

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #14

Scripture Luke 9:1-17

Let me remind you of some of the important activities we covered in chapters 4 through 8. This was the period of Jesus' early public ministry in the region of Galilee. He had introduced Himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The theme of His teaching was the kingdom of God. He had healed many people and cast out demons from many people, and even raised people from the dead. These miracles authenticated who He was. The people were amazed by His power and authority over diseases, evil spirits, death, and nature.

After several months of ministry, Jesus selected from among His followers twelve special companions that He named Apostles. After selecting them, Jesus continued His general interaction with people, but His emphasis shifted to the training of the Twelve. He was preparing them for future ministry, and they needed to understand the deeper truths of the kingdom of God.

The early methods used in the spiritual education of the Apostles involved teaching and observation. Their classroom was often on the slopes of the hillsides or near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They had frequent opportunities to observe Jesus in action, and occasionally they had some unique personal experiences which increased their recognition and appreciation of Jesus .

In the passage for today, Jesus takes the training program to a higher level. The time had come for the Twelve to go off on their own to put into practice the kingdom truths they had been learning.

Read Luke 9:1-6

The first lesson in this passage concerns a “formula” for spiritual service. Notice in verses 1, 2, and 3 that Jesus “called” the Twelve, “gave them power and authority,” and “instructed them” before sending them on their way. This four part formula is either explicitly stated or implied whenever God assigned His people to a spiritual task. “Called,” “empowered,” “instructed,” and “sent.” This formula has been applied to every person in the Old and New Testaments who became involved in kingdom work.

Let me give some examples. When God was ready to redeem the Israelites from Egypt, He spoke to Moses from a burning bush. It was there that Moses learned that he was God’s man to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses was called, given unique powers, instructed and sent to Pharaoh to demand that the people of Israel be released from their bondage.

The prophet Isaiah was called by God in a vision. He was promised power and protection, instructed about his message, and sent to warn the people of Judah about approaching judgment and to encourage them with promises of future salvation.

The Apostle Paul received his call on the road to Damascus. He was told that he was God’s “chosen instrument to carry the Lord’s name before the Gentiles and their kings as well as before the people of Israel.” The Lord informed him of the many things he would suffer for the sake of the Gospel. I could go through a long list of individuals from Noah to Abraham to David to Old Testament prophets to the twelve Apostles to point out how this formula applied to their lives.

God still uses this formula when calling and preparing His people for service today, whether it is to cross-cultural missionary service or activities in the local church or your ministry to this retirement community. Apart from the application of this formula, there is no possibility of spiritual or kingdom advance here on earth. It is foolish for believers to attempt to serve God in their own strength, or to choose for themselves what they will do, or to presume that they know how to serve God effectively. On the other hand, when God wants to assign one of His followers to a particular ministry task, He indicates the direction, provides the resources, sets up the parameters for the work to be done, and gets that person launched. What is required of the disciple is wholehearted trust and obedience.

In Luke chapter 9 it was time for the Apostles to get some ministry experience. Jesus wanted them to do the same kind of kingdom work that He had been doing: preaching, teaching, and healing. Therefore He called the Twelve together, gave them power and authority to drive out demons and cure diseases, and gave them explicit instructions about what resources they should take along on their travels and how they were to conduct themselves.

Let's think about the instructions for travel. When I travel, I pack my bags with all the things I anticipate needing. I have extra clothes, lots of money, and, depending on where I am going, I might include some energy bars and a jar of peanut butter. Jesus instructed the Apostles to not take any of these kinds of items. Jesus wanted these men to trust God for everything they would need for their travel — their empowerment for ministry as well as their travel provisions. The limited provisions they were permitted to carry would require them to trust God for their food, protection, and shelter.

There were also specific instructions about behavior in the villages to which the Apostles would go. They were not to move from house to house when in a village, but were to use only one home as their base of ministry in whatever location they were in.

Let's think about the power and authority given to the Apostles by Jesus. They were to "drive out demons, preach the kingdom of God, and heal the sick." The ability to do these activities is not a natural human ability. The Apostles needed supernatural power and authority to carry out these activities. This is what Jesus provided to them. They were to minister in Jesus' name, and spiritual ministry, whether in Jesus' time or today, is possible only in the context of God's delegated authority. This is one of the basic fundamental spiritual lessons that the Apostles then, and believers today, must understand. This is the main point to be gleaned from this passage.

The necessity and importance of bestowed authority cannot be underestimated or overappreciated. Not only did the training of the Twelve focus on this fundamental truth, but it is essential that this truth be appropriated by every believer today. The truth of this truth is revealed in the final command of Jesus to His disciples, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all peoples" (*Matthew 28:18*). Carrying out this command would not be possible without the all important statement made by Jesus just before the command, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." It is on the basis of Jesus' authority that the powers of evil will be overcome and the kingdom of God will expand.

