HE SENT THEM OUT

Luke 9:1–9

Key Verse: 9:2

“…and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”

Have you ever been sent to do something? Maybe when you were a child, your mom sent you to the store to get something she needed. Or your high school sent you to represent them at a big event. Or your job sent you to a conference or special training session. In any of these cases, being sent could be a little scary. When we’re sent, we wonder if we’re qualified, or if bad things might happen. In today’s passage Jesus sends the Twelve on a special mission. In one sense it was uniquely for them, but in another, it’s a model for all believers. The Bible tells us that God longs for all people everywhere to call on his name and be saved, but that so many don’t know who God is or how to call on him; they need someone to help them (Ro10:13–14). Is God sending *me*? If so, what does he want me to *do*? And how can *I* possibly do it? Today’s passage speaks to these questions. May God open our hearts and help us hear his word personally.

One of the major themes of all four Gospels is how Jesus called and trained disciples. Luke begins his version of it in chapter 5 by telling us the personal story of Simon Peter. Jesus asks him a simple favor to use his boat so he can preach to the crowd at the shore. But it soon turns into something more. After a night of failed fishing, Jesus asks Simon to put out into deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Simon puts aside his own ideas, listens to Jesus and does it, and there’s a miraculous catch of fish. Then he and his companions leave everything to follow him (1–11). Not long after, Jesus calls a tax collector named Levi. It’s so simple we might miss it. The focus is not on the calling but on the fellowship at Levi’s house. The highlight is that Jesus is a doctor for the spiritually sick, and he includes them among his disciples (27–32). Chapter 5 concludes with Jesus telling us that disciples are like new wineskins, receptive and ready to stretch and grow (36–39). Chapter 6 opens by showing how the religious legalism of the time had caused people to lose their basic love for a needy person. In this context Jesus spends a whole night praying to God, and then chooses the twelve. It says he names them “apostles,” meaning “sent ones” (13). They knew right then and there that one day Jesus would be sending them. But for now, they would be observers. They saw Jesus healing, curing and touching all kinds of sick, diseased and demon-possessed people (17–19). They heard him give his famous Sermon on the Mount, turning the world’s value system upside down (20–49). In chapter 7 they witnessed the power of his word to cure a centurion’s servant without even being there (1–10). They saw his power to raise a widow’s son from the dead (11–17). They heard him teach a sense of God’s work and history through John the Baptist (18–35). And they were there when a sinful woman anointed him at a Pharisee’s house, and witnessed how he praised her faith and love (36–50).

In chapter 8 Jesus focuses even more on his disciples. He takes them with him as he’s going through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God (8:1–2). He shows them how he includes women among his supporters and followers (8:3–4). He explains one of his most important parables, the parable of the sower, to show them the nature of sowing the seed of God’s kingdom in people’s hearts (8:5–18). When his own family comes to see him, he strikingly says that his real family are those who hear God’s word and do it, referring to his disciples (8:19–21). He takes them through a storm (8:22–25), lets them witness his healing a frightening man at the cost of a city’s entire pig herd (8:26–39), and finally shows them the power of faith, both for a woman with chronic bleeding and for a man whose daughter had died (8:40–56). The disciples have witnessed firsthand the power and authority of Jesus over every kind of disease, over death itself, and even over nature, and they’ve heard him speak again and again of the crucial role of faith.

Now in chapter 9 we see a turning point. Read verses 1–2. These verses are silent about how the disciples were feeling about this. Were they thinking, “Finally!” Probably not. Probably they were thinking, “Who, *us*? *Really*? *Already*?” And maybe even, “*Wait a minute*!” These men were not religious professionals. They were ordinary people—fishermen, a tax collector. They had no personal ministry experience. All they had was the experience of observing Jesus. But for Jesus, that was enough. In fact, it was the best, perfect. That experience alone made them more than qualified to do what he was asking them to do.

And he isn’t just sending them. Read verse 1 again. It says he “gave them power and authority.” Luke has often used this word “power” (1:17,35; 4:14,36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46). He’s also repeated the word “authority” (4:6,32,36; 5:24; 7:8). Luke uses these two words more than any other Gospel writer. Luke depicts Jesus as full of power and authority, and now he gives his power and authority to his twelve disciples. But how does that work? Luke doesn’t say explicitly. All he does say is that happens. It happens when they listen to him and just do what he says. It implies that this can happen to us as well.

And what did he send them to do? Read verse 2 again. Proclaiming the kingdom of God and healing have been the main content of Jesus’ ministry (4:18–19,40; 5:15,17; 6:18,19; 7:21; 8:1). It shows how Jesus was ministering to people’s bodies and souls. It also suggests that his healings were for the sake of proclaiming the kingdom. In other words, the healings showed what God’s kingdom is really like, and that it really was “near” (10:9). “Proclaiming” the kingdom of God means helping people see what “good news” it really is (1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,23; 7:22; 8:1; 16:16).

