

JESUS WELCOMES AND SPEAKS ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 9:1-17

Key Verse: 9:11b

“He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.”

The main theme of Luke’s gospel is that Jesus is the Savior King, who came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus is not only our Savior, but our King. Kings have power and authority to rule over their people. Worldly kings use their power to force subjects into submission, but not Jesus. Jesus uses his power and authority to forgive sins, drive out demons, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. In this way, Jesus restores the kingdom of God. Up to this point in Luke’s gospel, Jesus had revealed the kingdom of God through his words and deeds. His disciples could simply hang around him and observe with joy and amazement; Jesus did not push them to do anything. But in today’s passage we come to a turning point. Jesus begins to train his disciples as kingdom workers. Jesus didn’t want them to be mere fans. Fans cheer when things go well, complain in times of hardship and have no real commitment. In contrast, Jesus wanted his disciples to commit themselves to kingdom work and grow to be like him. So he sent them to do what he had been doing—to proclaim the kingdom of God—and he helped them to serve needy people. In the same way, Jesus wants us to grow as his disciples. Let’s learn how to be disciples of Jesus—not just fans, but kingdom workers.

First, Jesus empowered his disciples and sent them out (1-9). After choosing his twelve disciples in chapter 6, Jesus first taught them what kind of people they should become: for example, they should love their enemies (6:27). Then throughout his Galilean ministry, Jesus showed them his person and his work. Jesus exemplified the character and lifestyle of a kingdom worker. Now he sends them out as training to do practical ministry. Jesus could have trained them in various ways. He could have treated them like contestants in the “Survivor” shows. Or he could have lectured in a classroom and given them exams. Or he could have made them obey many detailed instructions with sharp rebukes like professors of medical students. But Jesus was very dynamic and generous in his approach to training them. Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases (1). Here we see that kingdom work is a spiritual battle against demons—the power of Satan. No one can succeed in this battle by human strength and wisdom. They needed Jesus’ power and authority. St. Paul said, **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”** (Eph 6:12). Though it is invisible,

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Satan's power works to blind people's minds and to oppose kingdom work (2Co 4:4). To be effective in kingdom work requires Jesus' power and authority. Power refers to energy or strength. Authority refers to the right to exercise it. We need power and authority from Jesus. Jesus is very willing to empower his servants. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Lk 11:13). Jesus gives us his word to equip us for good work (2Ti 3:17). When we are equipped by Jesus, we are ready to carry out kingdom work.

In verse 2, we find Jesus' main purpose in sending out his disciples. It says, **"...and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."** The word "proclaim" means to publicly announce the king's message as a herald. Jesus has come as king to save us from sin and death and to rule over us with love, peace and justice. Jesus himself proclaimed the message of the kingdom of God (4:43). This is the restoration of God's reign. In the beginning, when God reigned over the creation, it was very good. But through Adam's fall, man lost the kingdom of God. Man exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of created things (Ro 1:22-23). Man became an idol worshiper in bondage to Satan. This is not just a theory, but reality. So many people are miserable—not because of an unfavorable condition, but because they do not have God ruling their hearts. This is why they are fearful, insecure, anxious and enslaved to all kinds of sinful desires. Jesus came to rescue us from bondage and restore the kingdom of God. Colossians 1:13 says, **"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves...."** When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, it was the direct message of the King himself. In contrast, the disciples were heralds of King Jesus. They should boldly represent the king, but humbly acknowledge that they are servants. St. Paul grasped this and said, **"For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake"** (2Co 4:5).

In verses 3-5 Jesus gives specific instructions to his disciples. Later, at his arrest, Jesus cancelled some of them (22:35-36). So, we need to grasp the principles underlying these instructions, which are timeless and always applicable. Among them, I want to mention two. **First is to depend on God alone.** Verse 3 says, **"Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt."** When going on a journey, the first thing we may think is, "What should I pack?" We want to anticipate our needs and to make sure we are prepared. But Jesus told them to take nothing. It was to help them depend only on God. God would provide everything they need, mainly through those who accept the message. When they are welcomed, they should stay in one place until they leave that town (4). **A second principle is to keep a clear identity as kingdom**

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workers. As verse 5 tells us, Jesus anticipated rejection; it is inherent in kingdom work. So he prepared his disciples to handle it. They should not fight with human wisdom or argue. Nor should they take it personally and blame themselves, thinking, “If only I had spoken more eloquently....” Instead, they should regard it as a rejection of the king. They should simply leave, shaking the dust off their feet. King Jesus would deal with the unresponsive. In this way, they could keep a clear identity as kingdom workers. Here we see that in training his disciples, Jesus was not shortsighted. He did not demand performance to meet standards. Rather, he was more concerned that they understand the nature of kingdom work and mature as workers based on his principles.

