

Sermon 42: Luke 9:1-9: The Sending of the 12 Apostles

OUTLINE

The commissioning of the 12
The provisions of the 12
The response to the 12

INTRODUCTION

We are about half way through Christ's 3 ½ year earthly ministry. We are in the final stretch of what is known as Christ's Galilean ministry before He sets His sights on His crosswork in Jerusalem. 9:51 is a turning point in His ministry, 'When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.' We are still in the middle of a key section that is putting on display the identity of Christ. We have seen by His miracles that He is the one with authority over nature, demons, sickness and death, but still to come is Peter's confession, 18-20; Jesus foretelling that He must die and be resurrected, v21-22; and the transfiguration, before this turning point in His ministry comes. But not only are we seeing who Jesus is we are also witnessing the training of the apostles. We have seen them called to be disciples, then called to be apostles, they have been travelling around with Jesus sitting at His feet being taught by Him, and have been able to witness His power, His compassion, and His general way of ministering. They have been taught what to believe but also had their faith refined through things like having to trust in Jesus in the storm. We enter now into a new phase, the next phase in their training. They have come to the end of their learning stage and are now going to go out on their own getting more experience for future ministry. Their training coincides with God's plan for the nation of Israel. We know that it was Paul's method to preach to the Jews first and then the Gentiles, the apostles are God's plan for spreading the message of the Messiah throughout Israel. If they reject Christ, then judgement will come, this preaching tour will be one of the means by which God will announce His judgement on an unbelieving Israel.

We will look at 9:1-9 under three headings, the commissioning of the 12 looking at v1-2; the provisions of the 12, v3-4, and the response to the 12, v5-9. As we go through this section we will see that there are some things unique to the 12 which are limited to this time as God is doing something unique through them in Israel, but we will also see things that are relevant for ourselves.

The commissioning of the 12

V1-2, 'And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.' We see here that Christ calls together the 12 apostles, Luke 6:14-16, 'Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.' We are told that they are given both authority and power in two specific areas, over demons and to cure diseases. There is a difference between power and authority. For example, a policeman may have the authority to arrest a gang of bank robbers, but he may not have the power to enforce that authority, he would need to be backed up by an armed squad of officers to enact that authority. Jesus is God the Son, and He has been sent to earth to fulfil the highest role in the human race, God's vice-regent, the Second Adam, He has the power and authority. His incarnation puts on display what the new creation will one

day be like with King Jesus ruling all things perfectly. During His earthly ministry Christ spoke of the Kingdom in the midst of Israel because the King of that Kingdom was present. The message Christ preached when believed was the means of entrance into that Kingdom and the miracles performed put on display the nature of that kingdom and attested to the truthfulness of Christ's words. Now we see Jesus expanding this to the 12, giving them the task of preaching the same message and giving them power and authority. He gives His authority and message to them to deliver to the rest of Israel. Jesus has just multiplied His ministry 12fold. The authority over the demonic is a sign of their coming judgement and a picture of the new creation where there will be no demons inhabiting people. The power to cure all diseases shows Christ's power to reverse the power of the fall and anticipates a time when disease will afflict us no more.

But there is something more important than the miracles. You see all those who will be cured will get sick again and die of some failure in the human body. All those who get demons cast out will still be part of the spiritual war where the demonic will still be active and not totally removed. So the apostles are given the task of preaching the kingdom of God in their midst, the miracles acting to affirm the message, and not being the message itself. Luke does not spell out here what the message of the kingdom is, but he has already outlined it for us in his gospel so far. V2 tells us that they were to proclaim the kingdom of God, and then v6 tells us they preached the gospel. In other words, the message of the kingdom of God is the gospel.

This means that we have to be very careful in how we define the kingdom of God because we can see that it is the gospel. So what is the gospel? What is it that Jesus has preached and the apostles now preach? It was the good news for those who are poor in spirit. He came as a doctor to heal those who knew their sickness in sin and need of forgiveness because their own religious observance could not save them. He came to call people to repentance, because being born a Jew did not automatically made you one of Gods' children, you needed to repent and believe and be baptized. In his second recorded sermon, the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus spoke of the blessedness of the spiritually poor, hungry, sad, and those hated because of their association with Him. He called all those who believed in Him to a life of love, to avoid religious judgmentalism so prevalent in His day, and to bear fruit. Jesus spoke in parables about those who hear but don't believe or obey and how we are to be lights for Him not mere hearers, but doers of the word, as the form of true faith. He told people that their lives would stand or fall on the basis of whether they built their lives on His teachings and obedience to them or not. The miracles would have affirmed Christ's identity and message. So what did the apostles preach, the very same thing? Yes, that the Messiah has come and Jesus is the Messiah, and all who are poor and needy can come to Him in faith and receive forgiveness of sins if they will repent, believe and be baptized. They would have spoken about the form of true religion being one of doing not merely hearing and in particular obeying Christ's teachings. This is the same message that we preach today.

