

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 14, Transfiguration and the Boy with an Unclean Spirit, Luke 9:28-50

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This is Dr. Daniel K. Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 14, Transfiguration and Boy with an Unclean Spirit, Luke 9:28-50.

Welcome back to the Biblica eLearning lecture series on the Gospel of Luke.

So far, we have been following the Gospel of Luke, and we are in chapter 9, beginning from verse 28. In this particular lecture, I hope to be able to finish chapter 9 as we think and raise questions about Jesus' identity and how that is evolving and developing throughout this chapter. As we look into Transfiguration, let me help you think through where we have been to date. Beginning in the chapter, Jesus has sent the twelve out, and as they go and come back with remarkable results, Harold begins to get concerned.

In other words, the political leader in the region began to get concerned about who this Jesus is. So, he inquired about who Jesus is. Jesus' identity becomes a concern for political figures in the region.

As he goes on in ministry and feasts the five thousand, he comes into a situation where he asks the disciples about his identity, and they tell him that some say he is Elijah or John or one of the prophets, the same answer that Harold had given prior. Jesus goes on to ask them who they, as the apostles, think he is. And Peter answered he is the Messiah of God. Without acknowledging that that is the correct answer, Luke's construction tells us Jesus agrees with that, but Jesus changes the language and then begins to talk about the fate of the Son of Man.

Now acknowledging that he is the Messiah of God, he tells them the Son of Man and his ministry and life is not as glamorous, and so he tells them about the suffering, the rejection, the pain that he will go through and how those who want to follow him have to be ready to deny themselves, lose their lives, take up their cross daily and follow him. In the transfiguration account, we still follow in Luke's portrait of the questions of the identity of Jesus, and one of the things we are going to see is that here a voice from heaven, God himself, is going to set Jesus apart, and confirm that indeed he is the chosen one, he is the Messiah, so that if in a group of the disciples, the three that are with him in transfiguration are in any doubt about his identity, now it is clear who he is. And so when we move on from the last pericope of chapter 9 going into chapter 10, when Jesus starts the journey to Jerusalem, Luke has already disclosed to his reader that Jesus' identity is very clear, and in fact, he has hinted the

disciples what he is going to go through and so when they start unfolding in Jerusalem they should not be surprised.

Let's begin to look at the transfiguration account. But you want to remember that the transfiguration account is one of those that all the synoptic gospels record. It is recorded in Mark chapter 9, verses 2 to 8, in Matthew chapter 17, verses 1 to 13, and here in Luke chapter 9, verses 38 to 36.

I would walk you through this carefully so that you can think through some of the things I like to think through with my students in the classroom as we begin to distinguish what Luke is doing with this particular account. Note the number of days stated in all three gospels and how they describe the changes that take place with Jesus, Peter's reaction and even the voice from heaven, and how these are all portrayed. As we begin to look at what Luke is doing, we will be able to closely follow and capture how Luke uses this particular tradition to convey his message in a powerful way to Theophilus and subsequent readers like us today.

Looking at the text now, the three are in parallel. When we look at Matthew, we see that Matthew begins even though the sequence of events is the same. He begins by saying six days later, Jesus took with him, he took the same disciples.

Mark says six days later, he took with him the same disciples, Peter, James, and John. But Luke says about eight days after these sayings. Now, Luke talks about the sayings eight days after he had spoken with them or to them about the things that happened in the previous account, and these began to happen.

So, Luke changes slightly by mentioning eight days. They went to the high mountain, and they all recall that he went to the high mountain, but what Luke does is look at what Luke does. Luke did not say high mountain, but he added something particular, which is Lukan.

He says they went up on the mountain to pray. For Luke, prayer is very important, and prayer precedes major things in ministry. Major events in ministry have their foundations in prayer and so Luke said they went to the mountain to pray.

It is in the context of prayer that some of the things that we are going to see in the transfiguration would unfold—continuing the reading of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew goes on to say and he was transfigured before them and his face shone.

Mark uses a simpler term, transfigured before them, but Luke says that while he was praying, the appearance of the face changed. They occurred in the context of prayer. By all accounts, I have often stated that Luke is charismatic.

He does not play with issues like prayer, and whenever he gets the opportunity, he reiterates the essence of the kingdom of God. And then he says, the clothes you see. Matthew says the clothes became dazzling white. Luke says it becomes dazzling white, but then you look at the lower line. I show you that suddenly, they appeared to them, and Mark says they appeared to them.

