

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

First Attempts at Evangelism

Luke 9.1-11, 10.17-21

February 9, 2020

And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases.² And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.³ And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece.⁴ "Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city.⁵ "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."⁶ Departing, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

⁷ Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead,⁸ and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again.⁹ Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see Him.

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida.¹¹ But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.

^{10.17} The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."¹⁸ And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.¹⁹ "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.²⁰ "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."²¹ At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

We're looking at the four Gospels... to see how Jesus Christ trained His twelve disciples... and laid the tracks for this movement that started in such a small and apparently ineffective way but today claims almost two and a quarter BILLION people (who consider themselves believers in Jesus Christ).

I recently heard an interview with Douglas Murray (The Madness of Crowds, 2019) who is an Oxford University trained cultural critic and pundit... He describes himself as an atheist but also says that Christianity is a good and positive force in the world. When asked, "well, why aren't you a Christian? What would it take?" He replied, "I'd need to hear a voice."

And WE may wonder...“Well... why doesn't God just give the man what he needs? Would it be so hard for God to do that?” Have YOU ever wondered that about a friend or relative who doesn't believe?

Why does the transmission of Christianity involve people? Why doesn't God just speak directly and immediately to us...or just write it in the clouds that, “there IS one God and Jesus Christ is the one Way to know Him”?

“If I were God...”

I mean it's people who mess it up...right? And yet, in today's episodes we find Jesus Christ having been with the twelve disciples probably only about one year...He's turning the operation over to these young people (some teen-agers) – what could go wrong?

If I was going to save the world and had unlimited power at my disposal, I don't think I'd do it this way – it's counterintuitive at best. Let's look at:

1) WHAT He did 2) WHY He did it 3) HOW to use it

What He did was a commission. He's somehow going to use these young men as agents or delegates or emissaries of His movement. He called them together, gave them power and authority and sent (“apostello” = Gk) the twelve. And then also in the very next chapter does it again with a larger group of 70 disciples (with the twelve presumably supervising).

He transferred to them, “power and authority over all demons and to heal diseases and...proclaim the Kingdom of God”.

It sounds primitive to us that demons are mentioned (“unclean spirits” Mat/Mar) but in many parts of the world...most parts of the world, there is some understanding that there's more to existence than what can be observed scientifically and it is maybe our own Western elitism that refuses to see any connection between the world of spirits and physical and emotional maladies.

AND maybe the evil spirits themselves are happy with our elitism and anti-supernatural materialism.

And the empowered/commissioned agents (The Twelve) are also to proclaim or declare. What's the content of their message?

A: The Kingdom of God (Matthew – “Heaven”)

Luke in v.6 also calls the content “the gospel” – the Kingdom of God/Heaven or the gospel/good news AND that, in response to the happy announcement that the reign of God was close/near, that people should repent – i.e. change their mind/heart about sin and in sorrow/grief turn to God.

I wonder what they actually said. I mean they hadn’t even really identified Jesus as the Messiah at this point... knew nothing of His death and resurrection.

So the twelve and later the 70 went and carried out their commission as agents of Jesus Christ.

But the question is “WHY?” (second point)

If you had come to save the world – would you entrust the task to twelve young guys who had lots of hang-ups and little understanding... prone to pride and prejudice and rage (9.54) and ambition (Mk 10.37)?

What did they even think when they said the words, “Kingdom of God” – did they mean a political power movement to kick the Romans out and put this Man from Nazareth on the throne?

Would they come back from healing people and overpowering evil forces – come back thinking they were like superheroes all self-righteous and arrogant – I mean just think of how badly this may have gone! How people could’ve been misled and gotten a lot of weird ideas... fanaticism.

The seventy come back saying, “Whoooo! Even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” and Jesus has to “cool their jets”.

But of course... whatever was going on with the crowds... something else was happening with the twelve. They were being shaped and trained. If they came back in pride or were somehow impressed with themselves, their Teacher was there to instruct them, “Hey! Be more joyful that your names are recorded in Heaven!” And He prays for them calling them INFANTS” (that’s humbling!)

See... He’s there to catch them when they fall... fall into pride or fall into political notions of an earthly kingdom. They’re riding with training wheels!

They’re confined to the villages of Galilee and their own Jewish countrymen. He’s preparing them for later when they’ll go international with all the weird beliefs and strange/unclean foods they’ll meet... but right now it’s the relative safety of Galilee!

This is all about the Training of the Twelve. When they return all starry-eyed, Jesus Christ takes them away for a time of reflection and prayer.

