

**Luke 9:46-50**  
**July 21, 2019**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: When you were a kid (or even as an adult), did you have a desire to be great at anything? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Achieving greatness in a secular world doesn't translate well when it comes to being a Christ-follower. Luke records the story of disciples who are arguing about who among themselves will be the greatest. Jesus, of course, intervened. Let's read the text and see if we can land on how Jesus defines greatness. Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

*Who Will Be the Greatest?*

<sup>46</sup> An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. <sup>47</sup> Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. <sup>48</sup> Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest."

<sup>49</sup> "Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

<sup>50</sup> "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you." [X-REF Matt 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37]

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- Jesus described the one who is greatest as the one who humbles himself." Instead of "going up the ladder," he falls down (so to speak) at the foot of the Cross, which is level ground for every child of God.

Q: What did you think the disciples meant by "being the greatest?" [Let people engage – their healing powers? Having greater authority? Having special status? [Greatness lies not in receiving preferential treatment from others or in having more authority than others. On the contrary it involves serving others, especially the outcasts of society as represented by a little child. Greatness ministers to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who can never repay (14:12–14)]

Q: Why do you think the disciples were disputing among themselves? [Let people engage - they were concerned about their rank in Christ's Kingdom, a Kingdom they seem to still think is imminent]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

Jesus turns the definition of “greatness” upside down! Greatness is equated with humility. The term “**least**” has nothing to do with rank, talent, or importance but refers instead to the one most willing to humble himself in order to serve others.

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 205-208). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

*Lack of love (vv. 46–50).* The disciples did not have much love for each other, or they would not have argued over who was the greatest (Luke 9:46–48). Perhaps this debate started because of envy (three of the disciples had been with Jesus on the mount), or because of pride (the other nine had failed to cast out the demon). Also, just before this, Jesus had paid Peter's temple tax for him (Matt. 17:24–27); and this may have aroused some envy.

In His kingdom, the example of greatness is a little child—helpless, dependent, without status, living by faith. The only thing worse than a child trying to act like an adult is an adult acting like a child! There is a great difference between being childlike and childish! (see 1 Cor. 13:4–5; 14:20)

They also showed a lack of love for believers outside their own group (Luke 9:49–50). This is what we would expect from a “son of thunder”! (Mark 3:17) Perhaps John was trying to impress Jesus with his zeal for protecting His name, but the Lord was not impressed. Believers who think that their group is the only group God recognizes and blesses are in for a shock when they get to heaven.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 228)**

8. JESUS'S TEACHING ABOUT GREATNESS (9:46–50) (Matt. 18:1–5; Mark 9:33–40).

9:46–50. This section (9:1–50) ends with Jesus' teaching concerning the disciples' attitude toward greatness. He had been revealed to them as the Messiah who would bring in the kingdom. Perhaps this fact precipitated the disciples' argument about their greatness in that kingdom. Jesus set forth the principle that the one who is **the greatest** is the one **who is least among you**. This same attitude of service characterized Him, the Messiah who was willing to go to the cross for all people.

Coupled with this discussion on greatness was John's attempt **to stop** someone else who was **driving out demons in Jesus' name**. John's reason was that the **man** was **not one of us**. John must have thought that the disciples' own greatness was diminished if others who were not of the Twelve could also cast out demons. Jesus' reply, **Whoever is not against you is for you**, suggested that the Twelve were not to see themselves as God's exclusive representatives. Rather they should have rejoiced that the power of God was being manifested on earth by others as well. If they manifested that attitude, it would show that they were truly trying to be of service to the Messiah.

**Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 271-280). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

### **Context**

The last two accounts of Jesus' Galilean ministry are found in this section. They were already tied together by the expression “in my name” (9:48–49) before Luke wrote his Gospel. It is impossible to say whether or not the first incident was triggered by Jesus' taking only three disciples to pray with him on the mount of transfiguration and excluding the others. The first

account involved only disciples, while the second arose from an encounter between the disciples and someone outside their circle (cf. Num 11:26–30 and Acts 19:13–16). Both witness to the disciples’ failure to understand Jesus’ passion announcement in Luke 9:45. In Luke the two incidents are more closely associated with the passion prediction because he omitted the scene change in Mark 9:30, 33. Tellingly, the disciples’ failure to understand that the Son of Man’s greatness (9:43) would lead to his sacrificial death (9:44; 19:10; 22:27) leads directly into their speculations on human greatness (9:46–48). Their inability to understand this same teaching at the Lord’s Supper (22:15–23) is followed by similar speculations (22:24–30). The present scene is followed by a second failure in the disciples’ understanding, that the work of God’s kingdom was also going on outside their immediate circle.