Verses 6-9 tell us how the disciples responded and what the outcome was. They simply obeyed Jesus’ words. They set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere (6). God worked mightily through their obedience and the outcome was amazing. Some people were saying that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. Others said that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life (7b-8). Throughout Israel’s history, prophets had been the agents of God’s revival work. The people of Jesus’ time felt that God was working mightily in their generation as he had in the past. They sensed that their nation was undergoing a spiritual revival. When Herod the tetrarch heard these things, he was terrified due to his guilt for beheading John (7a, 9). This shows us that the powers of this dark world were shaken to the core. We pray for spiritual revival in our generation. How can this happen? Through obedient disciples, empowered by Jesus, who proclaim the kingdom of God. They may be quite young and inexperienced. But Jesus will use us when we simply obey him. Let’s pray that God may use us to bring spiritual revival throughout Chicago.

Second, Jesus welcomed and fed a crowd through his disciples (10-17). When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done (10a). Reporting helped them confirm what God had done through them in their own hearts. It was a time of spiritual discovery and learning from each other. We can find a healthy cycle here: be in fellowship with Jesus and other disciples, go out and proclaim the kingdom of God, return to the fellowship and report what God has done. We see the same cycle in St. Paul’s missionary journeys. Practicing this healthy cycle helps us to live vibrant lives as Jesus’ disciples. However, leaving out one of these elements can be detrimental. If our fellowship with Jesus and his people is weak, we can become worldly. And if we neglect going out to proclaim the kingdom, we become ineffective and even irrelevant. And if we fail to report what God has done, we miss the chance to learn from others, and lose accountability to the

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fellowship. But when we have a healthy mix of fellowship, witnessing and reporting we can grow continually and be a blessing in the Christian fellowship and the world. Our lives will be dynamic, meaningful and fruitful.

Jesus knew that his disciples were very tired. They needed some rest. So he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida (10b). The word “withdraw” implies “retreat.” It was a time of retreat and restoration after hard work. We might call this “R & R.” Jesus allows us “R & R,” not perpetually, but from time to time after hard work. To the disciples it was a very special time to be alone with Jesus away from the crowd. They might have planned a barbeque, softball, and nap time. But they did not realize how successful their journey was. People who had experienced the kingdom of God were looking for them: “Where is Peter? John? Bartholomew?” Discovering that they had retreated, the crowd pursued them passionately. In fact, the crowd was at the retreat place waiting for them. The disciples felt sorry they lost the chance for “R & R.”

What did Jesus do? Let’s read verse 11b. **“He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.”** “Welcome!” What a beautiful word. Many cities and airports post the word “Welcome” at entry points, sometimes in many languages. But the motivation may be to prosper their city. However, when Jesus welcomed the crowd, he did not expect to receive anything from them. He wanted to be with them and to take care of them. This crowd was made up of many kinds of needy people, each with pressing issues. They were desperate and demanding. Everyone else felt burdened by them. But not Jesus. Jesus welcomed them. Jesus did not say, “Why do you only come to me when you need something?” Or “Why do you come again with the same problem?” Jesus welcomed them with love and acceptance, unconditionally. Jesus said, **“...whoever comes to me I will never drive away”** (Jn 6:37b). Even though they interrupted Jesus’ plan for a retreat, he was not reluctant; he welcomed them with joy and was genuinely glad to see them. This is Jesus’ welcoming heart toward people. It is like the heart of the father of the prodigal son. Not only does he welcome us, but he runs toward us when we come to him. This Jesus, who welcomed the crowd, is now in heavenly glory at the right hand of God the Father. Now he welcomes us into the presence of God without any human limits. Whether we are in Mexico, Canada, Russia, Ukraine, India or the USA, Jesus welcomes those who come to him. Whether it is morning, afternoon or evening, spring, summer, fall or winter, the Middle Ages or 2016, Jesus welcomes us. Jesus even takes the initiative and invites us first. Jesus said, **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest”** (Mt 11:28). **“Here I**

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am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Rev 3:20). At this moment, Jesus welcomes each of us who have come to him. Thank you, Jesus!

