

Life Lessons from Jesus, Part 2

LESSON TWO: ACCEPTANCE (vs. 49-50)

As we have been studying Luke 9 God has had us on a journey. Jesus has been teaching us things, showing us who He is and who He calls us to be as His disciples. He has called us to go on mission with the message of the kingdom of God. He has taught us to trust Him and not rely on our own resources. He has revealed to us the power and glory of who He is as the Christ of God and His mission to suffer, die on the cross and be raised again. He has challenged us to discipleship; to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. He has turned our concept of importance and greatness upside down. This morning Jesus is teaching us to stop excluding and start including. Listen to it again, Luke 9:49-50:

49 Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us."

50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side."

The context is always important. What had been going on before John made this statement? Did he just make this remark "out of the blue?" No. I believe John's statement is connected to what had been going on. John and the other disciples had been fussing among themselves about who was the greatest (see: Luke 9:46-48 and Mark 9:33-37). John says this in answer to what Jesus had just said in verse 48: **"Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."**

I notice two great ironies in this statement of John. Jesus had just told His disciples about receiving, or welcoming, the child in His name and that by welcoming someone in Jesus' name they would be welcoming Jesus and His Father. Now the disciples are doing the opposite of that. Instead of receiving and welcoming, they are forbidding and excluding.

Another irony is that this unnamed man is casting out demons in Jesus' name -- something that earlier in this chapter, the disciples were unable to do. This man was not part of their group, but he was out there doing ministry, casting out demons, apparently successfully. So John tells Jesus, **"we forbade him because he does not follow with us."**

One day a lady criticized D. L. Moody for his methods of evangelism in attempting to win people to the Lord. Moody's reply was "I agree with you. I don't like the way I do it either. Tell me, how do you do it?" The lady replied, "I don't do it." Moody retorted, "Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it."

John probably expected Jesus to commend him for his action, but instead, Jesus uses it to teach a lesson. Jesus said, **"Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side."** It's like Jesus is saying, "I like the way he's doing it better than how you're not doing it."

Here, Jesus teaches us a lesson about himself and a lesson about us.

What's the lesson we learn about Jesus?

1. Jesus has a variety of servants

Note that their complaint against him is that "**he does not follow with us.**" They know that he is acting in Jesus' name. In fact John says that, "**we saw someone casting out demons in Your name.**" The problem is that he doesn't belong to our church, our group. He's not in the "in-crowd" so he is an "outsider," not one of the gang. We don't know him, he isn't one of us.

So the work of God gets shut down. Jesus, who has been breaking boundaries all over the place so that people could be free, now confronts His closest disciples who are, instead of following Jesus' example and breaking down boundaries, are actually putting up new boundaries. Finding new ways to keep people out, and restrict the Kingdom of God.

Now we do need to be careful in this area because not everyone who uses the name of Jesus has Jesus' authority or His Spirit. There are a lot of things that have been done in Jesus' name that He has nothing to do with. Think about the abuses of Jim Jones, David Koresh...and others like that who use the name of Jesus to lead people astray.

Also think of some of the actions of churches and church people. Not all church splits, policies, attitudes, or spirits glorify God. In these cases Jesus' name is used, but He is not authorizing or empowering what they are doing.

Take instance the interesting account of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19. They were going around trying to invoke the name of Jesus over those who were demon possessed. **They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."** (Acts 19:13 NIV). One day these guys tried this, "**And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?'**" (Acts 19:15 NKJV). And Luke tells us the result of that encounter was, "**Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.**" (Acts 19:16).

Another reason to be careful about how we apply these words of Jesus is that in our day many have made an idol out of tolerance. If we as Christians or as a church dare to expose or confront false teaching or immorality in our midst we can be accused of being "intolerant."

Here's the kind of argument you might hear: "The Lord said: 'Do not forbid him.' therefore, even though someone may not be with us; even if they happen to be teaching some things that are wrong; even though they approve of immoral practices, so long as they are not against us, and so long as they ascribe the name of Christ to their work, we should not forbid or criticize them." This is the "practical lesson" some have derived from this text.

Consider just exactly what John's objection was. John didn't say this man was guilty of some wrong. He didn't say the unidentified man was teaching false doctrine. The only thing John said was, "**he does not follow with us!**"

And consider what Jesus says about the man. Jesus said of this man, he is "**not against us.**" In Mark's account, Jesus said of this man, "**Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me,**" (Mark 9:39). It is clear, this man was not a false teacher! Had this he been a false teacher, what do you think Jesus would have said about him? Like He did the scribes and Pharisees Jesus probably would have called him a "**ravenous wolf,**" and compared him to a bad tree that bears bad fruit; a tree worthy of being "**cut down and thrown into the fire,**" (see Matt. 7:15-20).

So, whatever this passage means, we can be certain it doesn't mean we must refrain from exposing false teachers and immoral practices. The text affords no ground for that whatever. Gospel preachers are to charge false teachers "**that they teach no other doctrine,**" (1 Tim. 1:3). Our duty is to "**rebuke**" and "**exhort,**" (2 Tim. 4:2). Jesus never endorsed tolerance of anything morally or doctrinally wrong.

So what is the point of Jesus' lesson here? Jesus has a variety of servants. Those who are living and working in the name of Christ (by His authority) are not to be forbidden, even if they are unknown to us.

