

# **LUKE**

“Not the New, But the True”

*Luke 9:1-9*

Sunday, May 6, 2018 (Easter Season)

By David A. Ritchie

**9** 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.<sup>1</sup>

*Heavenly Father, I pray this morning that by your word and your Spirit, you would form us to be a people who are faithful to the mission of your Son, so that the whole world would know Jesus and seek to meet him. I pray this in Jesus’s mighty name. AMEN.*

## **Introduction**

It’s only been six weeks since Easter Sunday, and I have to tell you I still haven’t caught my breath. In the world of vocational ministry, Easter weekend is like the Super Bowl or Sweeps Week. It’s the weekend that we know that we will see more people than any other weekend of the year, so we want to make sure we do our very best. This last Easter, we held a Good Friday service and three Easter Sunday services, and over the course those four services 1300 people attended, 18 people were baptized, and 190 volunteers served. It was an amazing weekend!

But I have to confess. As a pastor, there is a significant amount of pressure that surrounds a day like this. If that many people are going to come – many of which for are coming for the first time – and if that many people are going to serve, I kind of feel like I had better bring my A-game.

And so internally, there is a struggle. There is a genuine temptation, as I am preparing my Easter sermon, to want to re-invent everything, to pull out all of the creative stops, and to try and give something to people that they have never heard before.

Every year I cycle through this. Every year I pray through this. And every year I have to remind myself this central truth: *“It’s not the new, but the true that matters.”*

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 9:1–9.

The story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not new. But it is a truth that has changed the course of history. And it is a truth that can continue to change lives of people today. *It is not a new gospel, but it is the true gospel. And it is only the true gospel that saves.*

Now, I believe innovation and creativity are good things. Purposefully seeking innovation and creativity can lead to new ideas, possibilities, and opportunities. But when chasing novelty becomes an obsession, it can create constant chaos, constant discontentment, and an endless treadmill of change for the sake of change, wherein we forsake long-term joy and satisfaction and faithfulness for the fleeting thrill of the new.

There is a term in the English language known as “neophilia.” It is the condition of being neurotically and irrationally obsessed with the new and novel. And we live in a nephiliac culture. With every changing season there are new fashions we are supposed to know about, new colors that we should wear and use in our interior décor, new books we need to read, new music we should listen to, new TV shows we need to watch, new devices that we should purchase, new meals we should make, and new destinations we should travel to.

I have begun to notice how this mindset can infiltrate our understanding and expectation of what it means to be the people of God, what it means to be the church, and what it means to do ministry. There is a very real temptation in church culture to constantly chase the next new fad, the next new project, the next new conference, or the next new big event.

Again, there is a time and a place for creativity and innovation, especially as it is related to the methods of ministry. However, there are certain foundations of ministry that are timeless and true. And when it comes to these foundations, I desire Redeemer Christian Church to be a church that collectively says: *“It’s not the new, but the true that matters.”*

Today, we are looking at the first moment that Jesus sent his disciples to participate in his kingdom mission. It is a type of dress rehearsal for what will soon be their mission to the world.<sup>2</sup> Though many things that have changed from this first missionary sending, I want to argue that this text shows us four foundational truths for the true mission of God that should never change.

## **Exposition**

### **Foundation 1.) True Mission Comes from a True Identity.**

Imagine you are a simple fisherman. You have spent the last few months traveling with Jesus, listening to his sermons, and witnessing his miracles. You have begun to understand that you have a front row seat to something – or Someone – who is going to change the world. And then one day he calls you and your friends to himself, and he says now it is your turn to go and do what he has done.

No way would you feel up to the task or ready or secure in yourself – that is, except for one reason. Jesus himself said you are no longer a fisherman. He has called you to be a fisher of men.

Luke 9 is recording a shift in the history of Jesus’s ministry. Jesus is taking the twelve men who have been his disciples, and he sending them as his apostles.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 269.

