

Twelve Men On A Mission

Luke 9:1-9

Pastor John Miller

In Luke 9:1-9, our text, Luke says, “Then He...” that is, “Christ” “...called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.” So Jesus is giving them apostolic authority. Now they went from disciples to apostles, and it’s the first mission they’re going on without Jesus.

Verse 2, “He sent them...” So He called them, He gave them and now He sent them. “...to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And He said to them, ‘Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And whoever will not receive you....’” There would be those who would reject the message and the messengers. “‘When you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they departed and went through the towns, preaching...” or “heralding” “...the gospel and healing everywhere.”

Now notice the response, verses 7-9. “Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him.” And you might add “by his apostles, as well.” “And he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John...” referring to John the Baptist “...had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. Herod said, ‘John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?’ So he sought to see Him.”

We see in our text that Jesus sent 12 disciples, who would become His apostles. This marks a significant transition at the closing of Christ’s ministry in Galilee. At this point in the Gospel of Luke, we will be moving from His ministry of itinerant preaching and healing in Galilee, that He did Himself, toward Jerusalem. He is heading toward the Cross in Jerusalem. And Jesus is going to speak of the Cross, He is going to predict the Cross, which the apostles can’t fathom or comprehend. He’ll blow their minds. They believed rightly that He was the Messiah, but in their minds, the kingdom would come now, when He would rule and reign in power and glory. So they were uneducated about the Cross, and they needed to be educated about it.

When Jesus was on the earth, He could only be in one place at a time. If He was in Galilee, He could not be in Judea. If He was in Judea, He could not be in Galilee. So Jesus was going to give His 12 disciples—and there were more than 12, but these are the ones He picked—to follow Him in depth and to be His messengers. And now He commissions them to be apostles with apostolic power and authority to go out to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God and to heal all that were sick.

So basically He is “passing the baton”; He is going from 1 to 12. Before there was only Jesus preaching and healing; now there were going to be 12 ambassadors representing Jesus with apostolic power and authority to preach, as Jesus preached, and to heal, as Jesus healed, all

over the Galilean region.

It really is transitional, because after Pentecost, Jesus had predicted, in John 14:12, that “greater works than these will [you] do, because I go to My Father.” After Jesus’ death, Resurrection and Ascension, He would send the Holy Spirit to come on the day of Pentecost, and they would be imbued with power and “be witnesses...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The mission in our text was just to the nation of Israel. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus sent them out “two by two” (Mark 6:7) just to the chosen people of Israel. So the mission was very specific, very limited and transitional, and it would lead to the sending of the 70. Then the Holy Spirit would come on the day of Pentecost, and the church exploded and went “to the ends of the earth,” fulfilling the great commission. He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). And in Matthew 28:19, He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” So this is the phase in which we see Jesus transitioning.

About this text, Charles Erdman said, “Their circumstances and the directions given them by Jesus were peculiar to the time and the occasion. However, these commands are not without application to the messengers of the Master in all ages.” I like that.

So, number one, this is a very particular, chosen-strike mission. It's pre-Pentecost but they had power to do miracles, yet Jesus assigns them to go only to the nation of Israel. But the point is that it has principles that apply to us as messengers of Jesus Christ. God wants us all to be His ministers or ambassadors. In a sense we all represent Christ in the world around us. And we want to have His power when we go out with His Word to preach the apostolic truth in His Word about Christ. We are His messengers, so the principles can apply to us today.

But this passage is about a particular group at a particular time in a particular area. So the principles are not necessarily universal in all applications throughout church history.

There are two sections I want to outline in this text. Verses 1-6 is the commission of the apostles, and verses 7-9 is Herod's confusion when he hears about Jesus' ministry—the healing and preaching—and he concludes that John the Baptist has come back from the dead. He has a guilty conscience confusing and convicting him.

Let's go back to their call and commission. Verse 1, “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.” The word “disciple” means “learner.” So these were men who were learning the ministry of Jesus Christ, so they could replicate that by His power and authority. And then He “gave them” two things: power and authority. Power is the ability to do what He has called them to do. It is the “dunamis” power of the Spirit. And the authority is the right to do it. So He was invested in them.

I believe this is when they officially became apostles. The word “disciple” means “learner,” and

the word "apostle" means "one who is sent" or commissioned. We use the word "ambassador," which is very close to the meaning of this word "apostle." And when Jesus made these 12 disciples His 12 apostles, He gave them full power and authority.