Luke is the only one who says they appeared two men. The other gospels don't add two men. Luke is trying to tell us that they are not angelic beings.

They appeared like visible human beings that are noticeable. There is no hallucination or illusion taking place, and then you find here in Matthew's account that Moses and Elijah were talking with him. The same goes for Mark, but when it comes to Luke, Luke says let's wait a minute. We have to say some more things.

Moses and Elijah were talking to him, but they were talking to him about some specific things. They appeared in glory and honor, and they spoke about the exodus and their departure. We'll talk about that later on which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, Luke says, but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory. And again, he names the two men who stood with him just as they were leaving him. And then observe, still in the power, Luke said, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here.

That is very much the same as what the others are saying. Let us make three dwellings: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

Notice that Luke is the one who is quick to say they were terrified. For Luke, when people have a special experience with God, they often get in fear. They are afraid of something.

They begin to see the power of God, and this surprise of awe begins to take place in their lives. Still continuing, you observe the power and Luke reduces the amount of words he is going to use comparing to Matthew. Mark is very simple, but Luke said, from the cloud came a voice that said, and this is important to our discussion, this is my son, my chosen.

Notice how Matthew put it, this is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Mark says, the voice says, this is my son, the beloved. But Luke changes that completely to say, this is my son.

Remember the language of the son of man. This is my son, my chosen. You find Elijah in the scene, you find Moses in the scene, but the disciples who are present to witness what is going on should know that that is the chosen son.

They should listen to him. When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. Mark said suddenly, when they looked around, they saw no one.

Luke continued to say, and they kept silent. In those days, they told no one about any of the things they had seen. So, the identity of Jesus begins to unfold here in Luke in a significant way. The Transfiguration of Luke is one of those passages that my students and I have a lot of fun with when we are in the classroom.

Because you find students who come from the traditions that are more charismatic, they think everything is about prayer, okay? Sometimes, when they ask and explain to me what prayer is, I doubt whether they understand what prayer really is. For some of them, prayer is repeating one-line syllables for hours, speaking in tongues. They also love the fact that Luke talks about prayer.

Luke says, you see, that transfiguration experience with the appearance of Moses and Elijah took place while they were praying. Yeah, that is true. Luke locates this significant account in the context of prayer meetings.

In the Jewish tradition, there are two or three witnesses. Here, we have three disciples present to witness and hear what God himself will say about his choice for the messianic mission if the issue of Jesus' identity still needs to be clarified. Luke said as everything played out, it was clear that something spectacular was happening, and they were all frightened.

But then the voice came and said, of the three who were present, namely Moses, the man who brought the law, Elijah, as my friend who is a Jewish rabbi, Mike used to say, Elijah was the Santa Claus of Jewish culture in the first century, everybody loves him. So, Elijah, the famous prophet who is talked about, who is dreamed about, also appears in the scene. And there stands Jesus, the one about whom Peter had just professed that he is the Messiah of God, which Jesus himself had acknowledged and said, this is what the Son of Man is and what he came to do, and those who want to follow him must be prepared for XYZ.

Now the voice from heaven comes and says, of these three standing in front of you, this is my beloved, my chosen, a language that Mark or Matthew does not use. He is the one he has chosen to be the Messiah. And then Moses and Elijah disappeared.

The one who stands there in front of them is the chosen one, and they must embrace what God is about to do. What Luke is going to do here is that Jesus is wrapping down or bringing to the conclusion of his ministry in Galilee. Once this is affirmed, he

has already told them about the mission of the Son of Man, and here there is a divine accreditation or divine validation about the messianic mission of Jesus.

So, from here on, Luke is just going to usher us into the next step. They will start traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. And the messianic mission is going to be unfolding.

Three quick things that are noteworthy. One, Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus. In that brief conversation, they spoke about the Exodus and their departure to Jerusalem.

Think through that word, Exodus, because I'll elaborate on that. Two, it is only Luke who establishes that this strong divine accreditation takes place in the context of prayer. Third, Luke is the only one who wanted the witnesses to know that or who portrays the witness account to say Elijah and Moses did not appear like mystical figures.

Lest someone say they were not the right people. There were two men who were present with Jesus, and it was Moses and Elijah. And they disappeared after that.

Trying to establish that those who were there saw the right people and did not only see them but also had a conversation with Jesus. In their conversation, they're soon to discuss how some of the messianic missions are going to unfold in Jerusalem. The Exodus, the conversation Moses and Elijah had with Jesus, has attracted scholars' attention and has a few views as to what that referred to.

