

## **Luke 9:1-9**

### **Picture of a Witness**

It was now about halfway through the public ministry of Jesus. His impending death on the cross was a little over a year away. He had taught, performed miracles, and drawn people to Himself for over a year. He had confronted those who challenged Him and drawn great crowds. Soon, He would leave the region of Galilee and make His way to Judea. But there was still much to do here, and time was of the essence.

Jesus did not need help to fulfill His mission. After all, He had created the universe at His word, demonstrated His power over the natural and supernatural worlds, and even raised the dead (twice, so far). He could perform the ministry God the Father had sent Him to do without assistance. But just like today, Jesus chose to use people to further His kingdom. He did not need them. He did not require help. God can do all things Himself, but even today He allows us fallen, depraved people to participate in His great kingdom. What an honor!

In this passage, Jesus provided an internship for His closest disciples. He knew full well that the day was not far off when His Church would have to survive without His physical presence. These men, whom He had sovereignly chosen, would be the leadership of that Church. They would be, humanly speaking, responsible for the furthering of the kingdom of God once Jesus was gone. The men themselves were totally unaware of this fact. They did not understand that Jesus would die (and even when He tried to explain it they did not understand).

Also, these were not extraordinary men. 1 Corinthians 1: 26, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.” There were no gifted scholars, wealthy patrons, political insiders, or natural leaders among them. In addition, they were unaware of the hardships they would face. They needed training to prepare themselves for the task ahead, and Jesus gave them that opportunity.

By way of context, it is worth mentioning that Luke has left a time gap in his narrative between the two events mentioned in the previous section (the miraculous healing of the woman and the raising of Jairus’ daughter) and this. In the interval, Mark records that Jesus returned to Nazareth where He was, again, rejected by those who had known Him, and then Jesus taught in Galilee until He sent out the twelve. This is where Luke returns to the story.

### **The Process is Gradual**

Luke says that Jesus “called the twelve together” (v. 1). He had called them before. There was the time Jesus called them to saving faith (John 1:35-51). Then later He called them to full-time discipleship (Luke 5:1-11). Here, Jesus was calling them to the office of apostle. Their ministry was to be permanent, and as such, it directly relates to us. Not in the misguided idea of apostolic succession, but rather in that they set the example for us. “<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, <sup>20</sup>having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone” (Ephesians 2:19-20).

We, too, are called in stages. First we must receive the call to faith (though even that usually comes in stages). Then, as our faith matures through the power of the Holy Spirit (sanctification) we are better

equipped to handle greater responsibility within the body of Christ. Paul later wrote that leadership in the Church should not be given to “a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil” (2 Timothy 3:6).

### **The Process is Symbolic**

Jesus selected twelve men because that is the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. He made this clear near the end of His life when He explained “<sup>29</sup>and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you <sup>30</sup>that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30). We are given this picture of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, “<sup>12</sup>It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. <sup>13</sup>There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. <sup>14</sup>And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:12-14).

Whether this process was entirely understood by the disciples themselves is problematic. They did choose another to replace Judas after he betrayed Jesus (Acts 1:23-26), but it may have been out of mere superstition or consistency than anything else. Paul was, perhaps, God’s choice to replace Judas and bring the number to twelve.

### **A Witness Proclaims**

After Jesus had called the men together, He sent them out. Mark relates that He sent them out in pairs (Mark 6:7). This was practical wisdom. These were men who had, at best, an unsteady faith. That they were committed to following Jesus at this time is unquestioned, but still they were young in the faith. What a reminder that even in spiritual matters, practical thinking has its place.

The purpose of the sending was clearly stated. Jesus “sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God” (v. 2). The word used reminds us of a herald of medieval Europe or a town crier who went about shouting publically the announcement he had been given. Before Twitter, this was how communication was done. People spoke aloud. Information was announced, and important information was announced publically.

The message had been modeled. Jesus had gone “around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). The disciples had followed Him and seen and heard how to do this. They had watched as Jesus answered questions and responded to confrontation. They had been mentored.