In fact, the word translated as “sent” in Luke 9:2 comes from the Greek verb “apostello” (ἀποστέλλω), which means “to dispatch someone for the achievement of some objective, *send away/out*.”<sup>3</sup> “Apostello” (ἀποστέλλω), is the same verb from which we derive the word “apostle.” But interestingly enough, in Luke’s gospel, these twelve were first called “apostles” long before they were even “sent” (see Lk. 6:13).

*First came the identity. Then came the mission.*

So too, we will do what God calls us to do only when we truly believe what God says about who we are. *To be a disciple of Jesus is not only to believe in what Jesus says about himself. It is also to believe what Jesus says about you. And Jesus says if you believe in him, your life has a kingdom-purpose. You are sent every bit as much as you are saved.*<sup>4</sup>

And if you are sent, that means you are sent here and now. Whether you are a student, in the workforce, a stay-at-home mom, or a retiree. The providence of Almighty God has uniquely positioned you in this time and this place for this moment. It is very likely that God has placed you in a family, in a school, in a job where there are people who need Jesus; people that a pastor like me would never be able to talk to. Don’t for a second underestimate your potential impact.

Invite people to church. Serve the city. Serve the church. Be engaged in your vocation to the glory of God. Know that because you are a disciple of Jesus, you are sent.

It is a humbling and profound truth, but from the dawn of creation, it has been the preferred methodology of God to use normal people to do the extraordinary work of the kingdom.

## **Foundation 2.) True Mission Comes from a True Power and Authority.**

I remember what it was like on my sixteenth birthday when I went to the DMV and got my driver’s license. I remember what it was like to turn the key, ignite the engine, and then drive down the roads of Amarillo all by myself for the first time. I remember it felt like now possessed a *power* that would change the course of my life and future. And if that’s what it was like sitting behind the wheel of a 1999 Dodge Neon, imagine what it would have been like to be given “*power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases*” (Lk. 9:1).

R. Kent Hughes says it this way: “*Imagine what it must have been like for them when they heard evil spirits cry out to them begging for mercy. Or think what it would be like to heal terminal disease. To touch a feverish child who becomes instantly well while still in its frantic parents’ arms, or to see a leper metamorphosed to wholeness, or to see a cripple skip with jubilation. How unutterably glorious!*”<sup>5</sup> They went from being struggling fishermen to being this!

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<sup>3</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 120.

<sup>4</sup> Ian McConnell. “5 Essential Elements for a Church on Mission.” Liberty Baptist Church Pastors Conference 2017. March 17, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Luke: That You May Know the Truth\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 323.

Like a new law enforcement officer who is given a gun and badge, verse 1 says, the Twelve were *given* “power”(δύναμις) and the “authority”(ἐξουσία) to use that power.<sup>6</sup> The big idea is that *the power and authority for true mission does not come from us; it comes from Jesus*. Our strength for mission is a delegated strength. In fact, when we try to do things in our own strength things get ugly.

Once there were seven Jewish exorcists known as the “sons of Sceva.” They heard about all of the miraculous signs and wonders done by the apostle Paul in the name of Jesus, and they were impressed. So one day, they ran into a demon-possessed man, and they began to invoke the name of Jesus like a magic spell over him. The result wasn’t pretty. This is from Acts 19: *“But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded”* (Acts 19:15–16, ESV).

Now sometimes when people get into a fight, it is hard to tell who won. Even in a boxing match, sometimes the result must go to a panel of judges, and sometimes that result is a split decision. But whenever a fight ends with one party without clothes and wounded, it is safe to say they lost the fight.

But I think a similar thing happens when we try to do ministry in the strength of self instead of the strength of God. We should be utterly uninterested in doing God’s work without God’s power.