Now a question often arises at this point around the purpose of the miracles. For some in the charismatic church they see this as a model that we should expect to repeat in our day. That we should go out and preach expecting the same miracles. The trouble with this view is that Jesus is doing something very specific through the ministry of the 12 at this time. This is the last time that Israel is sent a prophet, even the Messiah, who they will reject and this will result in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Matt. 10:5-6, parallel account in Matthew's gospel reports how they were sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and that they were not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans. Secondly, the bible also talks about the unique role that the apostles miracles had in redemptive history, 2 Cor. 13:13

reports that apostles had distinct signs that accompanied their ministries, and these will have ceased because we no longer have apostles in the church in that sense any more. And Heb. 2:3-4 written later in the first century speaks of the signs of the apostles in the past tense and having a particular function of attestation, indicating that that period had come to a close.

Others have tried a copy and paste model but instead of miracles they say that the gospel message should be preached along with acts of mercy. There is a movement within modern missions which gives equal ultimacy to word and deed as the apostolic pattern for preaching the gospel that we ought to copy. We can agree that good deeds are important, that we can give credence to the truth of the gospel by the fact that we show a transformed life by our good deeds. But cannot go all the way and say that the only way to fulfil the Great Commission is by a method of word and deed being given equal ultimacy. So without endorsing a copy and paste model let me emphasize the importance of our deeds as an important underlining of the truthfulness of our message. One of the greatest charges brought against Christianity is that they are hypocrites, here we can draw out the principle that we do not only preach the gospel truth but that there are deeds that should demonstrate its truth within our lives. Do you prove the truth of a life changing gospel? Christ's love and power captures and retunes our hearts, but are we giving expression to that change by the selflessness and love we are saved to portray? We may not have miracles to back up our message, but we can silence slander and heap hot coals and show the word that we are the disciple's of Christ by our love.

The provisions of the 12

V3-4, 'And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart.' Verses 3-4 give us some details about how the apostles were to go about this particular mission. Now these are strange instructions as it outlines a general prohibition, 'take nothing with you,' and then adds 5 clarifying prohibitions, take no staff, no bag, no bread, no money and no second tunic. Now we must say up front that this is not normative teaching on how to prepare to go to the mission field but something that Jesus was doing at the time in Israel and not normative for all time. In fact we will see later just before Jesus dies and ascends that He gives other different instruction quite different to this, Luke 22:35-36, 'And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." ³⁶ He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.' So why these measures? It is thought that the apostles were to travel light in order to travel in haste, they were not to plan for long stays anywhere but move from town to town. No staff means no extra staff, for Mark 6:8 allows for a staff, this would be the regular walking staff. No bag is likely referring to the ability to pack extra supplies, and a bag would be used to collect payment and tokens from where they had preached, these are prohibited. No bread means no food stocks. No money to pay for travelling expenses. No second tunics but just the clothes on their backs.

This would have been done in part to teach the disciples to live by faith. These apostles are still in training, and we see later that they needed for nothing because of God's provision. When they do finally go out to fulfil the Great commission this will be a needed lesson for they will be cast upon God in all their ministry efforts. We are not called to such austere measures today but we can still draw the lesson that we are cast upon God and must trust in God to provide for us as we busy ourselves with His mission. The Lord does throw us into the deep end at times to teach us that He is able to stop us from sinking.

Another matter that we can apply is the matter of contentment. I have watched some prosperity preachers justifying why they need to have personal private jets so that they can do ministry. Here we see these ministers learning to do ministry through deprivations. We see Paul, a man who suffered much coming to terms to deprivations when he writes from prison, Phil. 4:11-12, 'Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.'

We see that the apostles were to only go to one house per village, Matthew tells us that this was to be the house of a 'worthy' person, namely someone who accepted the message. And that they were to stay there and not move about. Staying in a house would be preferable to staying at the local inns which often had the reputation for being brothels. Also, it was common practice at this time for travelling teachers and philosophers to go from door to door collecting money. It appears that Jesus is training His apostles to be those who do not take gifts from others, exploit hospitality, nor follow the practice of other peddlers of the word. We can imagine how many parents or needy people would gladly offer a fortune to the apostles for healing their loved ones, no doubt Jesus would have experienced this offer many times. The apostles were to take no bags that they could collect such gifts, no money relying on the hospitality of those who put them up, and to stay put and not go around collecting funds. The principle here is what Jesus says in Matt. 10:8, freely you have received, freely give. This too is a principle that we can continue to apply in our service of the Lord today. Do you ungrudgingly give because of what Christ has done for you. Do you count how much loss you suffer or give because you constantly remember how much loss Christ suffered for you. All our service to God should be done imitating God's grace towards us.