The message had been consistent. The disciples were to proclaim “the kingdom of God” (v. 2). This was the same message that had been predicted by John the Baptist and preached by Jesus. Jesus had encouraged the disciples of John the Baptist that He was indeed the Messiah because “the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Luke 7:22). This gospel was that eternal life was received through repentance and faith. It was not the rabbinical details of following the letter of the Law. Salvation was not earned, it was freely given.

As disciples, we too are given a responsibility to proclaim the kingdom of God. Proclaiming is the process by which people hear the message. And like these men, we have great models to look to for support and guidance. We also must preach the kingdom of God, not a political agenda or a social platform. We do not have the right to modify the gospel to get better results or to avoid awkward issues. There is one gospel, and it is the one preached by Jesus.

### **A Witness is Practical**

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, He gave them “power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases” (v. 1). They needed a way to validate their message. They needed to demonstrate that their message was not from men but from God Himself. Their God-given ability to perform miracles validated their message.

They had power over the supernatural and natural worlds. Like Jesus, they could exorcise demons and heal diseases. Matthew even tells us that they could raise the dead. In that narrative, Jesus says the disciples are to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Again let’s be reminded that of all the ways God could have chosen to demonstrate His Power, He did so in ways that particularly benefitted humanity. He show compassion in His Power. He showed mercy; He showed grace.

Today, perhaps disciples do not cast out demons, but at least we can resist them. We can encourage one another to further God’s kingdom by not falling short of the expectations He has set. Also, we all can be compassionate. We can minister to the needs of all people, not just those like us or those that are easy to minister to

### **A Witness is Content**

With such power, there must have been the temptation to use it for personal gain. Scripture is replete with false teachers who took advantage of their position to benefit themselves. Jesus had warned them. “<sup>38</sup>In His teaching He was saying: “beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, <sup>39</sup>and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, <sup>40</sup>who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers” (Mark 21:38-40).

Therefore Jesus instructed His disciples that they were to “take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece” (v. 3). The potential conflict with Mark, where Jesus is recorded as saying “<sup>8</sup>that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff - no bread, no bag, no money in their belt - <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals; and He added, ‘Do not put on two tunics’” (Mark 6:8-9), can be resolved by concluding that Jesus did not want them to take an *extra* staff. The principle was that they should take only what they needed, and rely upon God for the rest.

The staff referred to was a long walking stick that was helpful both in defense and ease of travel. While Roman roads are famous for their design and durability, most of the roads in the insignificant region of Galilee were little more than dirt paths. There were rocks and ditches. A walking stick was a necessity, not a luxury. The bag may refer to a kind of backpack or knapsack that a traveler would use to carry his belongings. It could also refer to a purse carried by those who went from town to town with their trade who used it to hold the money they made. Since the disciples were specifically forbidden to take any

extra clothes or money, it was logical that they would not need a bag to carry it in. The tunic was a long shirt worn under an outer garment. It reached below the knees and had armholes. One would be sufficient. The basic idea in each of these injunctions is that these men were to take only what was absolutely necessary and to trust in God for their provision. Furthermore, they must be content with what He chose to provide.

To emphasize this focus on contentment, Jesus continued, “whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city” (v. 4). The disciples were not to go about from house to house hoping for a better deal, a more comfortable room, or better food. Matthew’s account gives us the criteria by which the disciples should discern where to stay, “and whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house” (Matthew 10:11).

In a world with no hotels or inns (or those that existed were more like brothels than anything else) people regularly stayed with someone they knew or to whom they had an introduction. By following Jesus’ instructions they would further distinguish themselves from the false teachers of the day who moved about taking advantage of different people until they had worn out their welcome in a town and then moved on to the next. They were not to be picky. They were not to be demanding of their hosts. They were to be content.