But what is this power for, and how is this power to be used? The text answers the question in verse 2. Jesus sends out his apostles *“to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”* Simply said, *the power and authority of true mission are for the declaring of the gospel and the displaying of the gospel.*

I remember in when I was in college, I heard someone say that St. Francis once said, *“Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary use words.”* At the time I thought that was a profound statement. But there are two problems with this statement. First, Francis never said it. Second, it is not biblical. Sharing the gospel most certainly requires words.

We are called to tell people about Jesus and to invite them to know him and serve him. And you can do this. You don’t have to be an extravert or a preacher to share the gospel, but you do need to be intentional. I recently met with another local pastor, who quoted a missionary who just visited his church. When asked about how to share the gospel with people, this missionary said the following, *“Ask about their story, so that when they ask about your story, you can tell God’s story.”*

All we have to do is lift Jesus up, and Jesus will draw all men to himself (cf. Jn. 12:32). Remember: *it is not the new, but the true that saves.*

The gospel isn’t about power. The gospel is power (cf. Rom. 1:16). People will be healed. People will be set free. We should be a people postured toward the supernatural power of God moving in and through and among us.

But I believe this text shows us true mission also involves displaying the gospel through acts of love and ministries of mercy. This is why we support ministries that drill water wells in Turkana and rescue women from slavery in Ethiopia and give sight to the blind in Mexico and feed the homeless in Amarillo.

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Plummer, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke\*](#), International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 239.

And in today's polarized culture, this needs to be said: *to care about social needs and social problems is not a Marxist or liberal ideology; it is a Christian mandate.* Don't let a cable news host or a hateful blogger tell you otherwise. As the Apostle John wrote: *"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth"* (1 John 3:16–18, ESV).

Now, one of the most fascinating things about this passage is that Jesus empowers these twelve men for mission, even before Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ and the son of the living God. But the fact that he does this should encourage us that God has a habit of choosing the unlikely and the unworthy for his purposes. This means he can use me, and he can use you too.

As New Testament scholar James Edwards has written: *"The sending of these particular individuals—and at this stage of their understanding of Jesus—testifies ... to believers of every age, that the fulfillment of the word of God depends not on the perfection or merit of the missionaries but on the authoritative call and equipping of Jesus."*<sup>7</sup>

### **Foundation 3.) True Mission Comes from a True Vulnerability and Dependency.**

Verses 3 and 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. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart'"* (Luke 9:3–4, ESV).

Modern translation: Jesus saying, "I don't want you to pack an emergency shoot."

God has designed his mission in such a way that he wants us to cultivate purposeful dependence upon the power of God and the hospitality of others. To say it another way, in a culture that would encourage us to depend on programs and budgets and buildings and events, we must remember that it is impossible to be engaged in the true mission of God without a real relationship with God and without a real relationship with people.

In practical terms, this means that we prioritize a life of prayer as if were the very oxygen we need to live. It means we stop looking to our financial resources and home as if they existed for our comfort and luxury, and instead, we consider how to use these gifts for the glory and mission of God. It means that we look carefully at the people and the opportunities God as puts before us, instead of constantly playing the game of which grass is greener.

These are hard words, but they get even harder.

Jesus then continues in verse 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"* (Luke 9:5, ESV).

In ancient Jewish culture, whenever a Jew would leave a Gentile city they would shake the dust off of their feet "as a way of removing what was ceremonially unclean before returning to their own land."

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<sup>7</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 178.

Thus, when the apostles did this to a village that rejected them, it was a symbol that those who rejected Jesus are not a part of God's true people.<sup>8</sup>

But on a more personal level, this means being involved in the mission of God involves a risk of rejection. It means likely you will be rejected. And when this happens, we must learn not to take it personally. When we are rejected because of Jesus, people are rejecting Jesus, not us.

We are not responsible for how people respond to the gospel, but we are responsible for going, putting ourselves in a place of vulnerability, and risking rejection for the sake of the gospel.

