

PREACH, HEAL AND FEED IN JESUS' NAME

Luke 9:1-17

Key Verses: 1-2, 13a

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

He replied, "You give them something to eat."

Until now, in his public ministry, Jesus had done all the preaching and healing and driving out demons. In the passage before us here, Jesus involves his disciples in the ministry. First, he sends them out with power and authority to preach and to heal and to drive out demons, just as Jesus had done. Jesus also gives them some brief instructions. Next, Jesus includes his disciples in the miracle of feeding a massive crowd of people. Jesus healed the sick, drove out demons, and fed hungry people—all this, to proclaim the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus wants us to participate in his life-giving ministry to lost and needy souls. Jesus wants us to be equipped and sent by him to continue his kingdom work, even today. We cannot do it. But Jesus can do it, in us, among us, and through us, for his glory, until he comes again to establish his kingdom. Let's listen and learn of Jesus and discover how he wants us to participate.

First, preach and heal in Jesus' name (1-9).

Jesus appointed twelve of his disciples to be "apostles," which means, "sent ones." But up to this point, Jesus had not sent them anywhere. In fact, until now, these apostles had just been tagging along with Jesus, observing his preaching and healing, passively. They were like people who go to church or a Bible conference but who don't do anything more than that. Their lives don't have much influence or impact on anyone else. Jesus wants more from his followers than simply sitting down to listen to a sermon.

Look at verses 1-2. "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."

These verses are quite amazing. These disciples did not have strong spiritual qualifications. They were not of priestly or prophetic lineage. They didn't look like men who would do anything to impact the world for God. They included four fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James and John), one tax collector (Matthew or Levi), one revolutionary (Simon the Zealot), one honest dreamer (Nathanael or Bartholomew), one accountant-like person (Philip), one doubter (Thomas), one traitor (Judas Iscariot) and two others that we know so little about that their father's names had to be mentioned (James son of Alphaeus, and Judas son of James). What was Jesus thinking? Jesus, are you sure you chose the right guys? Of course, Jesus

knew what he was doing. Jesus chose them because they were good followers (except for Judas Iscariot). That's all that Jesus was looking for: good followers, who could listen and learn and imitate him. These men would lead the church of Jesus in the future.

Notice two things in verses 1-2: Jesus equipped them, and Jesus sent them. These two things are what makes a mission successful. Servants of Jesus must be equipped and sent by Jesus.

First, Jesus equipped them. What was their equipment? It was not military armor or weapons or martial art skills or money. Jesus gave them his power and authority. This power and authority was given them to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. Jesus gave them power and authority to do the very things that Jesus was doing, things that could only be done by the power of God. Here we learn that no one can do the work of God by their own wisdom or power or resources. God's work can only be done by God and by those who depend on God's power and authority.

Second, Jesus sent them. Jesus sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. They were sent by Jesus to do two things: to preach and to heal. What were they to preach? The kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is good news to those who receive it. Of course, it is irrelevant news to those who aren't interested in it, and it is bad news to those who reject it. The apostles' message was simple: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news! Turn from sin and turn to God!" Their ministry was to do what Jesus had empowered them to do: heal the sick and drive out demons. This was practical, compassionate service to those who were suffering due to disease or evil spirits. They weren't just all talk. They showed God's love by engaging in mercy ministries.

How about us? We also need the equipping of God's word and the Holy Spirit to minister to others in Jesus' name. We also must go to the lost and needy, with prayer and conviction that we are sent by Jesus, for his name's sake.

What brief instructions did Jesus give them?

Look at verses 3-5. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. ⁴Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. ⁵If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

Jesus gave them 3 brief instructions:

- (1) Take nothing for the journey. They were to take no weapon, no suitcase or duffle bag, no wallet or credit card, no groceries and no extra clothes. Why not? For one thing, this was a short-term mission, no more than a few days or weeks. It was not a permanent, long-term mission. For another thing, they were to depend on God, not

their own resources. Jesus equipped them with what they needed: his power and authority.

(2) Stay at one place. Jesus said, “Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.” They were not to look for a better Airbnb. They were to accept, with gratitude, whatever hospitality was shown them. This was why they brought no money or food with them. They would rely on the welcome of open-hearted people. This was not a vacation. They were on a mission to proclaim God’s kingdom and to minister to the sick and needy and those tormented by demons.

(3) Shake the dust off your feet. Jesus also said, “If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” These words of Jesus could’ve been for two reasons: one reason for their listeners, and another reason for themselves. For their listeners, it was a warning to anyone who rejects their message and ministry. They were sent by Jesus, like ambassadors. Rejecting them was actually rejecting Jesus, and rejecting Jesus was rejecting God who sent him. The other reason was so that they would not get discouraged after being rejected. Not everyone is glad to hear the message of God’s kingdom, since repentance is not a comfortable message for anyone.

