

Sent

Luke 9:1-9 | July 28, 2019 | Bryce Beale

Every word of Scripture belongs to the believer, but you cannot grab every word with your bare hand.

Some passages are at just the right temperature; you can get at them directly. This is true especially in the letters of the New Testament. “Do not be conformed to this world,” writes Paul, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Reach out and take hold that passage, Christian—it is yours in an immediate sense. *You* must not be conformed to this world, just as the Roman Christians were under obligation not to be.

But certain other passages are too hot for your touch. This is often true in the Old Testament. We read, for example, in Leviticus 24:16, “Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him....” Believer, these words are yours no less than the words of the New Testament—the New Testament itself says as much: “whatever was written,” writes Paul, “in former days [that is, in the Old Testament] was written for our instruction.”

Leviticus 24:16 was written for your instruction; you must take hold of it. But it is too hot to grab barehanded and immediately. You have to stop and think about how you are going to grasp it. You must ask questions like, “To whom was this written at first? Was it intended for immediate obedience by every generation of God’s people, or for a specific season? If direct and unaltered obedience is not required of me, what instruction, what principles did God intend me to glean from these words.” By these questions of interpretation we put on our oven mitt and can, after we have asked and answered them, take hold the passage for our own instruction.

The nation of Israel under theocratic rule in the time of the Old Covenant was required to stone blasphemers; we are not the nation of Israel, and we are not under theocratic rule, and we do not live in the time of the Old Covenant. We are in a different circumstance; yet in that ancient command we do discover an unchanging principle of God’s will: no matter our time or circumstance, God always despises the misuse of his holy name.

I offer these important observations because our text for today in Luke is remarkably relevant for our instruction, but it is in some ways a hot text. We cannot simply grab it with a bare hand—many in the history of the church have tried to do so, and have burnt their hands.

We are, like the twelve we are about to read of, sent out to proclaim the gospel; like them we are given authority and power to confirm our message; and, like them, we can rely on the Lord's provision in our work. But we are not the Twelve. We must take some time this morning to put on an oven mitt of proper interpretation so we can grab this text which God intends for our instruction and, rather than burn our hands, eat of it and be edified.

LUKE 9:1-9

We have in this passage an excellent example for our own work as Christians. Verse 2 says that Jesus “sent [the Twelve] out to proclaim the kingdom of God,” and Jesus has sent us out into this world for the same purpose.

Yet the example we are given must be taken with an oven mitt—we must find in it the principles which apply to us, and not only to the twelve apostles at that specific time.

So this will we do under three headings. First we will consider the power of these sent ones, and how that relates to the power given us. Second, we will note their priorities, and how that relates to what ours must be. And lastly, we will observe the praise that resulted from their work, and of course relate that to the praise resulting from our own.

Power

First then, what power does Jesus give the Twelve when he sends them out, and what power does he give us today?

See the first two verses:

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.¹

The Twelve, as a reminder, were those disciples selected by Jesus out of his larger crowd of followers in Luke 6 to be his capital-A Apostles, or “sent ones.”

Their names are: Simon, also known as Peter; his brother Andrew; James and his brother John; Philip; Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael; Matthew, also known as Levi; Thomas; another James, this one the son of Alphaeus; another Simon, this one a zealot; and two Judas’s, one Judas the son of James, also known as Thaddeus, and one Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Lord.

We Christians are all witnesses to the truth about Jesus, but these twelve, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were witnesses of a special type: they had been with Jesus from the start of his ministry and would be eyewitnesses of him after his resurrection too. They form the basis of our New Testament, for every book except Hebrews has a known connection to an apostle.

In Luke’s next chapter, we will see seventy or so of Jesus’ followers sent out with instructions similar to the ones given now to these twelve—but these twelve are the first to go. They are in a unique category of disciple. The heavenly city of Revelation 21 has twelve foundations, and on those foundations are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.²

So we should expect there to be some difference between their task and ours, between their activity and our own. At the same time we are all disciples, both them and us, so we should expect some similarity—they were sent out to proclaim the kingdom, and we are sent out to proclaim the kingdom. We must then take up our oven mitt and consider how to pick up this passage for ourselves. There’s so much of value in it for us, but we cannot grab it directly. We must interpret.

And we can interpret, first, by asking this question: “How does the power given these twelve for their task of evangelism relate to the power given us for our evangelistic work?”

Believers today answer that question in two different ways.

¹ ESV.