The response to the 12

When Jesus sends out the 12, even though they will have power and authority, their ministry will be faced with resistance and Jesus prepares them for that, v5-6, 'And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.' ⁶And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.' Now before we consider Christ's instruction about those who reject, what would have happened to those who would have responded positively? Jesus taught His disciples to baptize those who accepted His message, John 4:2. So as they went about preaching, all those who responded with faith and repentance would have been baptized.

Now Jesus tells the apostles that if people do not accept their message then they should do what Jews ordinarily do when they leave pagan territory. When a Jew left pagan territory they would shake the dust of the unclean place off of their feet. This is a shattering critique of unbelief in Israel. Jesus is telling the disciples to treat unbelieving Jews as if they were pagans. This will be surprising but not new. John the Baptist has already indicated that claiming to be a child of Abraham but not walking in repentance, and not accepting the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would make you an offspring of satan, a brood of vipers.

This indicates to us that there is no possibility for neutrality. Those Jews were happily living their lives in their little towns but then were confronted by the disciples with the truth that the Messiah had come. There was no option to ignore, there was no option to delay, either you accepted the teaching and responded appropriately by believing, repenting and being baptized or you were under judgement. The same is true today, every day someone

decides not to receive Christ and Lord and Savior is another choice against Him. To say not yet is to say no, and there is no guarantee that God will strive with you forever. At some point His Spirit may withdraw and there will be no more opportunity. To reject results in judgement, and this is what this generation of Jews experienced in 70 AD when the Romans invaded Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus we see is preparing His disciples to be rejected. Yes they will have power to perform miracles and even heal terrible ailments, but the human heart is so gripped by sin that these things will not rub out unbelief. Even though we have the truth we must be prepared to have it rejected. No doubt this is disturbing and can shake the confidence of a lot of people. The young are especially susceptible to be moved by mass rejection or approval.

The question that arises from this example is, how long do we plead with people, how long do we persevere in offering the word of God before we decide to shake the dust from our feet? I do not see these verses as having any direct bearing on this question. This is Israel's last chance after thousands of years of God sending prophet after prophet, they have recently had John the Baptist, and now the powerful ministry of the Messiah Himself. They are a generation without excuse and who will be held accountable by higher standards. The strong actions of shaking off dust are directly sanctioned by Christ and are relevant given where Israel is in her history. We must not think that if someone refuses to hear us we must imitate this action of shaking the dust from our feet and having an attitude of, 'Well, I hope you get judged!' Remember that this is the last invitation on the heels of thousands of years of God holding out His hand to a people who have had every opportunity to respond. Imitate God's own patience and don't look for models of calling down judgement, as it is often said, while there is life there is hope that God might bring them to repentance.

We see in v6 that the Apostles went about preaching and healing, and we are given the response of Herod, v7-9, 'Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. ⁹Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him.' This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the great. He was a wicked man who had stolen his brother's wife. John the Baptist had spoken out against him and Herod imprisoned him. This resulted in John the Baptist being beheaded. Here was a man who had sinned, and whose conscience was bothering him. With the preaching tour of the apostles which would have been accompanied with healings, the word of this would have spread and gotten back to Herod. We see that he was perplexed because some were saying it was John resurrected, this would indicate his sins coming back to bite him; or it was Elijah, the prophet who spoke against the King of Israel's sins, a king like him. This reminds us that the preaching of the word of God will disturb people's consciences. We all have sins which we bear on our consciences and to hear of God active among us brings those sins we have hidden or tried to ignore into the foreground. We will see the Herod does nothing about this, instead of seeking forgiveness and changing his ways, he becomes complicit in crucifying Christ.

The second thing we see is that due to the faithful preaching of the apostles Herod hears about Christ and asks the question, 'who is this?' The point of all good preaching is to draw attention to Christ, and the apostles succeeded in this. They did not preach a technique about how to get rich or be successful, they did not make the message about the spectacle and the miracles, they spoke about Jesus Christ. This is the only message of salvation that

will save. There is no other name under given by which man must be saved but the name Christ Jesus. If we preach but do not get to Christ we have not preached like the apostles.

So what do we take away from this period of the apostles training and what do we leave? We take with us the importance of preaching as the central act of our mission. We cannot pretend to apostolic miracles, nor do we attempt to try and make deeds of mercy an equal co-partner with the message of salvation. That said, when it is within our power to do good we should do it, and we must remember that although we do not have miracles to attest to the power of the gospel, our changed lives still can.

We are not called to only go to Israel but all nations; we no longer need to practice the austerity measures of the 12; but we can imitate them in their desire to spread the word widely, to not peddle the word of God taking advantage of the vulnerable but as we have freely received freely give. We can be pure in our witness staying away from those places of temptations like the apostles stayed away from the inns that were practically brothels. We can be prepared to be rejected but should not imitate the 12 in signing God's judgement against those who reject. And we should make sure that the center of our message is Christ that consciences are disturbed and people are left with the question who is Christ?