## Comments

**9:46 As to which of them would be the greatest.** The term “greatest” can be understood in several ways: having the most authority, receiving the most preferable treatment, being the most valuable, or being most favored by God. Matthew 18:1 reads “greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” What is clear is that a comparison was being made among the disciples, i.e., “them.”

**9:47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts.** This Lukan addition to the narrative reveals Jesus’ prophetic insight. See comments on 5:22.

**9:48 Whoever welcomes this little child.** In the first century a child was an insignificant, weak member of society and so exemplified one who is “least.”

**In my name.** This can be understood to modify either the verb “welcome” or the noun “child.” If it is an adjective modifying “child,” it would mean *because of the child’s being a Christian*. If it is an adverb modifying “welcomes,” it would mean *welcomes because of being a Christian such a child*. In the other examples where Luke used this phrase or a related one, it appears to be adverbial rather than adjectival.

**Welcomes me.** Insight into the meaning of this comes from a rabbinic saying in *Berakot* 5:5, “A man’s representative is like the man himself.” If we assume that the child was a follower of Jesus, this would fit Acts 9:4–5 and the Pauline idea of the church as the “body of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 12:12–31). Compare also Matt 25:31–46 (esp. vv. 40, 45). The hospitality believers receive reveals the attitude people have toward Jesus (cf. Acts 16:33–34).

**And whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.** This verse is a good example of step parallelism in which the first thought (child—me) is raised a step higher in the second thought (me—him who sent me). Even as a child is received as a representative of Jesus, so Jesus is received as the representative of God (cf. Luke 10:16). There is a strong emphasis here on the idea that Jesus’ mission originated with God (cf. 4:18, 43).

**For he who is least.** Again a comparative adjective is used in a superlative sense (see 9:46 footnote). The term “least” has nothing to do with rank, talent, or importance but refers instead to the one most willing to humble himself in order to serve others (cf. Mark 9:35).

**He is the greatest.** “Greatest” is literally *great*, but due to the context it means *the greatest*. Something like “in God’s eyes” must be added to this sentence, for to be greatest in the sense of Luke 9:46 would contradict the saying. Compare 14:11; 18:14; 22:26.

**9:49 Master.** As elsewhere Luke preferred “Master” to Mark’s “Teacher.” See comments on 5:5.

**Said John.** As one of the “inner three,” John assumed authority and exercised it by forbidding those outside of the immediate fellowship of disciples to minister in Jesus’ name.

**Driving out demons in your name.** Compare 10:17; Acts 3:6; 4:7, 10, 30; 16:18; 19:13–16.

**We tried to stop him.** John's condemnatory attitude is manifest again in Luke 9:54.

**Because he is not one of us.** This is given as the reason for forbidding the exorcist to continue. Luke did not specify whether this person was a non-Christian exorcist using Jesus' name (cf. Acts 8:18–19; 19:13–16) or a believer who was simply outside the circle of the disciples. In light of the unhappy fate of the non-Christian exorcists in Acts 19:13–16, however, it is unlikely that Luke was referring to them here. If Luke really was thinking broadly enough to include non-Christian exorcists, he would not have omitted the passage most supportive of such an interpretation, "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me" (Mark 9:39).

**9:50 Whoever is not against you is for you.** The reverse of this proverb appears in Luke 11:23a, "He who is not with me is against me." These complement, rather than contradict, each other and reveal that one cannot be neutral with respect to Jesus. Luke changed the saying in Mark from "us" to "you." In so doing he may have been applying Jesus' saying to the current situation in which the attitude of people toward Jesus in Luke's day was revealed by their attitude toward his disciples, the church ("you").

### **The Lukan Message**

Luke addressed two kinds of misunderstandings surrounding the Lord's mission and ministry. The Son of God's greatness (9:43) is only understood properly in light of the passion (9:44). True greatness comes from serving (22:27). The first misunderstanding involves the nature of greatness. Greatness lies not in receiving preferential treatment from others or in having more authority than others. On the contrary it involves serving others, especially the outcasts of society as represented by a little child. Greatness ministers to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who can never repay (14:12–14).

The second error is to think that God is only working exclusively in one's immediate circle. Other followers of Christ were also exorcising demons in Jesus' name. It has been suggested that Luke may have been referring to a narrow sectarianism that excluded other servants of Christ, particularly thinking of the unwillingness of some in the Jerusalem church to accept the ministry of the apostle Paul "because he is not one of us" (9:49). Such speculation can never be demonstrated, but the practice of excluding others who minister in Christ's name because "they are not one of us" has been all too frequent within the Christian church. One need only think of the "established church" and the dissident or "nonconformist church." The church must guard itself against excluding outsiders who believe the cardinal tenets of historic Christianity simply because they are not associated "with us."

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 9:46-50). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**