Today I don't believe there are any more apostles with this invested power and authority, who are in direct succession from these 12 apostles in the church. I believe they laid the foundation, they gave us their teaching in the Word of God and Jude 3 says, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Why do I say this? Because there are some churches, some groups, that claim apostolic succession and apostolic authority. My opinion is that they do that to try to "lord it over" people, as though they are direct descendants of the 12 apostles and what they say is "authoritative." It is not. The authority lies in the Bible. And the authority of the Bible lies in the apostolic teaching. In Acts 2:42, right after the day of Pentecost, it says that the Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

The apostles were like ambassadors. An ambassador speaks with the authority from his country. He represents his country. So these apostles were Christ's representatives.

And there is a secondary sense in which we, too, are ambassadors. Not in the strict, first sense of the 12 who have authority, but today we also represent Christ.

I want to make that distinction clear. Be careful when a church or ministry or organization says, "We have apostles." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the Mormons claim direct, apostolic succession. They do that so they can give you their non-Biblical teaching and you will believe they have apostolic authority. They do not. The 12 apostles laid the foundation, which is built upon Jesus Christ. So the authority lies in the Bible.

And we are not to pit Jesus' words against Paul's words or any of the apostles' words. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, it is just as much the Word of God as when Jesus spoke in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are not contrary; they are complimentary. Jude 3 says that "The faith which was once for all delivered." That's why I say, "If it's new, it's not true. If it's true, it's not new." Today we preach the same apostolic faith given to us by Jesus Christ to the apostles that is in the Word of God. Today that is where our authority lies.

So the apostles went out with this gift. And notice that "He...gave them." So when God calls us to be His "apostles" to represent Him or to be His ambassadors, He gives us power and the gifting to do what He has called us to do. God's calling includes God's enabling. That's not a verse of Scripture, but it's taught in the Bible. When God calls you to do something, He gives you the ability to do it.

I have people ask me, "God has called me to do this, and I want you to tell me how to do it."

"I don't have a clue."

"Well, aren't you a pastor?!"

"Yes, but all I know is what God has called me to do. And I'm trying to do that the best that I can."

If God has called you to do something, He will tell you how to do it. And God will give you the ability to do it.

I've had people tell me, "God has called me to sing." Then I hear them try.

Then I say, "Sorry; God has not called you to sing. He has called you to 'make a joyful noise' (Psalm 100:1) but not to sing." Maybe a solo—so low we can't hear it; I don't know. "Sorry."

But when God gives you a gift, He gives you the ability and opportunity and He opens the door for you. I've had people come to me and they want me to open doors for them to do ministry. I'm not God. The Holy Spirit gives you the gift, He gives you the ability and He opens the doors to use you for His glory.

And when you use your gift, you use it for the good of others, for the edification of the body of Christ and for the glory of God. The gifts of the Spirit are not jewelry to show off. They're not toys to fight over. They're tools to build up the body of Christ. And they're to be used for the glory of God.

So Jesus called the apostles, He empowered them and He gave them authority. They were then sent out. They had been with Jesus for about three years at this point. They were well equipped, well trained and well prepared to become His apostles. Verse 1 says they had "power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases." They went out and performed the same ministry as Jesus was doing.

In verses 2-6, I want to give you six marks of true ministry. So I'm going to pull principles from these verses that are applicable to us today in ministry. Every member of the church is to be a minister. You may not be formally ordained, you may not stand in the pulpit, you may not have a clergy card that says "Reverend" on it, but as a believer in Jesus, you are called to minister. God has given everyone gifts that He has chosen. So these principles apply to us all, especially to those who are called into formal ministry.

Here are the marks of true ministry. Number one is the priority of preaching. Genuine, authentic, true, Christ-centered, apostolic ministry is a ministry of preaching "the kingdom of God," verse 2. What is the kingdom of God? Verse 6 describes it as "preaching the gospel." Before there is the healing, the deliverance from demons, there is the proclamation of the Word of God.

This excites me, because I believe with all my heart that God's highest priority for the church—not just to honor and glorify Him—is to be proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. That's the

church's priority. When the church forsakes the proclamation of the Gospel and the kingdom of God, we are neglecting the priority that God has given to us as the church. So the apostles were sent out to preach.

The word "preach" in verse 2 is the word "kerusso." It is significant because it means "to herald, to proclaim, to announce." It means to do it with clarity, with authority and with power. In the ancient world, they couldn't text or email, they had no social media, they had no phones. And they really didn't have the printed page. So a king would have a herald. He would go out onto the town square, people would gather, he would unroll the scroll and say, "Hear ye! Hear ye! Thus says the king!" Then he would read every word on the king's announcement.

What if the herald said, "I don't like the king's message. Let's get rid of it"? He was not to add to or subtract from or to substitute or change the king's message. He was just to herald the message.