So, there are four views about what the Exodus refers to. In Luke's account, we read he appeared in glory and was speaking. They appeared in glory, and they spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

The first view about what the departure is all about, the subject of the truth, the trial conversation, says that the Exodus refers to the passion week. They were discussing his death, his resurrection, and his ascension, how he was going to die in Jerusalem for the sins of the world.

If that is so, the holders of the view will go on to express that Moses and Elijah are actually all in line, and if you like, cheerleaders and supporters. They are in the loop about what Jesus is going to do. It just so happened that even if Harold and the crowd think that Jesus is Elijah, it is ever so clear to the disciples that no, he's not Elijah.

Elijah disappeared. A second view says that the Exodus that they spoke about refers to the death of Jesus as he departs from the earth. So, Exodus becomes going out of this world.

A third view says that the Exodus is the death of Jesus and an act of salvation, as we think about Moses. So, you don't think about just the death of Jesus as the departure from this earth, but the death of Jesus is almost like a journey that is beginning, a whole departure, taking God's people into eternity like Moses and the Hebrews. Another view says that the Exodus that they spoke about refers to the entire ministry of Jesus, and those who make the claim like to say that this is a very strong allusion to Moses, and we should be able to think about it as such.

As you follow commentary, commentators, and various scholars, you become aware that one of these four views is articulated strongly depending on who the commentator is. Sometimes, you may be disappointed to find out that they don't even show you that there are other views that other people share on this subject. So, if you ask what my view is, I'm glad you ask.

I don't have a particular view on this because when he says the Exodus is going to be accomplished at Jerusalem, it seems to me that the journey that is going to be imagined from Galilee to Jerusalem is going to be this departure from Galilee going to Jerusalem and perhaps everything else that is going to happen in Jerusalem. If you take that general view that I have just expressed, then you are getting about three of the views that have been expressed, all in my small expression of the view there. Does holding one of these views change how one reads Luke? No.

It doesn't make any difference because Luke's point is that God made it clear to three witnesses that Jesus is the chosen one on the Mount of Transfiguration. That is established. The conversation I would have wished to know more, but if you are like me, you are waiting for an opportunity to have a cup of coffee with Apostle Peter in heaven and have so many questions about things that you wish had been written about some of the things he did that are not written.

So, I'm looking forward to that too. So, following the Transfiguration, Jesus is still in Galilee in the final days of his work in Galilee before they set on the journey to Jerusalem. There, there will be an incident where a man with an unclean spirit is going to be the subject for him to deal with.

Let's read out from verse 37. The next day, when Jesus came down from the mountain, namely Mount of Transfiguration, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.

A spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams. It throws him into convulsion so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him, and it's destroying him.

I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not. Now, this is a sad situation on two fronts. A boy is suffering and suffering a great deal, and a father is in agony about the plight of his son.

The other is the disciples of Jesus who were given the mandate to go out, and we are told they were able to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal diseases. Here, they brought this guy too, and they couldn't heal this boy. This is one of the few times we are told the disciples of Jesus could not heal.

But I like the fact that Luke brings it out. And if this is not disturbing, think about it. It's after the highest spiritual level you can think about with the disciples.

Three of them were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. They had just seen Elijah and Moses. Talk about being spiritually high.

They have experienced the highest spiritual high. And then they came down, and they gave them somebody who is sick, and they couldn't heal him. And the man is disappointed.

No wonder he was screaming and calling on Jesus. Probably pause and throw in here some excuses. I have seen modern-day ministers who are trying to force healing into place.

They pray for someone who is sick. The person is not getting healed. They want to say or claim that you are healed.

Claim that you are healed because they think they are in the spiritual high, and it has to happen. But friends, before I go on to elaborate on this particular passage, let me remind you about something here. If it is about the ministry of the Kingdom of God and the mandate of power and authority that Jesus gives, Luke reminds us that the disciples acknowledge that if they call on somebody to be healed in Jesus' name and it doesn't happen, you don't force it.

He also suggests to us that it is likely that sometimes people may not be healed. Yeah. Don't help God.

Just trust God to do His work. Now let's look at the Father's plea, which for me is a very, very hard thing sometimes to think about. When the Father came into Jesus, you may observe in the text that He addressed Him as teacher.

