



Luke 9:1-22 – Jesus’ Church Begins: Evangelizing the Lost and Feeding its Members

Then He [Jesus] said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” -- Luke 9:20

We continue our expository journey through the gospel of Luke this week with **Luke 9:1-9**. Last week, we saw how Jesus exercised His authority over every created realm (over nature, the spirit world, illness, and even death). Now we see Jesus is able to extend both the power and authority to do these things to His twelve apostles. Specifically, they can command demons and heal sickness as His representatives. Mark 6:7 tells us He sent them in pairs (“two by two”) and Matthew 10:5 lets us know Jesus’ commanded them to only go to the villages of Israel and avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans. Going out together allowed for mutual support as they went, and their message of the kingdom of God was still, at this point in time, for the house of Israel first. This is the same good news Jesus gave solely in Luke 4:43, but now he extends development to a new people. Of note here, Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus, wields this divine power to some degree!

Verses 7-9 are Luke’s first indication that John the Baptist has been martyred when the expansion of miracle-working news reached Herod the tetrarch (Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, but only given rule over one fourth of his father’s kingdom, which included Galilee). His interest in seeing Jesus lies in a curious fear—was John or some other prophet returned from the dead? He remains perplexed, but does not see Jesus yet.

When Jesus’ disciples return from their ventures, He pulls them away to Bethsaida (Julias), a very small city in a “desolate place” east of the Sea of Galilee (and not to be confused with the similarly named hometown of Peter, Andrew, and Philip). Read **Luke 9:10-17**. This is important to know because the crowds follow Him there, where He welcomes them and tests the disciples to feed them. Notice that even though Jesus had sought to get away from the crowds He still welcomes them, preaches the kingdom of God, and heals all. In verse 12 we have the amazing situation where the disciples advise Jesus on what He should do! Focused on the night falling and the absence of any restaurants or markets nearby, they tell Jesus to send all 5,000 men away—along with their spouses and children, this is easily a crowd of 15,000 people. Instead, Jesus directs *them* to feed the crowd. After exercising Jesus’ authorized power through the villages, they still think only in the physical realm. Their five loaves of bread and two fish are all they have. There ain’t no way!

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Our desire is to witness God’s work in transforming hearts.
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But then Jesus takes over, and there is a way. He has the crowd separated into subgroups of fifty each and has them sit down. God is a god of order, and Jesus takes steps to avoid letting the crowd become a mob. Then, taking what the disciples had He prays to heaven, blesses the loaves and fish, and behold, it miraculously multiplied! The disciples then deliver it to each group (a foreshadow of ministry) and everyone ate to contentment; there were even leftovers in 12 baskets. This illustrates that what is impossible for men is easy for our God, a point made explicitly twice in this gospel (Luke 1:37; 18:27). John 6 goes further: What Jesus accomplishes here points back to God feeding Israel in the desert with manna. Jesus, not Moses, is the bread of life--and unlike the grumbling people with Moses, Jesus' bread fully satisfies.

Once Jesus finally gets alone with His disciples He enters into His customary time of prayer and then initiates a conversation (read **Luke 9:18-22**). "Who do the crowds say I am?" generates a variety of suggestions, ranging from John the Baptist (as Herod suspected), Elijah, or one of the other prophets. This shows how the king also exhibited prophet-like words and deeds. But we know Jesus was more than just a prophet like so many who came before. He pointedly asks His followers, "But who do YOU say I am?" to which Peter answers, "the Christ of God." What Peter proclaims is Jesus is the Anointed One (Greek: *Christus*) of God and thus the king. It is worth seeing Matthew's expanded account of this exchange at Matthew 16:13-20, where we see Peter's great confession included that Jesus was also the "Son of the living God". Jesus commends him because only by divine revelation could he have known this, and expressed it. Renaming Simon as Peter (*petros*) Jesus proclaims that the church would be built on this rock (*petras*), which some have taken to mean on Peter himself. However, it makes more sense that the rock on which the church rests is the confession that Peter made, that Jesus is the Anointed One of God and the Son of God, and so fulfilling all that the prophets foretold. He is the descendant of King David, who was also anointed and called "messiah", but Jesus is more: He is an eternally divine member of the trinity that makes up the one living creator God--expressed in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He then charges them to secrecy; share this information with no one.

In both gospels this conversation leads to Jesus' revelation that their road would lead to suffering, rejection, and His execution—but on the third day to be raised. The last phrase seems overlooked by the disciples in all the accounts! Peter famously puts his foot into his mouth and earns a swift rebuke from Jesus (Matthew 16:23) but Luke does not include that in our text. However, imagine the shock these disciples felt with this news. Although foretold in such Old Testament texts as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, they cannot believe this God-man, able to calm the seas, exorcise demons, heal diseases, and feed thousands with essentially nothing could be executed. And they are right; Jesus would never be harmed by anyone unless He allowed it to happen. As we will see, it was God's will that Jesus be the willing, once-for-all, atoning sacrifice to pay for our sins and He fully obeyed. Praise the name above all names, Jesus!

Questions To Ponder Further: *"Who do YOU say that I am?" I submit this is the most important question we can answer in our lives! Your understanding of who Christ is has eternal consequences. Be sure you know Him, and that He knows you—don't be like Herod! You may know about Him from a lifetime of going to church and still miss really knowing Him. Follow Him today!*

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