

Lessons on Discipleship (Part 1)

Luke 9:1-17

As we continue our series on Luke this morning I want to do a quick overview of where things are at in Jesus' ministry. We're in Luke chapter 9 which is a transition point in Jesus' earthly ministry. You can't really see it in the way Luke is written, but if you look at the other gospel accounts it becomes more evident. I have a Harmony of the Gospels that places the four gospels side-by-side in chronological order and it's really helpful to get a bigger picture of what was going on that you just can't get if you only look at one account.

At the beginning of chapter 9 Jesus finishes up his first extensive ministry tour which was primarily in Galilee. (see map) He spent about a year and a half there doing ministry with his disciples and that's much of what we've been looking at so far. As chapter 9 goes on he moves into his second tour which was in the areas around Galilee, including Bethsaida, Tyre & Sidon, the Decapolis, and Caesarea Philippi. (see map) So we're about two years into Jesus' ministry at this point and he only has about one year left before the cross.

He spent about 3-4 months on this second ministry tour, which all happens within Luke chapter 9, and by the end of the chapter he's wrapping that up and beginning to turn south to minister in the regions closer to Jerusalem, which included Judea and Perea. Luke 9:51 says, "*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*" So at the end of Luke 9 Jesus is beginning his long journey to Jerusalem that would take about 8 months and end in his death on the cross. We will see in Luke 9 that this is the point at which he begins to tell his disciples about his death and resurrection – something that was confusing to them and they didn't like very much.

So a lot happens during the span of this chapter, even though most of the stories are not in Luke, but in the other gospel accounts. As I thought about how to preach through this chapter, rather than taking a detour and covering everything in the other gospel accounts, I decided to stay in Luke and focus on what he has to say. As I studied, I noticed that chapter 9 contains several different interactions that Jesus had with his disciples at this time. I don't know if Luke intended to write it that way or not, but that's what I saw. So there are a variety of snapshots into Jesus' relationship with his disciples and that's what I want to focus on. I'm calling it Lessons on Discipleship, and we'll spend 2-3 weeks looking at these.

During Jesus' ministry, one of the most important things he was doing was training his disciples. He was preparing them to take over when he left, so they had a critically important role. And they were basically starting out from square 1. They didn't go through seminary or rabbinic school and the things that Jesus had to teach them were far different than what they had learned from the established religion of their day. So they had to go through a major process of growth and transformation – just like we do. In Luke 9 they were about a year-and-a-half to two years into that process, which really isn't that far if you think about where they were coming from. They had a lot more that they needed to learn.

We are in a similar process of growth and no matter where we're at, we still have a lot to learn. We all need to have interactions with Jesus which we can grow from and continue to become more like him. My hope is that as we look at these stories in Luke God will use them to speak into our lives and help us wherever we're at. The first is at the beginning of chapter 9, which is the final phase of Jesus' ministry campaign in Galilee.

Read Luke 9:1-6.

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

Up to this point the disciples had been traveling with Jesus, watching him do ministry, and assisting him in many ways, but now it was their turn to take the lead. This was the first time that they were sent out to do ministry without Jesus being right there with them. And I'm sure that had to be a little intimidating. Could they do it without him?

But what this interaction shows us is that not only did Jesus send them on a mission, he also equipped them with everything they needed to accomplish it. Luke says that he gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. This was the same power and authority they had seen in him so many

times before. I'm not sure how he gave them his power or what it looked like, but it appears that they were aware Jesus had given it to them.

He also told them that they were to take nothing with them – just the clothes they were wearing. This wasn't the normal way they did things. Normally they would have made preparations and gathered the provisions they needed, but this time it was different. It might seem like this makes their situation worse, but I think Jesus was actually telling them not to worry about all their needs – he would take care of them. "Focus on the ministry and I will provide everything you need." They wouldn't need a staff, or bag, or bread or money because he would provide for all their needs. He would also provide open doors in people's homes where they could stay and do ministry. Some would reject them, but others would be open and welcome them in.

So the lesson that I think Jesus was trying to teach was that when he calls you to do something, he will also equip you with whatever you need. You may feel intimidated and inadequate and think, "There's no way I can do this," but I think Jesus wants us to learn trust him. He will open doors and give us what we need. Smith Wigglesworth, a 19th century British evangelist, expressed this idea in a popular quote: "*God does not call those who are equipped, He equips those whom He has called.*" And I think we can see that when Jesus sent out his disciples. God equips those whom he has called.

Every one of us has been called to ministry in some way – to let our light shine for Christ and be involved in making disciples, and for most of us that feels pretty intimidating and we feel inadequate. But Jesus didn't just send us on our mission and expect us to muster up the strength and courage to do it on our own. He also equips us with everything we need each day. He's given us the Holy Spirit who has the power to overcome our fears and break through the darkness in people's lives. He's given us his authority and prayer to defeat the enemy and break down strongholds. He's given us his Word which is living and active, able to pierce people's hearts and bring light and conviction. He's given us brothers and sisters in Christ to join with us for encouragement and support.

