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PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS

Luke 9:1-9

By

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Luke Lesson 40

Proclaiming the Good News Luke 9:1-9

One of the greatest privileges God has entrusted to us is that we have been chosen to carry on the work that Jesus Christ came to this earth to accomplish. Just before He ascended, He told His disciples, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). We are here today as Christians because someone in the chain was faithful to tell us of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although bearing witness for Christ is one of our greatest privileges, it is not an area where most believers feel strong. I have often thought that God could have chosen a more efficient method of spreading the gospel than entrusting it to the likes of me! He could have picked the angels to proclaim the good news, and it would have gotten done much more quickly. Jesus Himself could have returned to earth to visit a different people group every month and single-handedly He would have done a much better job than the church has done. But the fact is, He chose us to proclaim the good news. The very fact that His church is still going in spite of us is a testimony to His grace and power.

Our text records the first instance of the disciples going out under Jesus' command to preach the gospel. Up till now, they had watched Him do it, but now He sends them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. We would be mistaken if we took these verses as normative for all believers or even for all those who are called to preach. It was a unique situation and Jesus gave unique instructions which He later modified (Luke 22:35-36). But even so, there are some principles here that we can apply as we seek to proclaim the good news of Christ as He has commanded us to do.

I am tying together two sections here. Verses 1-6 record the mission of the twelve; verses 7-9 report Herod's response to their mission. The other gospels use this occasion to go into more detail about the martyrdom of John the Baptist, but Luke barely mentions it in passing. Rather, he focuses on Herod's perplexed question regarding Jesus, "Who is this man about whom I hear such

things?" (9:9). For people to believe in Jesus Christ, they must understand who He is. When they do understand who He is and believe in Him, then they must proclaim Him to others so that they have the opportunity to be saved and not to come into judgment.

Because of who Jesus is, we must proclaim
the good news of His kingdom.

There are two questions to explore: Who is Jesus? And, what are we to do in light of that?

WHO IS JESUS? He is the Lord.

The matter of Jesus' identity has been a crucial one in Luke right from the beginning. The angel announced to Mary that her offspring, conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, would be the Son of God (1:35). At His birth, the angels proclaimed that the one born was the "Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11). Simeon and Anna both bore witness to the fact that this child was the Lord's Christ, the Savior (2:26, 30, 38). John the Baptist testified that he himself was not the Christ, and that he was not fit to untie the thong of Jesus' sandals because Jesus was far mightier than he (3:16).

At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, even the demons recognized that He is "the Holy One of God" and "the Son of God" (4:34, 41). When Jesus forgave the paralytic's sins, the Pharisees grumbled, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (5:21). Later, when John the Baptist was wavering in faith while in prison, he sent messengers asking, "Are You the One who is coming, or do we look for someone else?" (7:19). Jesus sent back the reply, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me" (7:22, 23).

Later, when Jesus was having dinner with the Pharisee and He forgave the sins of the woman who anointed His feet, the other guests grumbled, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" (7:49). After Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples fearfully asked, "Who then is this, the He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?" (8:25). Later, Jesus will ask the twelve, "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" (9:18); and, "But who do you say

that I am?" resulting in Peter's confession, "The Christ of God" (9:20). The ultimate confession comes from God the Father, who testified at Jesus' baptism, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased" (3:22); and, again at His transfiguration, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" (9:35).

So Herod was asking the right question, "Who is this man?" But, Herod was not asking the question with a view to repentance, but only out of his perplexity. His guilty conscience was nagging him about putting the righteous John to death, and now he feared that perhaps John had come back to life to haunt him. But as we examine the context, we learn three things about Jesus as Lord:

1. Jesus is the powerful Lord.

Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases (9:1). Power is the force or ability to do something; authority is the right to use that power. It is one thing for a person to have power over demonic forces and power to heal, but quite another thing to be able to confer this power on others. Jesus has that power and authority.

Furthermore, Jesus had the authority to summon and send out these men to do His bidding. They did not vote on the matter or discuss whether His plan was a good one. They did not negotiate the terms in order to get the best contract. Jesus commanded and they obeyed. Jesus sent them out to do two things: "To proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing" (9:2). The two tasks were not of equal importance. Preaching the kingdom of God was paramount; the healings were to authenticate the message. They were proclaiming that in Jesus, the kingdom of God had come in fulfillment of God's promises through the prophets. The miracles that Jesus and the twelve performed gave assurance to the people that He was indeed the promised one.

In our day, there are segments of the church that argue that we are to emphasize divine healing along with the gospel. The late John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement, claimed that the "greater works" that Jesus predicted that His followers would do after receiving the Holy Spirit (John 14:12) include signs and won-

ders. If we are not regularly seeing God use us to perform miracles, then we are not proclaiming the gospel as we ought.