After welcoming them, what did Jesus do? People had many practical problems: poverty, hunger, failing health, oppression, and so on. Jesus could have organized a political movement and worked for social reform. Jesus could have entertained people to cheer them up for a short time. But Jesus did not. He spoke about the kingdom of God. It seemed irrelevant to them. But in fact, it is what they needed most. Why? Though people seem to have many problems, at the root, all people have a common problem. It is bondage to the power of sin and death. This is manifest in many ways, through addictions, personality disorders, family dysfunction, injustices, social deviance, and even criminal behavior. No one can solve this problem. In spite of vast advances in technology and education, the fundamental tragedies of the human condition remain the same now as they were thousands of years ago. But Jesus rescues us from the power of sin and death. Jesus forgives our sins and unites us with the Father God. Jesus heals our inner wounds and restores the image of God within us. Jesus rules over us with love, joy and peace. Moreover, Jesus gives us living hope in the kingdom of God. Our lives in this world are temporary. Someday each of us will leave this world. What then? Without Jesus, there is God’s judgment and eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. But Jesus changes our destiny. Jesus welcomes into his kingdom all who trust in him. Jesus gives us living hope in the kingdom of God. We have real security and everlasting victory in Jesus. This is what all people need more than anything else. This is why Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God to all who came to him. Jesus also healed the sick. Jesus cared for people practically.

When we see what Jesus was doing, it is clear that he was like a father and mother to the people who came to him. Jesus had a parent’s heart for them. Parents love their children unconditionally. They are always ready to help their children. Parents look at their children differently than others do. Parents always love, hope and support, especially when their children are struggling. This reflects the heart of Christ. Apostle Paul learned the heart of Christ. Though the Galatian believers were hardhearted and betrayed Paul after being poisoned by enemies of the gospel, he did not give up on them. Paul said, **“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...”** (Gal 4:19).

As Jesus ministered to people one by one, he did not seem to realize that time was passing by. It was late afternoon, and the sun was now setting over the western horizon. The disciples had waited patiently, without complaining about

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their cancelled retreat. But now they felt compelled to speak up. So they came to Jesus and suggested that he send the crowd away so they could go and find food and lodging (12). Their words are reasonable. They were trying to help both Jesus and the crowd. They seem to be good administrators. But Jesus did not agree with them. He said, **“You give them something to eat”** (13a). It meant that they should have a parent’s heart for the crowd, as he did. They should feel the hunger of each person as if it were their own child, and feed them by any means. Being a kingdom worker is not a matter of position, but of heart. There are many needy people around each of us. Without a parent’s heart, we feel burdened by them and become critical and judgmental. But when we have a parent’s heart, we see that they are the very person God wants us to help.

How did the disciples respond? They answered, **“We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.”** About five thousand men were there (13b-14a). The disciples were a little rebellious. To them, the crowd was too big and too demanding. But Jesus did not rebuke them. He began to work with them and helped them to step out in faith. He said, **“Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each”** (14b). The disciples did so, and everyone sat down (15). The crowd became orderly and a sense of expectation arose. Then Jesus took the five loaves and two fish. He looked up to heaven, gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people (16). In this way five loaves and two fish became enough to feed the whole crowd of people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over (17). Jesus demonstrated that he is the Almighty Provider, and especially his parent’s heart toward needy people.

Does Jesus still work miracles today? UBF ministry is an example. Jesus has blessed so many people to experience God’s kingdom through kingdom workers who learned his parent’s heart. I hope we can share our personal stories with each other during this week. I would also like to share a story that you may not have heard from the city of Juarez, Mexico. ¹ In 1972, a Jesuit priest, Father Rick Thomas was inspired by Luke 14:12-14 to serve people in need. He organized a group of workers, prepared food for 150 people and went to a notorious garbage dump where the poorest people lived. When he arrived, he found they were separated into two rival gangs. The leader of the bigger gang said, “Feed us first, then if there is anything left, you can give it to the others.” But Father Thomas refused, saying, “We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Let’s eat together.” Then he went to a neutral place and began to distribute food. They realized that there

¹ <http://www.handsforchristministry.org/thechristmasmiracle.html>

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was not enough for everyone, but they gave what they brought. Hungry people began to eat with thanksgiving. Their hearts opened to each other and they began to sing and dance together. Strangely, the food supply did not run out. The lady serving the ham kept cutting slice after slice, but it did not run out. She became so tired that she asked a young person to take over the job. There were over 300 people present. Everyone ate as much as they wanted and there was still food left over. So they distributed generous portions to three nearby orphanages. When one person has a parent's heart and trusts in Jesus, miracles still happen.

Today we have learned of Jesus' welcoming heart, and proclaiming the kingdom of God. Jesus did so through words, through his disciples, and by driving out demons, healing the sick, and caring for the needy. Let's pray to learn Jesus' parent's heart and proclaim the kingdom of God in our time.