it, the less attractive it looks. Everyone's future includes good things and bad things. Could we handle the stress of knowing? Could we focus?

This affects how we pray. Our prayers are almost always about the future. We often ask for a certain future because we think we know what the “right” outcome should be.

This isn't wrong. The Lord said, “Ask whatever you wish,” (John 15:7) but we've all learned the hard way that some of our prayers turn out to be misdirected. In retrospect, we see that we were asking for the wrong thing.

We don't even know what our future *should* be. If we knew what it actually *would* be, we'd go nuts arguing with God.

That's why long, spirit-directed prayers can be so powerful. Whatever your prayers are, find time to give them their due. It's okay to ask God to give you the outcome you desire, but take time to seek His will.

This should not be some quick tag line at the end of a prayer. Seeking His will must be a serious and focused. It's okay to ask for a sign, or simply ask God to make His will clear.

But be forewarned, you must be ready to accept whatever happens next. If you ask God to make His will clear, and He closes a door that you hoped He would open, then you have your answer. You asked for clarity and you got it. It's a privilege to get a clear answer to prayer, even if it's not what you hoped for.

Celebrate that.

2 Luke 9:23–27 (ESV)

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

This is one of those passages where you need to pay attention to every word. At first glance, it sounds like Jesus is saying that His second coming will happen before the last apostle dies.

But that doesn’t fit with the point He’s making.

The key word here is “for,” which is the first word of verses 24, 25 and 26. The Greek word is “gar.” The Bauer Arndt Gingrich and Danker (BAGD) Greek lexicon defines, “gar” as, “a conjunction used to express cause, inference, continuation, or to explain.”

Jesus is explaining, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*” At this point in His ministry any reference to “taking up a cross” is going to shock His listeners. Crucifixion was the death-by-torture penalty at the apex of Rome’s brutal criminal justice system. A normal person would never think about taking up a cross.

Jesus is saying that the Romans are going to kill them for following Him. The three “for” verses are explaining why it’ll all be worth it. He’s saying, “This is what you’ve got to do, guys.” It’s a tough message.

Then verse 27 begins with “but” (“de” in Greek). BAGD says “de” is, “used to connect one clause with another when it is felt that there is some contrast between them.” Jesus is saying, “But, here’s the good news.” The other important word in verse 27 is “see.” The good news is that they will see the kingdom of God that Jesus has been saying is coming.

Notice that He doesn’t say that they’ll see “this”—the Son of Man coming in glory. No. What they’ll see is *the kingdom of God*. Some think this refers to Pentecost. Seeing people filled with God’s spirit is a pretty good picture of the arrival of His kingdom. Others think it’s about the transfiguration. Experts disagree.

Whatever Jesus was referring to here, the kingdom of God did show up and could be seen. Those who saw it were encouraged enough to endure incredible suffering without recanting.

We owe an incredible debt to those first Christians. Their witness built a solid church. Those first Christians were the stones that formed its foundation.

The torture they endured, and the way they endured it, stands forever as a witness to the truth of their testimony.

3 Luke 9:28–36 (ESV)

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Everything about this incident is different. It’s the most profound encounter with holiness this side of Isaiah 6—yet no one gets scared. Instead, they get drowsy. Then they get scared by a mere cloud!

It starts with Jesus glowing; the Greek literally says that His clothing became bright as lightning. Moses and Elijah show up as if they’re alive, and no one freaks out. They’re just standing there talking to Jesus. It’s an important conversation, but there’s no action.

It’s like being in a secret government command center. The scene doesn’t seem all that action packed, but everyone you see is famous, and the things they’re talking about are super important.

This doesn’t feel like Earth; it feels like heaven. But the passage doesn’t say they’re in heaven, or were transported to heaven, or anything like that. They’re definitely still on Earth.

Remember verse 27? *But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.*”

Then eight days later this happens. The specific mention of the eight days (in the very next sentence) ties the two passages together. Those who view this as the fulfillment of verse 27 have a point.

It’s no stretch at all to think of this as seeing the kingdom of God.

So, where is the kingdom of God now?

It’s us. The church is the kingdom of God. But can anyone see it?

If they can’t, we’re not doing our job. Everyone sees our main outreach—charity.

Consider what you’re doing to make the kingdom of God visible. While you can do some charity individually, programs are indispensable because they involve training, and training is essential.

Charity in modern America is complicated. There are lots of ways to do more harm than good.

4 Luke 9:37–42 (ESV)

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

Jesus performed countless miracles like this. At one point, He even gave His disciples this power.

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, — Luke 9:1

What makes this miracle worth special mention (here and in Matthew 17:14–20 and Mark 9:14–29)?

The key is the disciples’ failure to cast the demon out. What happened to the power they received in verse 9:1? Did their “training exercise” fail to completely train them?

Exactly. The power they were given in verse 1 wasn’t permanent. When they returned from their travels, it ended. Without that special gift, their faith wasn’t enough. The account in Matthew explains it best.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” — Matthew 17:19–20 (ESV)

Their faith is still a work in progress. It will grow significantly, especially when they see the risen Lord with their own eyes. Then the Holy Spirit shows up at Pentecost.

Then the mountains start to move.

No one’s faith is ever complete, in this life anyway, but it can be nurtured. We tend to neglect our faith—assuming it doesn’t need exercise the way our muscles do. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. Exercising faith should be our highest priority.

Be strategic about growing faith. There are two parts to this: prayer and experience. If you want more faith—and who doesn’t—you have to ask for it.

But the other half is essential. If you’re not using your faith, you won’t get a chance to see it validated. That’s what the first Christians did so well; they actually went out and did things.

And today’s passage shows that even their failures were important.

Faith grows when exercised.

5 Luke 9:43–45 (ESV)

And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

This passage has a wondrous paradox. Jesus emphasizes what He’s telling them with, “*Let these words sink into your ears,*” yet *they did not understand*. Furthermore, their failure to understand was by design; *it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it*. What’s going on?

There are two contrasting things happening here because of two contrasting purposes. Jesus emphatically announces what’s going to happen so that when it does happen, they’ll remember and connect the dots. The encouragement they’ll get from this is essential, as the events would otherwise be crushingly depressing. Remembering that Jesus had said this would happen, and had said why, will give them some sense that everything’s okay, just when everything seems not okay.

But it’s also essential that they connect the dots later—not now. At this point in their spiritual maturation, they can’t handle the truth. If they knew what was coming, they might say something stupid, or even do something stupid. Look at Peter’s immature reaction in Mark 8:31–33a.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan!” (ESV)

This explains a lot. We often wish we could see now what we will be able to see when we get to heaven.

Nah. We’re not ready.

This is why Christian service is so important; it’s one of the key ways that we get ready (grow in Christ, so that we can handle advanced things). When we’re in the middle of doing something—and dealing with the challenges that are sure to come up—we learn to depend on God.

And God often provides those challenges. Our works of charity and service glorify the Lord, but His agenda of growing us never ends. He’s relentless in His pursuit of our sanctification. Some trial or another always seems to be coming.

And that makes our service even more glorious.

So, ask God to bless our service, not by making it easy, but by shining His face upon us.

Ask Him to teach us, grow us, and sanctify us through our service to Him.