² V. 14.

There are some who think a text like this is really room temperature and can be grabbed directly. They believe that most of the extraordinary miracles active among Jesus' earliest followers should be just as active among all of us today. Not only these miracles of healing and exorcism, but especially those gifts given at Pentecost—speaking spontaneously in foreign tongues, offering new prophecies, and so forth—they claim for all Christians for all time. Those who hold this view are called continuationists, since they believe most all the miraculous gifts of the early church continue to this day. “After all,” they say, “where does Scripture teach that these miraculous occurrences will cease?”

But there are others, called cessationists, who believe that many of those early occurrences ceased to be commonplace after the early years of the church. They do not claim God cannot heal, or that his hands are tied in regard to miracles. Cessationists do not believe God has ceased to enact miracles on earth. But cessationists do believe that certain miraculous gifts very active in the early church—like speaking in tongues, prophesying, or the *gift* of healing—were specific to that time, to confirm the gospel just revealed, and have since ceased to be God's usual way of working in his church. We at Faith Bible Church hold this view.

After all, every evangelical believes that at least one ability of the apostles has ceased: the ability to write inspired Scripture. And if that sort of revelation has ceased, it is not hard to imagine other sorts ceasing as well. And the testimony of orthodox believers from quite early in the church's history until the start of the 1900's is relatively close to unanimous in favor of certain gifts ceasing. Before 1900, those groups that claimed to receive divine revelation apart from Scripture—that is, via prophecy or tongues—were most often heretical cults, like the Montanists.

So we must come at this text not directly, but with a mitt on our hands. The Twelve had authority to cast out demons—God may use us to do the same, but it is not usual practice in the church as it was with them. The Twelve could heal every sort of disease with incredible frequency—God may use us to heal a disease through prayer, yet an authority that heals nearly without fail does not belong to us.

But we must grasp the text, for it has great application for us. The Twelve were granted a unique authority that confirmed their

message as they preached the kingdom. And we, when we proclaim the kingdom to others, are we left without any power at all? What sort of power attends and confirms our proclamation?

And I answer: the power that attends our message is the power of God's Spirit who, by means of our message, changes people in their inmost being.

We are sent out and when we tell another the message of the kingdom and of its King, when we tell of his descent to earth and ascent up to the cross of Calvary, of his death for sinners and of his offer of forgiveness for all who repent and believe, then something miraculous occurs. The Spirit of God takes the seed of that message and drives it into the heart of men and women, and the heart changes.

Pharaoh's magicians could imitate many of Moses' outward miracles—the devil has his tactics and can replicate what at least appears miraculous. But to change the very heart of a person, so that someone who loves evil and is accustomed to wickedness suddenly converts to loving and doing good—that the devil cannot do. None but God by his almighty power can break the stubborn will of sinful men and women, humble the proud, and then lift them from the dust renewed. This is the greatest miracle of all, and it attends our proclamation of the kingdom. That is the principle from our text; with our mitts upon our hands, we must not neglect to take hold this glorious truth and hold it dear.

Priority

So then, we like the Twelve are sent with an attendant power, though it is not identical to theirs. And the same could be said about our second heading: priorities. How do we take the principle from their priorities and hold it fast for our own instruction?

See verses 3 through 5:

And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them."

We know from the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark that Jesus does not want these disciples, sent out two by two, to carry any extra provisions with them. Probably they had a staff, but they were forbidden bringing an extra just in case. They could have one tunic, the garment worn closest to the skin and under the outer garment, but they were not to bring a second one to change into.

In this case, we know quite clearly that the text is hot and cannot be touched right away, because Luke himself says so. He writes in chapter 22 that Jesus

said to them, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” 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.”³

And yet these things, the instruction given to the Twelve, were written for our instruction, even if they do not directly apply to our missionary endeavors.

And the way they apply is through what they teach about the priorities Christ desires for all of us who are entrusted with this task of evangelism.

Consider again the unique commands given to the Twelve, and note what they were meant to accomplish at that time. Why should the Apostles go out without any extra provisions? Or why should they stay in one house in a town and not move from house to house?⁴ Or why, if they were rejected, were they to brush the dust off their feet behind them, as though to remove the Gentile uncleanness of those Jews who rejected their message?

In all cases the purpose is clear: the disciples were to have their priority fixed on kingdom work. As Paul would later say it, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”⁵

The disciples were to travel and to spread the message of Jesus—extra provisions would only be a distraction and a burden. And to go house to house in a town would take their focus off the

³ Vv. 35-36.

