



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Entrusted with the Work of Their Master (Luke 9:1-9)

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The disciples that Jesus chose to be his apostles have not been major actors on the scene of Luke's gospel narrative up to this point. The Twelve have largely remained in the background and only specifically mentioned when accompanying Jesus as he began his preaching circuit through the towns and villages in Galilee. They are seen in the boat when confronted with the dangers of the raging storm. Then when traveling to Jairus' house Jesus the inner circle of Peter, John and James emerge. At this point in Luke's account, these men who would become the foundation of the church are seen as having hearts that resemble shallow soil and whose faith quickly fades during times of testing. It is in this context Jesus gathers this group to begin the next phase in their maturation process.

There may be little that would identify these men as possessing the qualities necessary to carry on the work of Jesus by what has been recorded. Yet as noted by the religious leaders in Acts 4:13, they recognized that these men had been with Jesus. They had been taught by him and were armed with the "secrets of God's kingdom." They had their faithless responses exposed and witnessed the miraculous deeds of their master over and over again. Not only this, they had seen his heart, the patience in his interactions, and his compassion for those whose lives were broken by sin. They were not special, but the common and ordinary of the world, yet they walked with one who was truly extraordinary. It is in this moment that Jesus gives them the same ministry that he himself has been carrying out. They were to proclaim the message of the kingdom and heal those held in bondage.

In recounting the acts and teachings of Jesus, these oral traditions became firmly rooted in their minds. This mission provided time for these chosen disciples to reflect and discuss, "Who is this who teaches and does these things?" Such questions would have naturally arisen not just among themselves, but from their audience. What is taking place in this account is Jesus' method of developing those who would carry out his work. This work is passed on to his followers as he establishes the centrality of their task and instructs them on the basic principles of his life. However those who witness the impact of his work from a distance are often left perplexed as they seek to answer spiritual questions from their self-focused perspective.

Luke 9:1-9: (1) And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, (2) and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. (3) And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. (4) And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. (5) And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." (6) And they departed and went

through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. (7) 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, (8) by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. (9) Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE TASK

He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal – What is it that the Twelve had witnessed in the few months between the time they were chosen and when they were being sent out by their master? First, they had seen the priority Jesus placed on teaching about the kingdom of God. They had heard him speak about the blessing of the kingdom, the ethical expectation of loving their enemies, and understanding that one's life declares the condition of one's heart from the parable of the tree and its fruit. He warned them of the woes of rejecting God's message of good news and the imperative nature of building the foundation of one's life on the rock of hearing and doing his word. Second, they saw him banish disease and death from the lives of those he encountered. Immediately after being chosen, a great multitude gathered from all Jerusalem and Judea. From this throng they observed how Jesus took the time to heal every single person that sought him. They were with him when Jesus healed the centurion's servant from a distance and raised the widow's son. They were part of the company that traveled through the towns and villages as Jesus preached the good news and healed.

This ministry was lived out in a tangible way before their eyes, and now they find this ministry has been entrusted to them. Just as Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom, so now they would preach. As he had healed the sick, so they too would heal those who crossed their path. What a formidable task they faced! They had seen the crowds that swarmed Jesus and witnessed the religious leaders who rejected his message. Could they expect a different treatment from that of their master? They were simple people with no formal training. Yet while simple, remember, they had been with Jesus the Master Teacher and Healer. Now he sends them out on the basis of his authority and power to continue this work to areas he would never reach except through their participation in his mission. Jesus does not send his people into places without first equipping them, and then empowering them to accomplish this central task of proclaiming the gospel and meeting the needs of the broken and hurting.