This is a description of what a minister, preacher, pastor and people are to do; we are to simply preach, herald or proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We're not to add to it, subtract from it nor substitute it with our own ideas. Simply preach the Word. Whether you're a pastor or layman in the church, the mission is still the same—preach the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, it says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Faith in Jesus Christ means that you can be forgiven of your sins and enter into the kingdom of God.

So these apostles were proclaiming the Gospel or preaching the kingdom of God. What does that mean? It was God's sovereign rule. It wasn't yet the millennial kingdom; that comes after the Second Coming of Christ. The millennial kingdom was promised to David, which is a literal kingdom of Christ's theocracy on earth. The kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom brought by the King, Jesus Christ.

In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So you can actually get born again and enter the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

So the apostles were preaching this message to the people of Israel with power and authority. In 2 Timothy 4:2-4, when Paul the Apostle was going to be martyred for his faith, he wrote to Timothy. His last words were, "Preach..." which is the same word, kerusso "...the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." Then he told Timothy why. "For the time will come..." that time is now "...when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

I don't think you should underestimate the importance or the priority of preaching the Word of God; that is, expositionally explaining the text—what it says and what it means and how it applies—with nothing added or nothing subtracted. Just preach the Word of God. This is what brings sinners to be converted and saints to be edified and built up. The church rises or falls on its preaching. The Bible must be preached expositionally, or it's not Christian preaching.

Number two, the mark of true ministry is demonstrating compassion. Verse 2 says, "to heal the sick." So it was to "preach the kingdom of God" and two, "heal the sick." And it's always in this order. It is preaching the Word first and then the Word of God confirmed by signs and wonders following.

And notice in verse 1 that He gave them "authority over all demons, and to cure diseases." He takes care of demons and diseases. They were to have compassion on those who were sick.

Does God still heal today? Yes. Does God promise that all people will be healed? No. Nowhere in the Bible are we guaranteed perfect health and abundant wealth. We live in a fallen world. As Christians, our bodies have not yet been redeemed. To prove it, after you've been out of high school for 50 years, look at your senior picture and weep. All you have to do is live long enough and you'll "go the way of all the earth" or "flesh" (1 Kings 2:2). No matter what you do, you will get sick and die. You've been saved, you are being saved and you will be saved; that's justification, sanctification and glorification. Look in the mirror; you're not glorified yet.

I said all that to say that God does still heal. But we aren't apostles; we haven't been given apostolic authority to just heal people we want to. We can't just say like Peter, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Should we pray for the sick? Yes. Should we believe that God is able? Yes. But no matter what happens—if you're healed or not—we should have compassion for those who are sick. We pray for those who are sick and suffering in our church every day. Every day there is sadness and tragedy, but we are to show compassion.

The principle is that we should preach and show compassion. Preach and pray for those who are sick, and trust God to do what He wants to do for His glory. Miracles should follow the preaching of the Word of God.

Number three, ministry is drawing dependency on God. In verse 3, Jesus said, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs..." a walking stick "...nor bag..." a wallet "...nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece." This is a great verse to read when you travel and your wife wants to take too much stuff. So Jesus said to live in dependence on God; travel light.

Again, this is particular to this mission, because later on in Luke 22:35-38, Jesus would say that if you need to, buy an extra coat, buy a sword, bring a sword, bring a money bag. So He changes what He told the apostles to do. So Luke 9:3 was particular to this ministry.

J.C. Ryle said, "The leading idea which the words convey in this text is a warning against worldliness and luxurious habits." I like that. "The preacher whose affections are set on money

and dress and feasting and pleasure seeking has clearly mistaken his vocation.”

That is one of the sad tragedies today; preachers who have multi-million-dollar homes, fly in million dollar jets, have watches set with diamonds and living lavishly. You ask, “Why can’t a preacher be rich?” They can, if God wants to bless them. But it’s a dangerous thing if a ministry brings you luxury and worldliness and prevents you from living in dependence on God.

Number four, in verse 4, is that they should be content in all circumstances. Not only should they travel light and minister in dependence on God, but “Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart.” In those days, they didn’t have hotels. So a pastor, minister or traveling evangelist couldn’t be accused of staying in an expensive hotel. They stayed in houses.

Luke 9:4 is an abbreviation of this. He said to make sure the people where you stay are righteous, salute the house and bring a blessing on it and stay there until you leave. They weren’t to go from house to house trying to improve their quarters. “Uh, food’s lousy here. The bed’s hard. Sorry, we’re leaving. We’re going to go somewhere else.”

I’ve traveled and preached all around the world. I could tell you stories about lodging I had that would make your hair stand up! But we’re to accept the hospitality given; we’re to eat the food laid before us, we’re to sleep in the beds that God provides and not be critical, fault-finding or looking for better quarters. We’re to be content.