Without God's delegated authority, no believer is able to serve God effectively and meaningfully. Jesus calls, gives His authority, instructs, and sends His people into the world because He has a goal: to gain disciples from all people groups. As Jesus' followers, we have a responsibility: to make ourselves available to Him, to obey His commands, and to trust Him to achieve His supernatural spiritual goals through us.

Verse 6 explains that the Apostles "set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere."

The episode continues with verse 10

Read Luke 9:10-17

This episode of the Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle of Jesus described in all four Gospels (*cf Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; John 6:1-15*). This is an indication of the importance of the lesson we are focusing on.

Verse 10 does not seem like a particularly significant statement on a quick reading, but it contains the clue to the meaning of the passage. "When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done." These four words were the indication to Jesus that the Apostles had missed the key teaching point of their ministry experiences. Jesus did not immediately admonish or criticize the Twelve about their report. Scolding and criticism were usually not Jesus' way of correcting the mistakes of His followers. Instead, Jesus usually used object lessons as His preferred method of clearing up misunderstandings. This is what the feeding of the crowd accomplished.

This episode began when Jesus took the Twelve with Him in an attempt to get alone with them in some remote place. However, when the crowds learned about His destination, they followed Him. Instead of being able to focus attention exclusively on the Twelve, Jesus welcomed the crowd and ministered to the people through teaching and healing.

This must have filled up most of the day. “Late in the afternoon,” the Twelve approached Jesus with their concerns for the people. They suggested that Jesus send the people away so that they could obtain food and lodging. Because the people were in a remote place, the Twelve assumed that everyone would be hungry and would have to spend the night in the open if action was not taken quickly. That was Jesus’ cue to drop His bombshell statement on them, “You give them something to eat.”

Why did Jesus give this response? Remember, the Apostles had reported to Jesus all they had accomplished — healings, casting out demons, supernatural work. They had used the wrong words to explain their success in ministry. Jesus was offering them another opportunity for them to do something else of a spectacular nature. From Jesus’ standpoint, the need for food was the context for the perfect object lesson. The Apostles were about to learn what they could actually do and what Jesus could do through them.

The Apostles quickly realized how helpless they were to meet the needs of the people. Only two fish and five loaves of bread were at hand. The sad part of this episode was that the Apostles tried to figure out how to buy food for everyone in the crowd. The absurdity of their planning becomes clear with a little imagination on our part. Jesus and the crowd were in a remote area, far from any Galilean supermarkets. Can you imagine a delegation going to a local bread shop in an isolated village and asking for enough bread to feed 5000 men? The Gospel of Mark mentions that there were also women and children in the crowd. Perhaps there were 6 or 7 thousand or more people in all.

The Apostles were faced with an impossible task. And that was exactly the predicament that Jesus wanted the Apostles to realize. Doing what God commands is a total impossibility for humans to accomplish in their own strength and with their own resources. Without the supernatural enablement of God, nothing that God commands can be accomplished.

Fortunately, Jesus had a plan, and He had the supernatural ability to carry out His plan. Notice the verbs in verses 14 through 16. Jesus said to his disciples, “Have the people sit down in groups of fifty.” They did this. Then Jesus took the five loaves and two fish; Jesus looked up to heaven; Jesus gave thanks; Jesus broke (divided) the loaves; Jesus gave the food to the disciples. All the important action steps were performed by Jesus. All the elements of this miracle focus on His power and supernatural ability.

And what was the role of the disciples? They took the food that Jesus provided to them and distributed it to the people. This is all a disciple can do — to take what God gives and offer it to needy people. The miraculous aspects of the feeding were done by God. The Apostles served the people. They served as the Lord's servants, doing the Lord's work.

What was the object lesson for the Apostles? They learned that they could not take credit for the things that only God can do. As believers, we can only share with others what God gives to us. It is not appropriate for us to brag about what we can do for God. We can only be thankful for the privilege of being involved in God's supernatural work, and thankful for what God chooses to do through us. The Apostles had faced an impossible task — well, impossible from a human perspective, but the task was not impossible for God, and the episode ended successfully.

The results of the miracle performed by Jesus are described in verse 17. Everyone had enough to eat and everyone was satisfied. Actually there was an abundance of food because the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers. The number of basketfuls was significant. Each one of the Apostles, who had earlier been so helpless and perplexed about what to do, was left holding a full basket as his personal object lesson.

Now let me give you my interpretation about the word "leftovers." It is my opinion that these were not half-eaten scraps of food. I think the Apostles collected food that was perfectly good, but not needed because the people had eaten all they wanted. This is a perfect example of another Biblical truth: when the Lord does His work, He does more than just meet the need. He provides abundantly.

What is the lesson for believers in these verses? We must realize that we cannot serve God in our own strength, but when we place at His disposal, in faith and obedience, our lives, then He will use us and work through us to achieve His purposes. Scripture declares that God has a plan for each one of His followers, and in carrying out His plan, He will call, empower, instruct, and help us engage with people for the sake of His kingdom. We must not be proud about our roles in advancing the kingdom but, instead, recognize our privilege to serve under His authority.

end