As we know, this world is always full of bad news. We still hear about wars, natural disasters, famines and illnesses. Sometimes we hear about how Christians are persecuted for their faith. When there seems to be so much suffering, evil and injustice in this world, sometimes it’s hard to believe that there’s any real “good news.” But God’s kingdom still is “good news of great joy for all the people” (2:10). Why? It’s because, no matter what our problems are, no matter how sick we may be, or how evil people are, God is inviting everyone to come back to him and enjoy all the blessings of his kingdom. It’s where God himself rules our hearts. All we have to do is turn from our sin and put our trust in Jesus. When we do, he gives us the Holy Spirit, who helps us experience the righteousness, peace and joy of God’s kingdom (Ro14:17). We don’t need false hopes, but we do really need the good news of the hope of God’s kingdom, through faith in Jesus (1Pe1:3–4). This hope becomes our greatest treasure, and we become free to sacrifice any earthly possession for it (12:33–34). Actually, there’s no other real hope. We need to really believe it. And people still really need to hear about this hope of God’s kingdom. It’s why we still need to be reaching out to people and sharing it. It’s what Jesus is sending us to do.

It also says Jesus sent them to heal. It’s more than certain that Simon Peter and the others had no healing power in themselves to heal anybody, not even the common cold. But Jesus gave them his amazing power and authority. He was training them to just depend on him. Later in Acts, after a crippled man is healed, Peter says, “Men of Israel…why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham…has glorified his servant Jesus…And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong…the faith that is through Jesus…” (Ac3:11–16). We believe faith in Jesus still heals. Impossibly sick, even chronically sick people can still be completely healed through faith in him. And even more important than physical healing is spiritual healing. Through all such healings, God is glorified, not us. Not only should we believe that Jesus can heal through us, but also we need to remember that this is what God is sending us to do. God sent Jesus to heal the sick; Jesus is sending the twelve to do it; and he’s still sending us today. When people experience inner healing by God’s power and grace, it’s how they experience the reality of God’s kingdom (10:9). God wants us to focus our prayers on people truly being healed by the power of Jesus’ name.

In verses 3–5 Jesus also gives them some specific instructions. What are they? Read verse 3. When we think about it, this is really hard. How can anyone take a journey and go empty-handed? It seems insane! Take *nothing*—really? What does Jesus mean? And why do they need to do this? He’s putting them into a situation where they can’t depend on themselves or their own resources—all they’d have to depend on is God himself. God would have to open people’s hearts to help them with their practical needs. Depending on others for our needs can sound repulsive. But it’s a great way to learn how to really depend on God. Gospel workers don’t need to get involved in money or material things, but stay focused on the mission Jesus gives us, proclaiming God’s kingdom and healing.

Read verse 4. Jesus is basically telling them not to go begging from house to house, for the sake of getting more financial help or better food and lodgings. His words “stay there” mean work with whatever people are open to you, for the sake of going deeper with them. It may seem exciting to travel there and there and meet many people. But it’s usually not the best way of helping people. It’s usually better to stay and work with just a few who are open.

Read verse 5. These are tough words. Jesus is teaching his disciples to be clear with people. Later he explains, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me” (9:48). Here he’s saying that if people are not open to them or their message, don’t beg—move on to someone else. “Shaking the dust off” one’s feet meant sending a message: “What you’re doing is so wrong, you’re making God so angry, I don’t want anything to do with you, not even your dust.” And interestingly, it’s all said not with words but with an action. It’s a warning of God’s judgment. God’s judgment was not to be their focus; their main message was the good news of God’s kingdom. But God’s judgment for those who reject the good news had to be part of the message. It’s still true today. Through this instruction Jesus wants his followers, even when rejected, to have confidence in the gospel.

And what happens? Read verse 6. This is the beauty of the disciples. Despite their immaturity and weaknesses, they simply trust and obey Jesus. It’s a great act of faith. They don’t think too much about their inadequacies, problems, or what people will think. They just try to do what Jesus said.

Finally, King Herod is perplexed by what’s happening through Jesus’ ministry (7–9). He’s haunted by his own guilt for beheading John the Baptist. His wanting to see Jesus is a mixed bag of curiosity and hostility (13:31; 23:8). Gospel ministry may seem like nothing, but it still has such power to shake a whole society, all the way to the top.

Read verse 2 again. May God give us the awareness that through faith in Jesus he is sending us. May he help us focus on proclaiming the hope of his kingdom and on healing people. May he help us learn to depend only on him.