Let us note that this is the command given to these disciples at this time. Later Jesus gave them other instructions. <sup>35</sup>“And He said to them, “When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?” They said, “No, nothing.” <sup>36</sup>“And He said to them, “But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one” (Luke 22:35-36). This experience was temporary, not normative. The idea of being content, though, is not limited to the at time and place. Simplicity of habit and an avoidance of worldliness is still a powerful way to further God’s kingdom.

### **A Witness is Discerning**

The final instruction Jesus gave the disciples addressed how to handle rejection. “And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them” (v. 5). In Matthew’s narrative, Jesus gave further encouragement by continuing, “it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.” (Matthew 10:15).

The idea of shaking the dust off one’s feet was an act of symbolism that reflected a practice of Israel’s history. Traditionally, whenever a Jew left a Gentile area, he shook the dust off his feet to remove any ceremonial uncleanness. It symbolized the removal of any residual pagan influences. Practically speaking for the disciples, Jesus was stating a matter of priority. Time ought not to be wasted on those who refused to hear the truth. If there was genuine interest, then the matter of faith ought to be pursued, but if not, then it was time to move on.

Paul and Barnabas put this symbolism into practice when they traveled. <sup>50</sup>“But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. <sup>51</sup>“But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium” (Acts 13:50-51).

This may seem harsh, but it was not a new concept. Jesus had previously taught “do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6). The illustration is vivid. The dogs referred to were not cute household pets, but rather the wild dogs that roamed the village streets looking for scraps to eat. No one in his right mind would give something of value to such a scavenger. And as for pigs, this unclean animal was unworthy of anything but avoidance.

We must understand that not all people will receive the gospel. God has chosen whom He has chosen. We ought never to take rejection personally.

### **The Fruit of a Witness**

The twelve went out and did as they were instructed. They went “throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere” (v. 6). It seems they covered a great deal of territory. And God rewarded their efforts. News of what they were doing even made it to the palace of Herod himself. This was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great (who ordered the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem). Herod Antipas ruled in Galilee from 4 BC until his death in AD 39. He is referred to as either a king (popular title) or tetrarch (official Roman designation). We have encountered him before, specifically with regard to the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist.

Herod was not unfamiliar with the gospel message. Yet when he “heard of all that was happening . . . he was greatly perplexed” (v. 7). The cause of his confusion was simple. He heard that it was being said by some that “John had risen from the dead” (v. 7). This is surprising, since Scripture does not record any miracles to John. Yet, if it were possible that he could be raised from the dead, the performance of miracles might seem equally likely.

Still others insisted “that Elijah had appeared, and . . . others that one of the prophets of old had risen again” (v. 8). The interpretation of Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” is the rationale given by those who thought Elijah was the cause of all this. Others seem to hedge their bets by being less specific and attributing the acts of Jesus and His disciples to any number of OT prophets.

Herod did not know what to think. He did know, however, that “I myself had John beheaded” (v. 9). No spiritualist, and hardly the kind of person to be afflicted with a guilty conscience, Herod was unwilling to believe that John’s ghost was responsible. So Herod wondered “who is this man about whom I hear such things?” (v. 9). No more important question can be asked. The response each person gives determines their eternal destiny.

Driven by concern or curiosity, Herod, “kept trying to see Him” (v. 9). He had been intrigued by what John the Baptist had told him about Jesus. During John’s imprisonment, Herod often offered an interview to John and “when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him” (Mark 6:20). Now Herod was hearing reports from throughout Galilee. He wanted to meet Jesus.

That Jesus did not grant him the privilege was an indication that Jesus knew Herod’s motives. Herod was not interested in the kingdom of God. Even some Pharisees, no friends of Jesus, later warned Jesus to “go

away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You” (Luke 13:31). Herod would eventually meet Jesus, when He was a prisoner brought before the king. Luke recounts the story,

“<sup>8</sup>Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. <sup>9</sup>And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. <sup>10</sup>And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. <sup>11</sup>And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate” (Luke 23:8-11).

### **Take Aways**

If God has been generous enough to allow us to partner with Him in the furthering of His kingdom, we ought to be the kind of witness He deserves.