What shall we say to this? First, God is just as able to perform miracles through His servants today as He always has been. We must be careful not to limit God's power because of our unbelief (Mark 6:5, 6). But, having said that, we must also be careful to understand the place of miracles in God's working. While there are miracles reported throughout the Bible, they mainly occur in clusters around the time of the exodus, during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and during the time of Christ and the apostles. The purpose of those increased miracles was to authenticate the word of God or His messengers during critical times in the history of His people. But once the purpose for the miracles had been accomplished, the miracles decreased in frequency.

For example, the Book of Hebrews was written to a second-generation church of mostly Jewish Christians who were tempted to go back to Judaism. The author is trying to convince them of the superiority of Jesus. In Hebrews 2:3-4, he states, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." He is saying that the truth of the gospel was authenticated by these miracles performed by those who had been with Jesus, namely, the apostles.

But—here's the point—if signs and wonders were still common in the church, why didn't he appeal to their current experience? It would have been a much stronger argument to appeal to their common experience of miracles as a proof of Christianity than to appeal to miracles they had not even seen. Or, if the Hebrews were not experiencing such miracles, but should have been, he would have exhorted them to believe God for such things in their midst. But apparently such miracles had generally ceased. His appeal was to the authenticating nature of such signs as performed by the apostles and reported to these people as evidence of the true identity of Jesus as both Lord and Christ.

Another reason I do not believe that we should be emphasizing signs and wonders when we proclaim the gospel is that both

Jesus and Paul censured those who sought for such things. The Jews saw Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes and yet they challenged Him to perform more signs (John 6:2, 26, 30). But they would not submit to Him or believe in Him. Paul said, "The Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

The real issue of the gospel is sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). People can gawk at miracles, but if they are not convicted about their sin and need for a Savior, they will not be saved from God's judgment. The miracles that Christ and the apostles performed authenticate Jesus as the promised Savior. While we can pray that God would graciously heal a person of some disease, and He may do it miraculously, our emphasis should be on the person's need of a Savior from sin. Jesus is the powerful Lord who can save every person who believes in Him.

2. Jesus is the providing Lord.

Jesus sends His disciples out on this mission with instructions that they should take nothing for their journey. Rather, God would provide for their needs through the generosity of those to whom they ministered. Later, Jesus refers back to this incident and comments on how they did not lack anything (22:35-36). But He then changes the instruction and tells them to take along money and other provisions. Why the change? Apparently, here Jesus was concerned both about the urgency of their going immediately and the vital lesson they needed to learn about trusting God to provide for their basic needs. That lesson is further underscored in the next incident, the feeding of the 5,000.

While Jesus' instructions to the twelve on this occasion are not to be applied literally, there is a valid principle here for all of His followers, namely, that our focus in life should not be on acquiring the world's junk, but on spreading the message of God's kingdom. In other words, "Seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things [our basic needs] will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Our focus should be on ministry, not on things. If it is, we can trust Him to provide for our needs (not all our *wants*).

Before I leave this point, I need to comment briefly on a difficult harmonistic problem. When you compare the parallel accounts (Matt. 10:9-10; Mark 6:8-9), you discover that in Matthew, Jesus prohibits taking sandals (also mentioned in Luke 22:35) whereas in Mark He allows sandals. But in Matthew and Luke, Jesus prohibits taking a staff, whereas in Mark He permits taking a staff. How do we solve this?

To be honest, no thoroughly satisfying answer has been proposed. Perhaps the best answer is that Jesus was saying that the disciples should not take an *extra* pair of sandals or an *extra* staff. It would have been unlikely for anyone to travel barefoot over the rocky terrain of Israel. And, it would be assumed that you always took a single staff on a journey. So each account agrees that Jesus was making the point, "Just go as you are; don't stop to load up with extra provisions." The problem with this view is why anyone would need two staffs. The answer is that Jesus was speaking somewhat hyperbolically and graphically to make the point that no extra provisions were to be taken. The point was, "travel light and depend on God" (see Darrell Bock, *Luke* [Baker], 1:815-816).

So our text shows Jesus to be the powerful Lord and the providing Lord. Thirdly,

3. Jesus is the prophetic Lord.

The multitudes were still not clear on who Jesus was but, at the very least, they all knew that a great prophet had arisen in Israel. Some thought that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of old had risen again (see 9:19). As Peter will correctly confess, Jesus is more than any of these; He is the Christ (= Anointed One, Messiah) of God (9:20).

But in a true sense, Jesus was also the prophet *par excellence*, the one predicted by Moses (Deut. 18:15). As the prophet above all of God's prophets, Jesus can rightly pronounce God's judgment on those who reject Him. Thus He instructs the twelve to shake the dust off their feet in witness against any village that rejected their message about God's kingdom (9:5). When the Jews of that day traveled in heathen territory, they would shake the dust off their feet as soon as they entered Jewish territory, so as not to contami-

nate the land. By doing this, the twelve were giving a prophetic demonstration that the village was as pagan as the Gentiles were. It was a pronouncement that they had rejected God's good news and that their blood was on their own heads (see Acts 13:51).