1 Timothy 6:6-12 is a great reference to this point. Paul is warning Timothy about false teachers. It says, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain.” There were false teachers who were not content; they wanted to be rich. He says, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” This verse should be underlined in your Bible. “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Now this is what the minister of God should do, verse 11: “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” What a great text! So we are to be content with our circumstances, verse 4 of our text.

Number five, we should practice discernment when we serve the Lord, Luke 9:5. “And whoever will not receive you....” Jesus is warning them that there will be those who will not receive your message and ministry. “When you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”

So Jesus forewarns that some will reject you and even be hostile toward you. Don’t be surprised and don’t be discouraged. When you’re sharing the Gospel and ministering for the

Lord, if someone rejects you, they're rejecting Christ. To reject an apostle meant to reject Christ. To reject Christ was to reject God. And when you share the Gospel and they reject you, they are rejecting Christ and God and have no hope. Then there comes a time, Genesis 6:3, when God says, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever."

They were to take their sandals off and knock the dust off them, symbolically saying, "I am clean from the blood on you. I've shared the Gospel with you. You've rejected Christ and God's judgment will be upon you." This is a stern warning and a very frightening text. Some will reject and not receive you, so shake off the dust.

This is from the picture of a Jewish person traveling and passing through a Gentile area. They didn't want to go from a Gentile area back to a Jewish area, crossing the border, and bring dust or dirt—Gentile "cooties" were not allowed in Jewish territory. So they literally took their sandals off and knocked them together to get the dirt off.

Now these apostles were to do it and teach it to other Jews saying that, "God is finished with those who reject Him." God will no longer speak to them, and God will judge them. When we preach, we need discernment to know when to warn a rejecter of the judgment and the wrath of God.

There have been times when I've shared the Gospel with someone, and they were rejecting and rejecting it. I've felt this tug in my heart to tell them, warn them of judgment. If you harden your heart, if you don't heed His voice, there will come a day when you can't hear His voice and you will be judged by God. You would then actually have the judgment and wrath of God on your own life. So this is a stern warning and we need discernment.

Number six, and the last point, is that we are to be obedient to Christ's commission, verse 6. "So they departed..." without debating or arguing but adhered to Christ's commission "...and went through the towns, preaching the Gospel and healing everywhere." They obeyed the great commission, and we must be obedient to it. It's not a suggestion or a recommendation. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). That is the church's mission, and we must be obedient to that commission.

Now how did the people respond? Luke focuses on Herod and his confusion in light of this ministry, verses 7-9. "Now Herod the tetrarch..." or Herod Antipas, the ruler over a third of Galilee "...heard of all that was done by Him..." and the apostles "...and he was perplexed..." or "confused, puzzled" "...because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead." So when Herod heard about all these miracles done by Jesus and the apostles, he thought it was John the Baptist back from the dead.

And others said "that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again." In Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, it says that "Behold, I will send you

Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5). So John came in the power and spirit of Elijah, but he wasn't Elijah. But some concluded that Elijah the prophet had come. Another theory, in verse 8, was that one of the old prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Malachi—had risen again.

And in verse 9, “Herod said, ‘John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?’ So he sought to see Him.” Herod had John put to death. Herod's power, position, possessions and popularity could not sooth his guilty conscience. He had the blood of John the Baptist on his hands, and his heart was full of conviction.

There is only one thing that can give you a clean conscience, and that's the blood of Jesus Christ. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

You can be forgiven through Christ today. If you've sinned—you have and we all have—you carry the guilt and the shame and the reproach of that sin, but God has given you the Spirit to convict you. Your guilty conscience should drive you to Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

Herod said, “Who is this?” He would learn that it was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Who is Jesus? He is God incarnate. And then Herod wanted to see Jesus. This is interesting, because Herod did see Him. After Jesus was sent to Pilate, He stood before Herod. Basically Herod said, “Do a miracle! Work a wonder!” (Luke 23:8). But Jesus stood right there before Herod Antipas and said nothing.

That is the scariest thought in all the world; you could be standing in the presence of God in flesh and He says nothing to you. God says there comes a time when you will no longer hear God's voice. You can sear your guilty conscience. Someone said, “Your conscience is like a wheelbarrow; you can take it wherever you want it to go.” You can lie to it. It can become darkened. You can murder your conscience. You can resist your conscience.

Or you can let it drive you to Jesus' feet for forgiveness and cleansing. Sad is the day when God says nothing to you or no longer has anything to say to you. The Bible says, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7). “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). If you hear His voice, repent and believe in Jesus Christ. He can cleanse you from all guilt.