

Commentary on Luke 9:1-16

Our passage begins with Jesus commissioning the twelve apostles for mission. We don't know specifically where they go but we're told "village to village." It is likely they travel around the region of Galilee which is a hot spot for Jesus' burgeoning ministry. Word is beginning to spread about Jesus – about the Good News of the Kingdom of God He is proclaiming (4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1; 8:10) and about the miracles of healing and demon extraction (5:17;6:18-19; 7:7; 8:47). Yet, it's time to now commission and equip the 12 apostles with His power (Gk: *dynamis*) and authority (Gk: *exousia*). By way of reminder, the 12 include: Simon (Peter) & Andrew (brothers); James & John (brothers); Philip, Bartholomew; Matthew (the tax collector); Thomas (the doubter, according to John's Gospel); James (son of Alphaeus); Simon (the Zealot); Judas (son of James) and Judas Iscariot (we all know who he is, the traitor); *See Luke 6:14-16.*

The apostles are sent out with two objectives: to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. They were also sent with specific instructions: don't take anything with you – no walking stick, no traveling bag, no food/snacks, no money and no extra clothing. Also, Jesus tells them: when you're welcomed into a home, stay there. If you're not welcomed, shake the dust off your feet and move on. "Mission instructions to the Twelve are negative with reference to things and positive with reference to relationships."¹ Fascinating! Jesus wants them to focus on trusting Him and on the people with whom they will interact. The apostles follow His command resulting in the positive results of people being healed everywhere. Because Jesus' instructions were simplified and clear, the apostles had no choice but to trust in His power and authority given to them. As a result, the Kingdom of God grew and the word about Jesus spread through the interaction of relationships – person to person – with the acts of healing exhibiting the power and authority of Jesus.

And yep, guess who is hearing about it all... the "powerful" from the world's perspective: Herod the Tetrarch, ruler of Galilee. We first hear about Herod in chapter 3 at the beginning and then later at verse 3:19 with a reference to him locking up John the Baptist in jail for rebuking Herod for all the evil he had done including marrying his niece, Herodias. Luke does not detail John's beheading death at the hands of Herod as do Matthew and Mark (see Mt 14:1-12 and Mk: 6:14-29). The rumor mill about Jesus peeks Herod's curiosity and he wonders about just who this Jesus is. Herod will continue to play a role in Luke's Gospel threatening to kill Jesus in 13:31-35 and later finally getting to meet Jesus in 23:6-16. Herod plays a role in Jesus' persecution and torture before He is crucified. Herod is interesting... like the seed that falls along the path but gets trampled on and eaten by the birds of the air (8:5)... he hears about Jesus, has interest and curiosity about Jesus. Just who is this Jesus? Could he be a resurrected John? Or, Elijah? Or, one of the prophets of old? Interestingly enough, we'll hear these claims about who Jesus is later in chapter 9. Regardless, Herod seeks after Jesus, but he ultimately never believes or follows Jesus, just like the seed on the path.

¹ Edwards, James. The Gospel According to Luke, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 2015), p. 262.

The apostles return to Jesus and report to Him about what they had done. Jesus takes them away on retreat to Bethsaida but as often happens, the crowds hear about it and follow them. Jesus then begins doing exactly what He had instructed the disciples to do – he tells the crowds about the Kingdom of God and heals those who need healing. As the day wears on, the disciples become concerned about the crowds. So they tell Jesus – send them away to nearby villages and countryside for food and lodging. But Jesus responds, “You give them something to eat.” Perhaps Jesus’ directness implies a sense of frustration or astonishment...? Was he thinking... “I’ve just instructed and given you the experience of ministry by pouring out my power and authority on you – and you’ve seen the results! But are you now doubting that and once again coming to me instead of acting?” James Edwards writes, “The Twelve are no longer expected to be mere observers of Jesus’ ministry, but active participants in it.” (p. 265). And they respond by pointing to the practical reality of things: “We’ve only got 5 loaves and 2 fish unless we go buy something.” So Jesus tells them to have the crowd sit down in groups of 50. He then introduces them and us to the four-fold action around the breaking of bread: He takes, He blesses, He breaks and He gives. We’ll see this same pattern again at the Last Supper (22:9) and one we continue to celebrate when we approach the Lord’s Supper during worship today. We also see this at the dinner at Emmaus (24:30). In each of these instances and even today, this four-fold order points to both Jesus revealing Himself to those who believe in Him and to the recognition by His disciples of just who He is.² Everyone eats and is satisfied and the disciples pick up all the leftovers filling twelve baskets full. Perhaps each one of the Twelve gets to take a basket of the leftovers with them or perhaps this is reminiscent of the 12 tribes of Israel and God’s continual provision to them through the manna dropped from heaven. Regardless, the awe and wonder and majesty and grace found in Jesus is on full display.

Where do we see Jesus’ upside-down kingdom at work in these verses? First, Jesus doesn’t just hold onto the power he’s given, he gives his power and authority to his apostles so that His kingdom will be expanded. What king operates this way? Most earthly kings do everything they can to hold onto their power and authority. But, not our King Jesus. Second, through Herod, we are reminded of the rulers of the world who think they are first but in God’s economy they are last or even non-existent. It’s as if Herod wants to know Jesus but he just can’t give up his worldly place to submit to him and follow him. Third, the feeding of the 5,000 – it is the only miracle besides Jesus’ resurrection reported in all four Gospel accounts. Can you imagine being there? Think about experiencing Jesus first hand – hearing his teaching and experiencing his healing. The vast abundant provision is poured out upon the crowds and Jesus shows them, his disciples and us just the kind of king He is – a servant leader, a caring king who takes care of His people, who teaches them and heals them and a king who blesses His people beyond measure.

² Edwards, 267.

Discussion Questions for Luke 9:18-25

Observation

1. Look at v. 18. Describe the scene. What was Jesus doing? Where were they? Who all was there?
2. Look at the first question Jesus asks his disciples. What does he ask them? How do they respond?
3. Look at the second question Jesus asks the disciples. How do the disciples respond?
4. What specific things does Jesus tell his disciples in verses 22?
5. In verses 23-24, what does Jesus say is required of those who want to follow him?

Interpretation

1. In verse 19, the disciples respond that others say Jesus is either John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of prophets of old that had risen from the dead. Where else have we seen a similar response? Why do you think people on the street thought these were possibilities of who Jesus is?
2. **DIGGING DEEPER:** Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ- the Anointed One, the Messiah. Look back over previous passages of Luke and write down some of the things Peter witnessed about Jesus which would lead him to this revelation (healing, teachings, authority, etc.).

3. Why do you think Jesus sternly told his followers not to tell anyone who He was and what must happen to Jesus?
4. How is the prediction Jesus makes about what he must do evidence of His upside-down kingdom? Compare this to what was expected of the coming Messiah and his mission?
5. What contradictions does Jesus make about saving and losing life in vs. 23-25? How is that related to what Jesus says in verse 26?

Application

1. Look back at the question Jesus asks his disciples in vs. 20, "Who do you say that I am?" How are you tempted to base an answer to this question on the responses of who others say Jesus is instead of looking intently at Jesus and answering this question for yourself?
2. What thoughts and feelings do you have when you read Jesus' command to deny yourself, take up your cross (die to yourself) daily, and follow Jesus?
3. How are you tempted to save your own life? What are some ways you try to save yourself?
4. In what areas is Jesus inviting you to lose your life to gain it? Do you see this as a means of God's grace to you?