He sent them out with NOTHING... so they could see how every single need they had would be generously met by God. He was molding them into believers and not simply teaching them on a blackboard or a Power-point presentation, "This is faith!" NO! He was thrusting them into a place where their only recourse was to believe.

I wonder if Jesus said to them, "Yeah! Demons can be pretty nasty and scary – but what I find really frustrating is YOUR unbelief! Now THAT is not gonna fall so easy! I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning but your faith is a slow train coming!"

And then...right in the middle of this episode, there's mention of Herod: a powerful reminder that evil spirits sometimes sit on thrones... possessing earthly rulers and ordering heads to roll... "This, my friends is also a part of the commission I have for you."

And yet... in a great irony... He who sits in heaven laughs as everything is moving to FORMULATE that one, ultimate, all-important question, "Who IS this Man?" and here in this passage, it's the twisted tyrant, Herod, who's made to ask that question (v. 9), "Who IS this Man about whom I hear such things?"

Even THIS is meant for the training of the twelve to say, "See, even God's enemies will be forced to do and say what God wants! The evil Herod who killed John the Baptist has asked the question I will soon ask YOU – WHO IS THIS MAN? Who do you say I am?"

Discipleship is tied to knowing Jesus Christ. And this whole commissioning is tying the two together in the hearts of the disciples – to know ME, who I am and what I have come to do... to see Me as utterly trust-worthy and able to meet all your needs – to rely on Me so deeply that you will have NO SPARE COAT, no extra money, nothing up your sleeve, NO PLAN B – THIS is the essence of true discipleship and this is what this commissioning is working into your hearts!"

Later, when the disciples saw Jesus Christ taken from them – when the training-wheels were taken away and when all the wheels just seemed to fall off the cart – when they saw Him stretched out and nailed to the cursed Tree... when all the powers of darkness came out of the shadows to snap and snarl and gnaw and devour Him like a pack of wolves (Ps 22.16) the untimely born Apostle Paul would write, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the cross." (Col 2.15)

In other words – the power and authority He gave us on that assignment/commissioning were exercised to the full at the VERY WORST MOMENT in our lives, the worst moment in all of human history – when God was rejected and absorbed our justice on the Cross – the powers of darkness were openly defeated... They latched on to Him and He dragged them into the grave and left them there!

Herod's ranting would accomplish God's ends and the powers of darkness – thinking they were devouring the Son of God were actually defeated BY Him: "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the Cross."

All this was behind that apparently harebrained scheme of the Great Teacher when He sent them into the villages of Galilee on that day. People were touched and healed and liberated from evil. This is what it will look like when God's Reign is fully come.

But just as important – the Twelve were being prepared, being molded in their desires, their hearts and motives – WAY deeper than just their intellect or their behavior, they were being not just taught but changed into believers who would eventually go international (2 ¼ Billion!)

And see this is the utility/benefit or function this passage can have in our modern lives and in our church. Evangelism and discipleship and Jesus Christ's active molding of our character/desires, our motives and the nurture of our faith is, BY GOD'S BEAUTIFUL DESIGN, NOT a billboard in the sky.

It's not an audible voice – it's done by human agency right up to this present day. God is still entrusting the work to fallible human beings in the Apostolic Church (founded on the teaching of the Apostles).

We're teaching our children – putting them into places where their faith can be born and nurtured NOT just on a blackboard but a faith they actually exercise by trusting in God's provision.

We're holding out a message to one another and to the world IN and THROUGH the fallible church that in our weakness Jesus Christ demonstrates His strength.

OUR message – at this point in history is even clearer than that of the Twelve – they had not yet fully identified Jesus as Messiah and had no idea about the Cross and resurrection BUT after these 20 centuries WE DO.

And we are the Church Militant – the church battering the Gates of Hell – the church on a mission – assertively living out our callings as moms and auto mechanics and attorneys and retirees as citizens and neighbors, as church members and office managers – and we are finding, in the ancient witness of the Apostles and in the present working of God's word and God's Spirit, we are finding reason to believe that the powers of darkness will fall – the Gates of Hell will not prevail: "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3.13)

If you are NOT yet believing but just here to see what it's about – we're REALLY glad you're with us.

We want you to know – we will mess it up. We are weak and fallible like the disciples were – BUT there won't be a billboard in the sky (until...you know...until it's too late) – until then, we're all you got! Jesus Christ's truth, beauty and goodness reflected in our weakness.

We hope you can see through us and look to Him.