

Faith to Serve
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We enter a new chapter today in our study of Luke, chapter 9, and I want to let you know from the beginning that we are approaching a high point in this gospel. Chapter 9 might not feel so exciting, but when you dig a little deeper and discern what Luke is trying to communicate, it's a pretty big deal. Luke makes a pretty significant point and he makes a significant turn in this chapter; we'll get to those later, but I share that with you now because Luke has been building to this climax and he does some more of that today in our passage.

Something else you should notice about Chapter 9 and our passage is that Luke is trying to do two things at one time. First all, he wants to continue his teaching on faith. What does true faith in Jesus look like? This teaching started with the parable of the sower showing us that true faith looks like holding fast to God's word and bearing fruit with patience. The rest of chapter 8 was related, then gave us examples of this in the midst of fearful situations. Luke's not done; today, the primary focus is still faith; what does faith in Jesus look like?

But in addition to that, Luke is building to the momentous revelation of the real identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Who is this man? That should sound familiar. Just a few sermons ago, the disciples themselves ask, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" Today in our passage, an adversary, the murderous King Herod asks the same question. This is such an important question because sooner or later every single one of us will need to give an answer: who is this man? So, let's read our passage now with an eye and an ear for these things: a deepening picture of faith and a deepening awareness of who Jesus is (READ Luke 9:1-9).

Let's start by quickly addressing vs. 7-9 and then get into the meat of this morning's message about faith. Herod the tetrarch is the puppet king of Galilee and Perea, Galilee being Jesus' home region the place where Jesus did the majority of his ministry. Remember, at this stage in history the Romans are in charge. But the Roman Emperor would entrust power to local leaders who they could trust to be obedient to the Emperor - that's Herod.. It says that Herod heard "all that was happening." What's the all? Just think back to what we've been learning. The healings and miracles. People delivered from demons and even raised from the dead. Jesus' fame has spread far and wide. The crowds have been huge. Now guess what? Jesus' followers and disciples are doing the same thing.

Herod is getting conflicting reports. Some say, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead... that's what's happening!" Others are saying "Elijah!" Still others are saying various other prophets. Look at vs. 9, "Herod said, 'John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?'" He's not so convinced about the fantastic accounts of OT prophets coming back from the grave or even John the Baptist. And so he wonders, "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" We all should be wondering that, too. Who is this?

One last thing before we dig into faith; don't miss two very short phrases. The first phrase I want to draw your attention to is the last one, "And he sought to see him." Herod wants see and meet Jesus. Doesn't that sound nice? Wouldn't it be great if they *could* meet; maybe Herod would turn and repent. Maybe they couldn't work together. Or maybe not. Why not? That takes me to the second phrase at the beginning of vs. 9, "Herod said, 'John I beheaded.'" Put those two statements together. The guy who beheaded John is now looking for Jesus. That's not good news. Remember these things, FBC, as we continue on in Luke 9.

Let's talk about faith. Jesus is giving his disciples another opportunity to exercise faith. Remember the definition of faith we learned in the parable of the sower: holding fast to the word's of Jesus and bearing fruit with patience. That's exactly the opportunity the disciples get in Luke 9:1-6. They are sent out themselves now to do kingdom work (that's bearing fruit) with specific instructions from Jesus (that's the word they are to hold fast to).

Now, this can really be helpful to you and me. We are sent as God's missionary people to the Taylor County area and beyond. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim* the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." That's the purpose of our salvation; to be his instruments of proclamation in our world. We do that, of course, individually in the various social circles God has placed us. But we do that collectively, too, as God's church combining all the gifts and resource God has given to us. I remind you of that so you are hungry to see and learn what faith looked like to the disciples sent by Jesus to continue his kingdom work. Let's learn together what Jesus did and told them because I think he's telling us to do the same thing.

The first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus sends out the disciples with his power. Look at vs. 1; it says, "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases." The disciples do not have the resources in and of themselves to accomplish kingdom work; and neither do you. So, Jesus gives them his power. He gives them the power to heal, power over demons. Man, what must have that been like? I confess as a kid I used to imagine myself with superpowers (of course, I usually used my imaginary superpowers for evil and not for good).

God gives his power to his people today. Flip to 1 Peter 4:10-11 (READ). Look what Peter says: God gives gifts, he gives strength. And we are to serve in that strength that God supplies. When we do God gets the glory (right?) because it's his strength, not our strength. So, that pattern is continues; that's how we are to serve.

Now, I'm well aware that some of you might be thinking, "Well, man, I'd take the power to heal or to cast our demons. I'd be a pretty effective witness, too, if I could do that!" Friends, don't minimize the power God gives us today. Often, I think, we're amazed at these very visible, dramatic signs of power and miss the power of God working in us right now. You need God's

power to stand around a flagpole at school praying to your God while people are watching and wondering what on earth you're doing. You need God's power to freely give more money than most people think is normal to the work of God here at FBC. You need God's power to keep serving kids with joy and affection week after week, year after year when you could be doing all kinds of other things with your time. You need God's power to go against the grain of the American retirement mentality and give the best of your energy in your retirement years for the work of the kingdom. That stuff is the work of God in us. Here's how it works: when we are born again, when we get saved by God from the penalty and power of our sin, the Holy Spirit lives within us. He just does. Sometimes you may feel it; many times, maybe, you don't feel it. It doesn't matter what you feel; believe that it's true from God's word. And with the Holy Spirit living inside of you, when you hear God's word and you hear his promises, you hold them fast even when a million earthly reasons are tempting you not to. And you press through the obstacles and believe in Jesus and walk in his way no matter what. That's the power of God at work in you, FBC. Be amazed by it!