Pennsylvania

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TASK

Take nothing for your journey – The Twelve are given instructions for how they should conduct themselves as they seek to accomplish the task of proclaiming and healing. These instructions are to be understood as temporary restrictions in light of the fact that Jesus rescinds this directive in Luke 22:36. He calls to memory these previous parameters for ministry and then says, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack.” Why place these restrictions on his disciples to take nothing for the journey? This may have been due to the brevity of their mission; however Jesus is also calling the disciples to a deeper level of trust. Just as they trust God for the authority and power to heal, so they must trust him to provide for their daily provision. As the kingdom belongs to the poor (Luke 6:20), so they must display their own need. In this they take on the very nature of Jesus who lived on the basis of God’s provision as experienced through the generosity of others. This work is worthy of support, but it will happen in God’s way and in his timing.

Whatever house you enter, stay there – This directive was based on the understanding that their mission was to fellow Jews who customarily extended hospitality to other Jewish travelers. In this section of the instruction the disciples are told not to move from house to house when they arrive in a new town. They are to look for the family whom the Lord will provide to meet this need of lodging. They are to accept what they receive and not search around for better accommodations. Once settling into this location, this was to be their residence the entire time they stayed in that town until their departure. Jesus is teaching his followers contentment; his ministers do not seek after their own personal gain, but are satisfied with the Lord’s provision, in order to be worthy servants of the gospel.

Shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them – As touched on briefly, the target audience of this mission was their fellow Jews in the towns and villages in Galilee. Just as the expectation of hospitality was an anticipated response from fellow Jews, so also, the response of the message which proclaims the good news of the kingdom, the arrival of the Messiah, should warrant great rejoicing among God’s chosen people. Into this setting Jesus issues this response to any town that rejects the announcement of the kingdom. By giving this warning, these men are being put on notice that the opposition that Jesus faced will also be one aspect of this mission. “Shaking off the dust from your feet” refers to a well-known custom. The shaking off of the dust of a gentile city from one’s feet was practiced by Jews. They removed what was ceremonially unclean before returning to their land, lest they defile it. When these missionaries did the same thing to Jews, it was a

symbolic piece of evidence against them that they were no part of the true Israel; they had refused the message of the kingdom of God. This action is significant for the spectator rather than for the disciples themselves.

They departed and . . . , preaching the gospel and healing everywhere – This section of the narrative ends with the disciples demonstrating their willingness to embrace the central aspect of Jesus’ ministry. No details are given as to what transpired only of them reporting to Jesus all that they had done. However, we glimpse the effects of this work as Herod the tetrarch is introduced. The impact of this mission has been felt in a broad sense throughout the region, and now news had reached the ear of Herod. Notice that he attributes all this activity back to Jesus, both of what Jesus did personally but also the work of the Twelve. These chosen men had been faithful to their task and the manner in which Jesus sent them out. Like Jesus, they invited the people from the towns and villages they visited to accept the good news and to become part of this growing contingent of Christ followers. Also, like Jesus, they had a genuine concern for the needs of the people and demonstrated this in a concrete manner by healing everywhere.

RESPONSE TO THE WORK

Heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed – Herod becomes the visible representation of one who has rejected Jesus. His intelligence gathering for Galilee had kept him informed of everything that had occurred in his kingdom – even to the point of rumor and their interpretations. We had learned previously from Luke’s account that John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod. The text reveals succinctly John’s fate; he had been beheaded at Herod’s command. Since John had been one of the most powerful people the common man would have known, when they heard of the power exercised by Jesus and his disciples the people conclude that John was back from the dead, and if not John, then Elijah or possibly one of the Old Testament prophets. The speculation of Elijah was probably based on the words of Malachi who had promised that Elijah would return before the Messiah’s arrival (Malachi 4:5). The news of Jesus’ ministry brought fear and doubt to those who had rejected him. Earlier, when Herod felt threatened he sought to protect his kingdom by doing away with John, and now he is faced with another growing menace. He is unable to make sense of the information he has received and is left frustrated and confused. In this we see Herod’s primary concern is for himself and securing his throne from possible danger. For those of the world, even seeking Jesus is filtered through a paradigm of self-protection instead of humility before a holy God.