So you may feel intimidated when you think about talking to that person about Jesus, or going on that mission trip, or volunteering for that area of ministry in the church. But whatever Christ has called you to do he will also equip you with

everything you need to do it. He wants us to learn to trust him – to live by faith and not by sight, just like he was teaching his disciples.

That's the first lesson on discipleship. The second came several days later when the disciples were returning from their mission.

Read Luke 9:10-17.

On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. ¹¹ When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. ¹² Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place." ¹³ But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ And they did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

This is a great story and awesome miracle – one of the only miracles contained in all four gospels. Both Mark and John indicate that one of the reasons Jesus did this miracle was to try to teach his disciples something (Mk. 6:52; Jn. 6:6) and I want us to try to see what that is.

Jesus and his disciples had withdrawn from a huge crowd of people in Capernaum and gone by boat to a desolate place to get some rest, but the people saw where they were going and were waiting for them when they got there – a huge crowd of some 15,000 people. Jesus had compassion on them and ministered to them the rest of the day, but when evening came, they were in need of food and lodging. The only thing the disciples could think of was to send them away to fend for themselves, but Jesus told them "You give them something to eat." This was the beginning of the lesson.

The disciples rightly concluded that there was no way that they could do that. There were way too many people and they didn't have enough food or money. Mark and John point out that it would have taken 8 months wages to buy food for that many people. So, on their own, the disciples couldn't do what Jesus told them to do.

After they admitted that, Jesus gave them some instructions. Instead of sending the people away, Jesus told his disciples to organize them into groups. Then he took the five loaves and two fish, prayed a blessing over them, and started handing them to his disciples to distribute – and they never ran out – a seemingly unending supply. The disciples experienced Jesus doing something they couldn't do and watched as every one of those people ate until they were full. When they gathered the leftovers, there were 12 baskets left over, which probably had something to do with the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 disciples themselves.

The other gospel writers have much to say about this miracle, and Mark's the one who gives the clue about what Jesus was trying to teach them. Later that night Jesus sent the disciples in the boat to go to Bethsaida. The wind came up and they were struggling against the oars, and when he saw that from shore, he did another miracle – he walked out to them on the water. In Mark 6:51-52 it says, *“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”* So what he was trying to teach them by multiplying the loaves was not understood, and because of that, they were utterly astounded when he walked to them on water and made the wind cease.

What was he trying to teach them? The Expositor's Bible Commentary says this: *“Mark relates his explanation of the disciples' panic at seeing Jesus walking on the water and their amazement at the calming of the wind to their failure to understand about the multiplication of the loaves. Had they understood about the loaves, i.e., that the sovereign Lord of the universe was in action there, they would have been prepared to understand walking on water and calming waves. Their problem was a Christological one. Not unlike Jesus' opponents, 'their hearts were hardened.'”* In other words, Jesus was trying to teach them that he wasn't just an extraordinary man, but the sovereign Lord of the universe that was Master over all creation. I think he wanted them to see that he could do things they couldn't do, like feeding 15,000 people with only a handful of food. And when they faced things in ministry that they couldn't do, he wanted them to rely on him.

As disciples of Christ, Jesus wants us to know that we are partnering with the sovereign Lord of the universe. He is King of Creation, able to multiply bread and fish, walk on water, and calm the seas – he is able to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of carrying out his will. That’s a reality that can bring us peace and confidence, and calm our fears, no matter what problem is before us.

But like the disciples, I think this is something that is hard for us to really know and believe. We believe it in our heads because that’s what we’ve been taught and that’s what we read in the Bible. But we also need to come to believe it in our hearts and live with that kind of faith. We need to experience it in our lives. When we are seeking to carry out God’s will and come up against something that’s impossible for us to do, rather than giving up or throwing in the towel, I think Jesus wants us to come to him and pray. In Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus taught his disciples: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”*

We’ve been sent on a mission by the sovereign Lord of the universe and he is with us wherever we go. As we seek to carry out his will in our lives let us learn to quickly turn to him and rely on his power and strength.

That’s all that we have time for today and I hope that these stories are encouraging to you. Maybe you’ve been feeling inadequate and are struggling to move forward with something God is calling you to do. I encourage you to take a step of faith and trust that Christ will give you whatever you need to fulfill his calling. Or maybe you’re seeking to follow God’s will but you’re facing a barrier you don’t see any way around. Rather than giving up, go to him in prayer and depend on him to make a way. God’s desire is that we learn to walk by faith and experience his power and provision in our lives.