Those in the immediate company of Jesus were not the only faithful disciples! In addition to the apostles, many who heard Him were receptive, noble listeners. Yes, "the multitudes pressed about Him to hear the word of God," and in the response of some to Him, he "saw their faith," (Luke 5:1,20). "And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John," (Luke 7:29). The notion that the apostles were the only faithful disciples is not only assumption; it is in error. Those "with" Him were not the only faithful disciples. This unidentified man, based on every indication we have, was a faithful disciple of Christ, though not in the physical company of the apostles. (Just a few verses beyond our text, you'll read of Jesus appointing and sending out 70 disciples, and they had the ability to cast out spirits! See Luke 10:1-20).

It's so easy for us to criticize or minimize other Christians because they are "**not one of us.**" We can be guilty of the same spiritual bigotry that infected John.

When we look at v. 50 and its parallels, it brings up an interesting dilemma.

- * For who is not against us, is for us (Mk 9:40 NASB)
- * "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you." (Lk 9:50 NASB)
- * "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters." (Lk 11:23a)
- * "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." (Mt 12:30a)

These statements of Jesus almost seem to contradict one another don't they? One possible resolution is to notice that the first two are concerned with "us," or "you," while the second two are concerned with "me," in other words, Jesus. Being with or against Jesus is not the same as being with or against us. Just because another Christian is different from me does not mean that they do not belong to Jesus.

Illustration: It is said that when the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec. He was given orders to wait for the British land forces to arrive, and then support them when they attacked the city. Phipps' navy arrived early. As the admiral waited, he became annoyed by the statues of the saints that adorned the towers of a nearby cathedral, so he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ships' cannons. No one knows how many rounds were fired or how many statues were knocked out, but when the land forces arrived and the signal was given to attack, the admiral was of no help. He had used up all his ammunition shooting at the "saints." Daily Bread, October 6.

Are we ever guilty of "shooting the saints?" Do become critical when another Christian church or group outside of ours expresses the truth we are teaching about Jesus in a different fashion, with a different style of music, or form of worship, or style of preaching or teaching, or a different emphasis in the community? Let me tell you. We are not in competition with other churches who are doing the work of Christ. It's not us against them. Our mission is not to criticize or exclude them. We should rejoice whenever and wherever the Spirit of God is at work. We should rejoice that God has even included us in His mission.

Our temptation is to reject and to resent all those other people because "they are not one of us." Like John, we almost feel like we are doing the work of God when we say, "Stop what you are doing!! How dare you use the name of Jesus in a different way than we do!!"

Here's the truth: Jesus has all kinds of children in his family and most of them are *not* like us! We need to recognize that.

And the lesson about us is this:

2. Anyone who honors the name of Jesus is my friend

The key to this lesson is that John pointed out this stranger was casting out demons in the name of Jesus. I'm not advocating some kind of universalism that says any religion is okay. There is *only* one way to God and that is through Jesus—and Jesus alone. Jesus is not just *one* of the ways to God. He is not even the *best* way to God: He is the *only* way!

I realize some people and groups use the name of Jesus in a way that is not legitimate. Not everyone who claims the name of Jesus really honors who Jesus is. What a group believes about Jesus is absolutely essential for us to cooperate and fellowship with them, that's what it means to honor the name of Jesus.

But within those parameters we need to be inclusive. We need to realize those who don't do it the way we do it are our friends, if they honor the same Jesus we honor. In fact they are more than our friends—they are our brothers and sisters!

Did you know in heaven, God is not going to corral us into different areas? St. Peter is not going to have a loudspeaker saying, "Okay, let's have all the Catholics over here, Baptists in this area, Methodists over here, Church of God folks in this corral, Church of Christ folks, to that side ... "

And listen, when real revival comes to our community, the flood waters of revival have a way of raising us up until all these man made fences are submerged under the flood of God's mercy and grace. That's when "heaven comes down

and glory fills your soul!" Let's learn that lesson and start loving and praying for other people who honor the name of Jesus, but aren't "one of us."

And this truth ought to impact how we welcome people into our church. People will come here at different levels of their spiritual walk. Some will not yet be born again. Some will be babies in Christ. Some will be stunted in their spiritual growth. Regardless of where they are, where you are, they must be made to feel included in order for us to fulfill what God has called us to do as a church.

Whatever God has placed within a person to do, they should have the freedom to use their gifts and be a blessing to the body. We have got to enable people to serve one another in the body of Christ.

We will not get there by excluding people because their ideas do not measure up to ours, or they have a different way of doing things. We will not get there by holding people back because they do not know as much of the word as we do. We will not get there if our members do not feel that they can approach the leaders or any other member when they have a question about the Bible or their own spiritual growth. We will not get there if we push older members to the side because they have had their day. We will not get there if we tell our young people that their expression of worship through song and praise is not traditional enough and therefore not holy. We will not get there by looking down on someone whose educational level is not the same as yours. We will not get there if we do not include everyone in fellowship and ministry in this Church.

Did you notice how this lesson is connected to Jesus' lesson about greatness and welcoming the child in His name? When you become like a humble little child, you will be less exclusive of others. Long before blacks and whites started getting together in the South as friends, little black kids and white kids played together without any qualms. It was only as they grew up they learned blacks and whites didn't socialize. I think they had it right as children, don't you?

Think about the attitudes of little children. They get out on the playground and have such fun with each other. They don't ask each other which country club their parents belong to. They don't inquire about where their parents graduated from college or where they work or how much money they have. They don't ask what denomination they are. They just play together. That's the kind of childlike spirit Jesus was talking about.

Jesus said to enter the kingdom of God, we must simply receive it like a little child. Will you receive God's free gift of eternal life today?