Jesus had performed many miracles. But Luke wants us to make sure that we are aware that one of the key portraits of Jesus is a teacher, one who has come to proclaim the Kingdom of God. His identity is not one of a miracle worker.

The man called Him a teacher. It is important that we think through the fact that He referred to Him as a teacher because too many people want to be identified with the most spectacular that has happened in their lives. This man knows Jesus as a teacher.

But something about this brief pericope that you should think also about is the spirit cosmology, the spirit world of this. Two or three lectures ago, I talked about the miraculous encounters with Jesus, and I emphasized some of the spiritual activities. In Luke, if you don't understand this spirit cosmology, you are in trouble.

Luke says that this boy's conversion or seizure was attributed to the work of the spirit. It is not only that it is attributed to the work of the spirit. The Father Himself said, My son has this spirit in him that convulses him.

So, it is not only a mystical belief from the outsider. The father who comes to Jesus also tells Jesus that the boy's sickness is caused by a spirit. As I mentioned in an earlier lecture, it may not be a belief that is held today.

But in the ancient Jewish culture, the cultures of the time, many things of this sort are attributed to spiritual causes. When a man came to Jesus, his concern was that the spirit would be cast out. Believing that if the spirit is cast out, the seizure, the convulsion, and all that will cease.

This is hard to comprehend if you live in a world where things of the spirit or the concept of spirit are not part of your daily thought pattern. It will require that you imagine the world of Jesus and locate this story in that world to begin to conceptualize what is going on. And then, when he said the disciples were not able to do it, that became very interesting.

Jesus is going to respond to this as if the disciples had failed as if they had failed in matters of faith. This would imply that if they had believed enough, they could have healed this guy, and the father would have been satisfied, and he, Jesus, would not have had another work to do. Verse 41, Jesus said, You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.

And even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in convulsion. But in very Lucan language, Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And in a very Lucan way, they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

They were amazed. Now, this account is one of those areas where Mark's version gets a whole different attention. Because Mark follows, Luke follows Mark very closely.

But Mark seems to suggest that Jesus is trying to say that it is not only a matter of faith with the disciples, but if the disciples actually believed, more things could have happened. In Mark's account, I read from verse 9, chapter 9, verses 17 to 29. And someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So, I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able. And he answered them, O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.

And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, it immediately convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked his father how long this had been happening to him. And he said, From childhood.

It has often cast him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Verse 23 And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief. And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse.

So, most of them said he's dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he rose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could we not cast it out? Verse 29 And he said to them, This kind can be driven out by anything but prayer.

In other manuscripts, it reads by anything but prayer and fasting. And I brought that Markan account to show you how Mark, unlike Luke, elaborates on the compassion, talk about the lack of faith component like the other disciples, and then go on to say this happens only by prayer and fasting. So those who read the Almighty King James, for example, the Textus Receptus, have the prayer and fasting with that manuscript.

So he said this only happened through prayer and fasting. That's why some preachers have said that, Oh, some people are not able to perform miracles because they don't fast a lot. That is not a point of Luke.

In fact, a lot of reliable manuscripts don't have the fasting component to it. So, if you are going to build theology around it, just be careful about that. But still on the boy

of unclean spirit, I want to end that part of the discussion by highlighting the following.

It is Luke alone who indicates that this is the only son of the father. Having a boy is a very important thing in that culture. It is very important that this father has someone to inherit him and take his place, especially since his wife will be younger and he may have other children; the son will have to take care of them.

Losing the son will be a big deal. A son with seizures and convulsions becomes a big problem for the entire family. Seizures too, seizure, and convulsions are linked to evil spirits in ancient belief.

It does not mean modern cultures have to link seizure to that. Now, we know more about some neurological disorders that cause seizures. The ancients did not know that.

But whatever causes seizure comes; if God is able to heal it, that's fine. But I want to suggest to you that whether God heals or doctors heal, none of that should be taken as something unimportant. I think that God will be happy that some are sick, that the doctors treat them, and that they find healing through orthodox medicine.

Here, we find miraculous healing. It doesn't mean to the exclusion of orthodox medicine. The other thing we find here is the disciples not able to heal someone because of faith.

As a principle, yes, sometimes healing comes by faith, faith of the one who is sick, sometimes faith of the one who prays for them, and sometimes healing brings other people to faith. But this must not be a formula, I should say. Fourth, when Jesus rebuked the spirit, Luke suggests to us that Jesus dealt with the spirit behind the symptoms, and then he healed the boy and gave him to his father.