Experience has taught me that making yourself vulnerable to people who can and will hurt you is perhaps the hardest thing about ministry. But the alternative is far worse. The great C.S. Lewis writes in his book on love, *"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."*<sup>9</sup>

You cannot faithfully pursue the true mission of God if your highest pursuit is safety. We worship a Savior who became vulnerable to come on a mission to us. And we must become truly vulnerable to continue his mission to the world.

#### **4.) True Mission Comes from a True Desire to Make the Name of Jesus Known.**

As the Twelve go out in the power of Jesus, ministering to towns and villages, their actions do not go unnoticed. In fact, the very halls of power begin to hear about the name of Jesus. This includes the highest governing official in the region of Galilee, who history remembers as Herod Antipas.

Now, just so you know, Herod is not a good guy in this story. In fact, Luke only mentions it in passing, but Herod has just recently murdered John the Baptist because John called Herod out for committing adultery (Lk. 9:9; cf. Mk. 6:14-29). Herod is a wicked man who is a living abomination to God and his people, and he has opposed the gospel at every turn.

But the gospel is unstoppable. The disciples go forth (Lk. 9:6). Herod hears (Lk. 9:7), Herod is confused (Lk. 9:8), and even Herod seeks to see Jesus (Lk. 9:9).

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<sup>8</sup> "The action of shaking off the dust of a gentile city from one's feet was practised by Jews; they removed what was ceremonially unclean before returning to their own land, lest they should defile it. Thus the practice implied that the place in question was heathen and that the Jew had no fellowship with it (BC V, 269-271; SB I, 571). When the Christian missionaries did the same to Jews (Acts 13:51; cf. 18:6), it was a symbolic piece of evidence (μαρτύριον, par. Mk.; cf. 5:14; 21:13) against (Luke adds ἐπι) them that they were no part of the true Israel; they had refused the message of the kingdom of God (cf. H. Strathmann, TDNT IV, 503)." I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 354.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis. *The Four Loves*. (New York: Harvest Harcourt, 1960), 121.

In today's culture, there is an increasing amount of people who hate Christians. At least in American culture, Christianity has made a transition from being laughably irrelevant to one of the greatest villains of society.

Nevertheless, in this environment of suspicion and opposition, our message and our love should be so radical that it creates cognitive dissonance in those who would be our enemies. Our mission must seek to defy expectations and cultural categories. When disciples live on true mission the world takes notice, and the name of Jesus becomes un-ignorable. This is the goal of true mission.

The question that is provoked by the disciples' mission is not, "Who is this Peter or James or John?" It is, "Who is this Jesus?" Therefore, our gospel must be really all about Jesus. We must be all about Jesus.

For all of you who know and love Jesus, know that this is your purpose and your destiny. And if you are not yet a Christian: today hear his call. Believe in him. Trust in him. Follow him. Join his mission. When we are in Christ, we are not our past or our failures. We are new creations. We are missionaries and ministers of reconciliation. We are ambassadors of a king who is coming. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 5:17–20, ESV).

Redeemer Christian Church, may God use us to make the name of Jesus known. May our neighborhoods, our jobs, and our cities, and our region be blessed because we are sent here. May we be a people who do not endlessly chase the new, but rather embrace what is true. AMEN.

### **Community Group Discussion Starters**

- 1) *In Luke 6:13, the Twelve are called "apostles" (which means sent ones) long before there are actually "sent" in Luke 9:2. In light of this, how does our identity in Christ precede and empower our mission?*
- 2) *Jesus gives his disciples "power" and "authority" to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:2). In what ways should everyday Christians seek to declare the gospel with words and display the gospel with acts of love and mercy?*
- 3) *Why must we be dependent on God and vulnerable to people to be effective disciples (Luke 9:3-5)?*
- 4) *After the disciples are sent on their mission, even Herod (a very wicked man) hears about Jesus and seeks to see him (Luke 9:6-9). How can we share the message and love of the gospel in such a way that the name of Jesus becomes un-ignorable to people in our culture, even to those who would be our enemies?*

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