⁴ See Luke 10:7.

⁵ 2 Timothy 2:4.

kingdom and onto earthly concern—they might seek out the best lodging instead of settling for the first and so waste time, or they might by finding too much hospitality overstay in any given city, so hindering the breadth of their work. The symbolic casting back of dust showed the weight of their message. Everything was focused on the work they had been given by Jesus—that was the priority that suffocated all competing diversions.

This is the principle we can and must take to ourselves. We are permitted two undershirts and bank accounts and stores of bread in our pantries—but we are not permitted distraction. Our first priority, as with them, must be the kingdom of God, and that kingdom is not of this world. It is not comprised of cars and houses and hobbies, as fine as these are in themselves. “The kingdom of God,” as Scripture says, “is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”⁶ These must be our preoccupation—the practice of these, and our speaking of them.

We are sent, like the Twelve, with the promise of God’s power, and are urged, as they were, to keep our priorities right.

Praise

Notice lastly what praise they got for their labors, and how that relates to our own.

Verses 6 through 9 read this way:

And they departed and went through the villages,
preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

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, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.

The ninth chapter of Luke, which we are presently in, may be the most important in the whole book. For Luke’s primary concern in his letter to Theophilus is to show who Jesus is, so that we like the

⁶ Romans 14:17.

original recipient might know with certainty the identity of this man.

A few more verses forward and we will find the disciples describing the various views of Jesus in their day, and Jesus asking them directly: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter will reply with that pivotal declaration: “The Christ of God.”

This scene with Herod is preparing us for that scene—it turns our attention to the identity of Jesus, challenges us to consider for ourselves who Jesus is.

Herod Antipas, ruler of one portion of his father’s former kingdom, reigning over Galilee during the entirety of Jesus’ ministry, had put John the Baptist to death. Herod had married Herodias, who formerly was the wife of his brother, and John had called him out for it. So Herod imprisoned him, and through the scheming of the irrational Herodias he was beheaded.

Herod had never met someone like John, so devoted to piety and bold in his proclamation. And thus when the tetrarch begins to hear of Jesus’ doings, he wonders if perhaps this was John back from the dead.

But the point we wish to draw from this text is in the connection of verse 6 with what follows. Notice who works the wonders: “they,” the Twelve. And in verse 7 Herod hears “about all that was happening.” And we might therefore expect a few verses about the disciples, with the crowds and Herod amazed by their miracles and wrestling with their identities. Perhaps here would be the place for further research into the person of Peter, a small biopic on his life. Or those Sons of Thunder, James and John, could be the topic of the crowd’s musings.

But they, the Twelve, practically disappear. They are the actors of “all that was happening” in verse 7, but the thoughts that these happenings spark center not on them, but on Jesus. Luke’s purpose in his letter is not to reveal who the Twelve were, but who Jesus is. After all, as verses 1-2 asserted, it was Jesus who summoned the Twelve, who granted them authority, and who sent them. Without Jesus, they would still be fishing for fish. So though they are permitted the power to proclaim and act in his name, it is his name that receives the focus of all.

He alone gets the praise for their kingdom work.

And in this case we can take hold the passage with little handwear, it is fairly cool. The disciples received no praise for their endeavors, and neither do we.

Our goal, like theirs, is to allure the attention of all persons toward our Savior. We wish that when someone visits this church and says, as is often said, “Wow, I have never seen folks who really care about each other so much,” that their next question would be, “Who is this Jesus that they claim?”

The crowds in our text were as confused as Herod. Some thought Jesus John, others considered him the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy that Elijah would return before the final day, and others thought him one of the other prophets, like Jeremiah, revived. They were all mistaken—but they were at least thinking about Jesus in earnest.

May that be the consequence of our lives—we have no higher aim than to direct the attention of our neighbors to Jesus.

I am, in closing, reminded of what two visitors to London said of Charles Spurgeon’s preaching. The two were in the city long enough to attend two Sunday services, so first they went to another well-known preacher there. They were not disappointed—his eloquence and power surprised them, and they came away saying, “That man is a great preacher!”

Then they went to hear Spurgeon preach. Spurgeon was a great orator, and his work was attended by the Lord’s power. But when the two men went away, their declaration differed from the first. “Jesus,” they said, “is a great Savior.”

That was praise enough for the Twelve, and that is praise enough for us.