Imagine so many things that are happening so far in Galilee, especially after the transfiguration. All these things are happening. They came down from the mountain.

They met a man whose son had an unclean spirit. That becomes an incident. The guys couldn't even heal.

But Jesus told them about the son of man, and his identity was validated. What else would they do? From verse 43, we begin to find events unfolding and how these interesting disciples are going to respond to the events. In verse 43, Jesus now is going to make some things more explicit.

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 man. Forty-five, 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 it saying, and they are afraid to ask him about this saying. But then, some of my favorite observations begin to ensue here. An argument arose quickly about these disciples.

These are the guys who couldn't heal the boy. Okay, so you have that at the back of your mind. Now, an argument arose among them, and the argument was, which of them was the greatest? Jesus, knowing and reasoning of their hearts, took a child, put him by his side, and said to them, whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

For he who is least among you all is the one who is the greatest. The disciples are very interesting characters, isn't it? If they have any failure in ministry, we have seen one of those failures, they couldn't heal that boy. Jesus gave it to them.

Jesus told them that he was going to die. Luke tells us they did not understand it. But the next thing they are going to do is, hey guys, now let's talk about power.

Who gets to be the biggest in the whole game now? Well, if it is the biggest, you should have demonstrated your power when you had that boy who was sick. You couldn't do anything about that. Mark has an interesting take that should make all of us who think about Christian leadership very humble.

Because in their power struggle of who takes whatever position, Jesus uses a child as a model to say that in a world where age has some validity and reception in how people treat others, the child is the one who is treated with the least honor. But those who want to be with him must be like the child. And then, if that is not enough, I have already told you that the disciples have been failing in Galilee in the last few days.

Let me mention to you or let me show you something else that will happen—verse 49. Verse 49, I call it unusual exorcism.

John, one of the disciples, answered, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us. But Jesus said to him, do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you. In other words, these disciples who couldn't do what they were supposed to do earlier on, who are thinking about power struggles now, they come in again, and they say, hey, we were very upset, Master, that somebody is casting out demons in your name, and we tried to sort that person out.

Hey, that sounds like some Christian leaders I know. This will be rolling out all in the last days of Galilee, before they set out to go to Jerusalem. I am going to be ending this session here by pointing out some negative, what I call negative shadows of the apostles in the last days of Galilee.

The reason I'm doing that is that I'm very interested in Christian leadership. I realize, including myself, that we all have the tendency when we see God giving us the ability to do some things that attract attention, sometimes pride comes in, and we begin to perceive ministry in our terms instead of seeing it as the kingdom of God, and we being privileged to participate in it. If you look at the disciples, even in their highest height, Peter has just said that you are the Messiah of God.

They had witnessed transfiguration. They came down, and they couldn't cast out the demon and heal that boy. They are causing problems and asking, who is the greatest among us? Somebody else is doing ministry, and they have an issue with that person.

We tried to stop the person, they said. We all may have the tendency to have that shadow. And I hope that as I draw these shadows out, you will bear with me and begin to realize that we are all often tempted to be in that category as I bring this part of the lecture to the close.

So, the first shadow, you observe that they are not able to deal with seizure, but they are eager to stop others from casting out demons in Jesus' name. There is some ego there. Second, you see that there were men who were obsessed with greatness.

When Jesus was talking about suffering, they were concerned about status and rank. On the other side, you saw earlier that these people who were given authority to cast out demons were not able to deal with convulsion. In the words of Jesus, we see the other side of their negative shadow: they lack faith when faith is needed.

May God help all of us, even as we reflect on some shortcomings of the apostles. And how they followed Jesus. We can also reflect on our shortcomings.

Because these are the same imperfect people, ordinary people, who will later reignite their passion and focus in ministry and become the pillars of the early church. I believe that if we all pay close attention to some of these portraits of Luke, God will be able to raise us from our ordinary standing with him and use us as tools to accomplish extraordinary things. Our next lecture is going to be as Jesus set out from Galilee and traveled teaching through the regions from Samaria and others on his way to Jerusalem.

But as I end these lectures of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, my prayer and my hope is that we all at least begin to think about what it means to be disciples. People who are ready to deny themselves, to lose their lives, to live a humble life, and constantly

be reminded about our need to follow the master who has called us. We can't outdo him in his own ministry.

We can only follow his lead. Let's do it with him because we can't do ministry for him. Thank you again, and may God richly bless you for this learning experience together.

Thank you.

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