Mark’s gospel tells us that Jesus sent them out two by two (Mk 6:7). Was their journey successful? Verse 6 tells us that it was: they proclaimed the good news of God’s kingdom and healed the sick everywhere they went. In fact, so successful was their mission, that even Herod the tetrarch heard about it and he was perplexed. He was perplexed because rumors were spreading about Jesus. After all, these were disciples of Jesus doing amazing miracles. Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised to life again. Others thought Jesus was Elijah or another prophet from centuries earlier.

But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” Here, Luke does not record the details of Herod beheading John the Baptist. Matthew and Mark both give us the details. On Herod’s birthday, he made a rash oath to his mistress’s daughter, and he had to have John beheaded at her request. It was an evil, treacherous act of murder of the righteous man of God, John the Baptist. Herod was haunted by his evil act and wondered if John was alive again. People are haunted by their sins and evil deeds unless they confess them to God and repent. Herod was doing evil, but Jesus and his disciples were doing good—healing the sick, casting out demons and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

Sara Weaver lived in depression and suicidal thoughts for many years after she lost her mother and brother in tragic gunfire by a government operation gone wrong known as Ruby Ridge. Her first marriage ended in divorce. She began to realize that she could not blame others for everything gone wrong in her life. A friend whom she trusted looked her straight in the eye and said, “Sara, I know Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.” Her loving testimony

impacted her. Later she opened her Bible to a childhood Bible verse, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” She met Jesus through it. The next verse in John 3:17 also spoke powerfully to her self-condemning spirit: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” She said, “[Jesus] understood what I had been through, and He cared. Him setting me free was more real than all the pain and heartache I’d been through...That began my journey of walking with Him...bringing healing to my heart.”¹ Jesus still heals people through the loving testimony and prayers of others, and through his living word.

Second, feed the hungry in Jesus’ name (10-17).

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. They had never experienced such power and authority in their lives. People’s diseases were healed and demons were driven out of many by the power and authority of Jesus that was given them.

Jesus then took his disciples with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida. Mark tells us that it was to get some rest in a quiet place. I imagine that the disciples were really looking forward to this quiet vacation with Jesus. However, their plan for some R&R (rest & relaxation) did not seem to go as planned. Verse 11 says that the crowds learned about it and followed them.

How would you feel if your vacation plan was suddenly interrupted by some surprising, urgent phone calls or emails? How did Jesus react to this intrusion? Many people in Jesus’ boat would’ve said, “When can a guy ever get some rest? Aren’t you people ever going to leave me alone?!”

But that’s not what Jesus said. Look at verse 11b. It says, “[Jesus] welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.” Jesus welcomed them, and not just with a shallow, “Hello. How are you?” Jesus welcomed them with a big smile, as if Jesus had prepared an entire sermon for them, or even multiple messages about God’s kingdom. Not only that, Jesus ministered to them, healing those who needed healing. Jesus showed them great compassion and love, and he helped them in the way that they needed help. How beautiful is Jesus’ mercy and compassion for those who come to him in need!

Assuming that this vacation attempt had started early in the morning, it was now late in the afternoon. Most of the day was now gone. The twelve disciples came to Jesus and said,

¹ “Reflecting God’s Heart of Forgiveness: A conversation with Sara Weaver,” interview by Jim Daley, Decision magazine, Jul-Aug 2022, p.18.

“Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”

They did not say it, but they probably wanted to add: “We are also hungry and tired. Can we go to Chick-fil-A?” Actually, the disciples were somewhat mindful of the tired and hungry crowds. They were in a remote place, far from any town where they could get food and lodging. And this was no small crowd. There were more than 5000 people there. 5000 people is about 40 times our main Sunday worship service attendance (so for each person here, imagine 40 more people)!

At this point, we might expect Jesus to say, “Oh, sorry guys! I really got carried away in my preaching and healing, didn’t I? Thanks for letting me know the time. Where would I be without you guys?” Not.

Rather, Jesus shocked them, when he replied to their suggestion, “You give them something to eat.” Now remember that they had just returned from their powerful mission journey. They had brought no bread and no money, and yet they had been amply supplied and fed. But now, they were back in their usual “survival mode.” Survival mode says, “I have to take care of myself, because no one else is going to do it.”