Now, as Jesus sends out his disciples with his power, he tells them to do three things. Remember, this is faith: believing what Jesus says to do is good and right and then doing it. That's holding fast. I'm going to summarize them this way.

- Trusting his provision
- Being content with his provision
- Warning others

And all of these commands, remember, are related to them going and doing the work of ministry. That's important. Because what if they don't go? What if they stay? What if they receive the power of Jesus, they're ready to trust his provision, they're ready to be content and to warn, but they don't actually go? They're not living by faith, are they? So, the going is the context. We, too, need to be going. We need to proclaiming together. Now, we're not perfect at that and that can look a variety of ways given our context, but we need to be living a lifestyle of mission as we seek to obey these words of Jesus.

Jesus says firstly in vs. 3, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics." Now, you need to understand something: Jesus is trying to teach faith. He's not giving his disciples or us universal instructions on what to pack when we are sent by Jesus. Some may read this and think "Ok, now whenever Jesus followers go serve nobody should ever bring extra money, clothes, food, whatever." That's incorrect. Flip to the back of Luke, chapter 22:35-36 (READ). In this chapter, 22, Jesus is referring back to our chapter, 9, isn't he? He's saying, "Hey remember when I sent you out and told you to take nothing? Did you need anything?" Nope. They didn't. Why? Because God provided for their every need. You can trust God with your needs; that's the message. Now that you've learned that lesson, take food, clothing and other supplies as I send you out again. Do the disciples need Jesus less now in this final mission? Is Jesus not going to take care of them? Of course not.

Jesus tells us his disciples to take nothing; no food, no clothing, no money because he wants to teach them they can trust in God's provision. He wants to show them that he will provide for them in their going. When you serve God, FBC; when we faithfully obey the words of the Lord and do what he says we need to do in Rib Lake, in Athens, In Colby and Abbotsford and here in Medford, God will give you what you need. You can trust him. God provides. Think of your fears, think about your excuses and doubts and tell yourself what you saw from the scriptures: Jesus provides.

The second command of faith Jesus gives the disciples is to be content. Vs. 4 says, "And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from their depart." So, it seems that with his instructions Jesus is preventing the disciples from voluntarily leaving a host home, right? In this second instruction the scenario is not that the disciples are being forced to leave; that's the third scenario. This one he's telling his disciples not to leave a host home of their own accord. When someone welcomes you, stay there with them until your work is done; don't hop from house to house.

Why might they do that? Why might the disciples be tempted not to stay with a particular host family? I'm thinking because the family down the street who said we could stay there, too, has DISH TV. And Mr. Smith smoked a mean beef brisket; that sounds better than this cabbage soup.

Jesus is telling his disciples to *be content*. Because here's the thing: that house, this host home and family, have been provided by Jesus. Be content with what Jesus has given you. Believe that what Jesus has given you is a good thing.

How might this apply to your service in the kingdom. I'm wondering if you've ever been envious of the gifts or calling God has given someone else? I look at some of you, brothers, and the abilities, the skills, the gifts God has given you and that you use for his kingdom and I'm tempted to be jealous of those. I'm tempted to think, "Boy, I wish I could do that." That comes from a lack of contentment in what God has given me and the role and gifts God has for me for his kingdom work. Friends, it's been my joy to live and serve with you for the last 13 years. One thing I know is that together we do not lack anything to accomplish God's work here in this area. We may lack, at times, the want to and the willingness, but all the gifts are here. If we just use them as God has equipped us we'll keep doing his kingdom work. So, be content with what God has given you and choose to faithfully use them for his work. We need each other and the various gifts God has given to us.

Finally, and I don't want to take too long on this, there seems to be a place for warnings. Jesus said in vs. 5, "And wherever they do not receive you, whenever you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." This act of shaking off the dust from your sandals was supposed to be done publicly with the town watching. Just as Jesus says, it's meant to be a way of testifying against them warning them of the trouble that is coming their way.

So, it seems Jesus is telling us that there's a place for us to warn those we minister. We don't need to do that in an insensitive way. But it would be insensitive to not tell someone the truth of the trouble that comes with remaining disobedient to the God of the universe. There's a place for that in our kingdom work.

With Jesus sending out his disciples with power to do kingdom work he gives them these 3 commands to follow. Will the disciples have faith? Do they believe in Jesus to obey his commands? It appears they do. Vs. 6 says they go and do the work Jesus sent them to do. Will we? Friends, let's trust God's provision; he'll give us what we need. Let's be content with what he's given; it's good for us. And let's not forget to warn others in our words, it's good for them. By so doing, I believe we'll be more effective in bearing fruit for God.

Key verse ~ Luke 9:1-2

Questions for the week

- Think about all the things you are learning from Luke; how is God's word about Jesus expanding your understanding of "who is this man?"
- Why is it important to know and remember that God provides his people with power to do his work?
- Which action step of faith was particularly important for you to hear this morning? Why?