

Text: Luke 9:1-17

Title: The Ministry of the Twelve

Truth: By which Jesus teaches us how to serve Him faithfully.

Date/Location: Sunday March 17, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

A big shift is about to occur in the ministry of Jesus. The remaining chapters of Luke's gospel do not contain as many miracles. The focus becomes more on His teaching. And He starts to openly explain about His upcoming death. But before all that, He sends out his 12 disciples to expand the reach of the ministry, thus foreshadowing what will happen after He is gone to heaven. And he feeds a tremendous crowd as a capstone miracle.

I. The Twelve Sent Out

- A. Jesus sends out the disciples to do what He has been doing for many months already: to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick, to cast out demons, and the like.
- B. He gave them a supernatural bestowal of power and authority to do those things. That power served well to authenticate their new message and office as apostles of the Messiah. The power to do those things is highly unusual, of course, and the ability to share it with others is even more remarkable.
- C. Their message of the kingdom would cover two major aspects: what the kingdom is, and how you get connected to it. As to the latter, their call was repentance from sin and recognition of what the kingdom is: that God is the glorious King. And too, that Messiah would become King over Israel. We must recognize that democracy is not king; no mere human dictators are king; we ourselves are not the masters of our own destiny; and the so-called "captains of industry" and "robber barons" are not king either. Only God is. This divine rule extends to all aspects of the world, including demons and physical health: the miracles would prove that.
- D. See Matthew 10 for the parallel passage. Notice some details from that portion as you read it carefully from verse 1 to 42.

- E. The Lord sent out the 12 and instructed them to be relaxed about their own physical needs. They did not need to take extra walking sticks or provisions or to pack a carry-on bag with extra clothing—or take a long time of preparation. They were to just go as they were. They would find households of peace and stay there with those families. God would provide for them.
- F. I read this passage and wondered why in our day the Lord does not give us power and authority over the demons and to cure diseases. Why do you suppose that is? Wouldn't it be highly effective to authenticate *our* message? Wouldn't it be very convincing if every Christian could heal people and easily help people with their real demons or “virtual demons” like addictions? Would not many people come to faith in Christ and join a church? It might seem so, but the fallacy of this thinking is exposed Luke 16:31—“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” As incredible as it may seem, even the clearest evidence will not convince many people.

And, miracles like healings and providing food can tickle worldly desires and cause our focus to shift to where it should not be. What happened in John 6 was that after the Lord fed the crowd of 5,000, they followed Him in His travels because they liked that He gave them food. Jesus wanted them to set aside the priority of working for food that perishes (John 6:27) but instead make strides toward the food that endures to eternal life, that which Jesus Himself supplies. Why would the Lord want us to believe in Him because of the mundane “stuff” He can do for us? If we come to Him for what He can do for us in our earthly life—as if He is an entitlement machine, or a perfectly-competent physician, what kind of “belief” would that be? Do we express loyalty to Jesus because He does that stuff for us?

Or do we believe in Him because of Who He is and the fact that He sacrificed Himself for our spiritual need? Do we love Him for the “stuff” or for Himself? Do you love your husband only because he is competent to do things, or do you love your wife only because she is beautiful in appearance? Or do you love that person because of who they are and the deeper things about how your connection with them?

- G. I am making a case against miraculous gifts for today, despite their seeming utility in evangelism, because faith in Christ is not about meeting everyday health and financial needs. It is about believing in Him. It is not even about ensuring the message is true—it is true—because we have enough eyewitnesses and testimonies of transformation to establish that fact already. Faith in Jesus is about a deeper need, that of our soul’s darkness. It is about the fact that He is wonderful. He is the King of kings, the mighty God. He is holy and just. He is redeemer and a friend. He is closer than a biological sibling, or a parent, or spouse. He does care about our temporal needs as well, but not to the detriment of our spiritual condition.
- H. Jesus instructed the disciples that if they found a city that rejected them, they were to symbolically shake the dust off their feet as a picture of the separation they were to have from ungodly people, and that ungodly people have from the people of God. It would serve as a warning and last call for repentance.
- I. They went as they were instructed. We have a different mission from Matthew 28:18-20 which does not include healing or demon removal—but that should not stop us from being merciful and benevolent people!

II. Herod

- A. The fame of Jesus spread—as it should everywhere in all ages. Herod Antipas the Tetrarch was confused when he heard about it, because some said that John the Baptist had come back to life (Matthew 14:1-12), or if Elijah had come back, or another of the prophets. Remember, Herod’s steward Chuza was married to Joanna, and she was one of the women who was serving Jesus and the disciples as they traveled (Luke 8:3). Therefore, we can easily imagine news about Jesus reaching Herod’s palace.
- B. Herod knew that he had killed John the Baptist but wondered (Matthew 14) if John was such a holy man of God that he came back from the dead. Herod’s conscience was bothering him.
- C. He wanted to see Jesus to learn what he could about Him. This was no “believing” desire. This was human curiosity, a ruler “searching out a matter” (Prov. 25:2), seeing if there was a threat to his

power. His father had tried to kill the baby Jesus three decades earlier in Bethlehem. Luke 13:31 shows that Herod's stance later changed into a murderous desire against Jesus.

III. The Twelve Return and 5,000 Fed

- A. The 12 have a good deal of ministry experience now—not just observing Jesus but now having gone out on their own.
- B. They reported what they had done. We might say that they reported what God did through them, but the fact is that they did labor for God.
- C. Jesus took them aside privately to a place near Bethsaida. His intention was to help them rest after a very busy time of ministry (Mark 6:31). This is a good lesson for us—because ministry work has all the energy-draining effects of other types of work, and I am convinced that the spiritual component of it adds to the drain that it creates in a person. A recent study reported that 63% of pastors experience significant stress. Stress creates subtle and difficult symptoms. Burnout is likely with heavy ministry load.
- D. A large crowd was not considerate of their need for rest. This “inconvenience” became a great ministry opportunity for Jesus to preach the kingdom of God and heal—more of the same that the disciples were doing in the prior days.
- E. As the day of “rest” wore on, the people were lacking food. Jesus told the disciples to give them food to eat, but they were thinking only of their material resources, not their heavenly ones. So, they said that they had a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, but that was all unless they went to the nearby markets and bought food.
- F. Jesus directed the 5,000 men, and their families if they had one, to sit down in smaller groups and He blessed and divided up the food and God multiplied it in His hands so that everyone ate and were filled. This is an incredible story, but no more difficult to believe than the other miracle accounts. And again, all the gospel writers and the disciples present corroborate the story.

G. A note is made that they retrieved the leftover fragments—12 baskets, which was more than what they started with. If only that were the case with our leftovers! This does advise us about wise stewardship. For many people today, and more in ancient times, food was a precious resource. It took many more hours and much more money to procure than it does for us. Consequently, it was a central issue of good stewardship. God provides it, do not waste it! I have heard of some people who do not like leftovers. You do not like when God provides extras?

Conclusion

What can we glean from this portion? These three sections do not seem to naturally fall under a single heading.

1. The disciples, although sent to the house of Israel only on this occasion, were doing something like what we are called to do: preach the kingdom of God. We ought to know a little bit about that kingdom and the basics of the faith that we share with the world.
2. Herod is just a bad character, a villain, a pattern for all the ungodly rulers in the world.
3. Jesus took what little the disciples could produce and increased it tremendously. He can do a similar thing for your and my meager spiritual abilities so that we can do meaningful things for God and have a good impact on people around us.

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