Astonished by Jesus’ words, they objected, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish— unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.” Now I highly doubt that all of them putting their wallets together, would have enough money to feed 5000 people a sandwich. Even at the dollar menu of McDonald’s that’s over \$5000. Who carries \$5000 with them on a daily basis? Only millionaires. Even \$500 in each of their bags is highly unlikely. What they probably had was a few bucks for a McDonald’s dollar menu item.

Jesus knew that they didn’t have that much food or that much money. Then why did he say to them, “You give them something to eat”? John’s gospel tells us that Jesus said this to test them. Then what was he testing?

I can think of three things that Jesus could’ve been testing here: their faith, their compassion, and their sense of responsibility.

Jesus wanted his disciples to have faith in God Almighty. After Jesus calmed the stormy sea, Jesus asked his disciples, “Where is your faith?” Jesus wanted them to have faith that overcomes a scary, dangerous storm. He wanted them to have faith in God. He also wanted them to trust fully in Jesus. The test of faith this time was even greater than before. Jesus wanted them to have faith to participate in God’s impossible provision.

This reminds me of two stories in the Bible. One is how God provided manna and quail for his people in the wilderness. The other is a story involving Elisha the prophet (2Ki 4:42-44). Elisha said to give 20 loaves of barley bread to 100 men, which seemed unreasonable. That’s

one loaf bread per 5 men, and it was regarded as too little to feed them. But Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: 'They will eat and have some left over.'" They ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD. Understand that Jesus' disciples had only 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed over 5000 people. That's one loaf per 1000 people, which was a miracle 200 times greater than Elisha's miracle. Jesus wanted his disciples to have and experience the power of faith in God Almighty.

Jesus also wanted his disciples to have compassion. He wanted his disciples to participate in feeding this crowd. In this way, they could experience love and compassion by serving the hungry people. And the people could feel the disciples' love and compassion since they personally participated in this loving miracle of Jesus.

Also, Jesus wanted his disciples to have a sense of responsibility. Irresponsible people say, "That's not my job. Let someone else do it." Jesus doesn't want his disciples to avoid responsibility. Look at verses 14b-17. Jesus said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, [Jesus] gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Jesus had his disciples participate in this feeding of the huge crowd. They helped the people to sit down in groups of 50, as if to get ready for lunch in groups. That means there were about 100 groups of 50. Jesus also had them help to distribute the bread to the huge crowd. So each of the 12 disciples had to serve 8 or 9 groups of 50 people each. Our Sunday worship attendance would amount to about two groups of 50, so each disciple had to serve about twice our congregation's size.

This miracle of Jesus is the only specific miracle mentioned in all four of the gospels. What can we learn from this miracle? We can learn at least 3 things:

(1) Jesus is Lord, for only God can do this. Jesus is powerful.

(2) Jesus is our Provider. In John he declares shortly after this miracle, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn 6:35). Jesus promises to fulfill all our needs.

(3) Jesus wants to bless even the little that we bring to him in faith. They had only 5 loaves and 2 fish. Actually, according to John's gospel, even these loaves and fish belonged to a boy. So they had to borrow the boy's bread and fish, probably his own lunch. I hope the boy didn't cry. Well, if he did, he got a free lunch and leftovers soon after. What we give to Jesus, even if it looks small, he can bless many with.

What do you have to bring to Jesus, that he can bless others with? Perhaps it's your time, talent, skill or gift, your marriage, your vacation, your retirement, or your weekend. The key is to give it to Jesus for his blessing to bless many people.

Andrew Brunson was imprisoned in Turkey for his Christian work. In prison he could not feel God's presence and almost lost his faith. What could he give to Jesus while he was struggling with doubt in prison? He gave his faith and trust in Jesus. He prayed, "God, whatever you do or don't do, I will follow You. If You do not let me sense Your presence, I will still follow you. If You don't speak to me, I will still follow You. If You don't show me Your gentleness or kindness, I will still follow You. If You leave me in prison, I will still follow You." The Bible verse he clung to was Isaiah 50:10, "Who among you walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord; let him lean on his God."² God has been using his testimony to encourage and strengthen many believers who feel they are alone, struggling in darkness.

In today's Bible passage, Jesus equipped his disciples to preach and to heal and to feed the hungry. Jesus enabled them to participate in the life-giving work of God. Jesus still wants us to participate in his kingdom work. We need to be equipped by Jesus through his living word and Holy Spirit. Jesus wants to send us to those in need. Jesus wants us to have faith and compassion to minister to others in Jesus' name. May Jesus lead us and equip us with faith and compassion to serve the lost and needy in Jesus' name.

² "Don't Be Offended By Christ," by Andrew Brunson, Decision magazine, Jul-Aug 2022, pp.29-30.