The point is this: The issue on judgment day will be, *what have you done with the Lord Jesus Christ?* He is the only way to God. If you receive Him as Savior and Lord, you pass from death to life and you will not enter into judgment. If you reject Him, you remain under God's righteous condemnation. Thus to reject the message about Jesus was and still is a serious matter! Because Jesus is Lord, a person ignores or rejects Him at his own peril.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO? We are to proclaim His kingdom in His power and authority.

1. What do we proclaim? The good news of God's kingdom rule in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

A. The message we proclaim is the good news of God's kingdom rule.

The disciples proclaimed "the kingdom of God" (9:2), which is also called "the gospel" (9:6). The kingdom refers to the fact that God is King or Sovereign and that people must submit to His rule over their lives. The gospel is that if anyone will turn from his sins (see parallel, "repent," in Mark 6:12) and submit to Jesus as King, God will graciously forgive his sins and welcome him into His kingdom. But the good news also contains bad news. As Jesus here implies, some will not submit themselves to His rule. For these, the sober action of shaking the dust from their feet signals that they had rejected the reign of God and thus could only await His impending judgment. Thus, as Paul put it, the same message is an aroma of death to some, but of life to others (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

I wonder if the people in these towns realized the tremendous fork in the road of life that stared them in the face when the disciples passed through proclaiming the kingdom of God. If they refused the offer, the opportunity was gone and they were left under judgment. If they welcomed the offer, they were forever different, under God's rule, looking ahead to the day when they would see the King and be with Him for eternity.

The gospel we proclaim is the greatest news in the world. If a sinner responds to it by trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord, he is changed for time and eternity! The gospel was and still is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. You never know how far your witness for Christ will reach. None of the twelve spoke directly to Herod, but their message still got to him. Although he did not respond in faith, God will use the disciples' witness to hold Herod accountable when he stands before the great white throne. Herod had the authority to behead John, but he couldn't stop the powerful spread of the gospel.

- B. The message we proclaim should point people to the person of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The disciples went out proclaiming the kingdom (9:1-6) and the result was that Herod and the multitudes were talking about who Jesus was (9:7-9). That's how it should be: when we bear witness for Christ: people should either understand or else be haunted by the question, "Who is this man, Jesus?" While you may have to answer some basic questions and objections, don't get sidetracked on peripheral matters. Direct people to who Jesus is and to what He did on the cross. Encourage them to read the gospel accounts. As John 20:31 explains, he wrote his gospel "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." Thus, we proclaim to people the good news of God's kingdom rule in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

- 2. How do we proclaim it? By deed and by word in God's power.

The battle we fight is primarily spiritual, and so we must pray that God will deliver people from Satan's domain of darkness. God must open their eyes to the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). In the Great Commission, Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:18-19). "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Relying on His authority and power, we tell people about the saving grace to be found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Our lives must back up our message. The disciples were common men whose lives were different because of Jesus. When they went, they lived simply and stayed in homes. The people could see that their lives were in line with the message they proclaimed. If people see the reality of Christ in us, they will be more inclined to listen to our message. The disciples not only preached, but also healed in Jesus' name. This means also that we must perform deeds of mercy that minister to the whole person. Certainly we can and should pray that God would heal the illness of the one with whom we are sharing the gospel. If they need basic medical care, we should try to provide it. If they need food and shelter, we should help the person obtain these things. But every person's greatest need is not physical; it is spiritual. If we provide for the person's physical needs but neglect the spiritual, they still will die and face God's judgment. Each person desperately needs to know Jesus Christ as Savior.

Conclusion

When I was a boy, I used to watch "The Lone Ranger" on TV. At the end of each episode, after the Lone Ranger had saved the victims from some villain, he would mount his horse, Silver. The rescued victim would ask Tonto, who always managed to be standing nearby, "Who is that masked man?" Tonto would reply, "Don't you know? That's the Lone Ranger." Silver would stand on his hind legs, the Lone Ranger would wave and cry, "Hi ho, Silver, away!" To the tune of the "William Tell Overture," he would ride off into the sunset and get ready for the next episode when he would rescue someone else in need.

Through our witness, people should be able to answer the question, "Who is this Man Jesus?" They should know, "He is the Lord God in human flesh, who offered Himself in the place of sinners. Whoever trusts in Him is reconciled to God and receives eternal life as His free gift." God has entrusted to us the great task of carrying on the work of Jesus. As Peter instructs us, "Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ..." (1 Pet. 3:15). Jesus is

the Savior and Lord, coming to judge the world and reign as King!
Let's boldly proclaim it.

Discussion Questions

1. Some say that if we just had more faith, we would see more miraculous healings. Agree/disagree?
2. What is your biggest hurdle when it comes to witnessing? How can it be overcome?
3. In witnessing should we emphasize submitting to Jesus' lordship or should we mainly focus on accepting Jesus as Savior?
4. To what extent should we emphasize sin and judgment in our witnessing?

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