

Encounters with Jesus: The 12s Healing

Luke 9:1-6

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Please turn with me to Luke chapter 9. You will find this on page 733 in the pew Bible in front of you if you didn't bring your own.

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I want to start with a question today, and that is: After people meet Jesus what happens next? After He touches their life transforming them into new creations, new people, what happens next?

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And if you had to answer that question with one word the word most of us would come up with would be "discipleship." Discipleship happens next. After all the last command Jesus left us with was

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

And that would be the right answer, the problem is "discipleship" is one of those nebulous church words we all use, but aren't necessarily sure what it means.

My experience, and perhaps this has been your experience as well is that in my thirty years in church I can't count how many times I've been urged to embrace discipleship, but almost every time this challenge came it looked different.

Sometimes it was a Bible study happening on Wednesday nights for 12 weeks. Sometimes it was a book to read. Sometimes it meant meeting for coffee one on one and chatting about life. I took on several of these ventures over the years and even led a few, but I have to admit that after the class was finished and the book was read I still found myself feeling that whatever discipleship was I hadn't really nailed it down.

So churches have come up with lots of different ideas about what discipleship is – what happens after we encounter Jesus – but my question is "what does the Bible say discipleship is?" What does Jesus say discipleship is, because really nothing else matters.

And as I looked for this I discovered that the word "discipleship" never occurs in the Bible at all – not once. There are hundreds of references to disciples but not one reference to them being discipled or called to discipleship. The closest we come is the reference we already looked at in Matthew 28 where Jesus says "Go and make disciples", but notice He didn't say "Go be discipled" or even "Go and disciple people".

Here's what this means: In the West we've taken Jesus' command to make disciples – in other words to turn sinners into Jesus followers – and made discipleship into something we can do in the church with other Christians. And this is not the same thing.

So what I want to do today is look at what the Bible and Jesus say about discipleship.

Would you pray with me to this end?

[Pray]

Look with me at the first part of Luke 9 verse 1

[Read Luke 9:1a]

This morning rather than a thesis I want to define what discipleship meant to Jesus and then work to unpack it from the text. Here it is: **A disciple is someone Jesus calls and uniquely empowers to make disciples.**

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Ready? Chapter 9 in Luke marks the rough half way point in Jesus' ministry. So if from His baptism to the cross was about 3 years, then we are about 18 months into it now. And up until this point Jesus has been doing all the teaching, all the healing, all the casting out of demons, and all the discipling. Really ministry for Jesus has been a one man show.

But things are starting to heat up and so at 18 months Jesus makes an intentional shift in His focus.

In verse 22 of this chapter Jesus predicts His death for the first time saying:
 The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (Luke 9:22)

Yikes! But because death and resurrection were what Jesus had come for, instead of trying to avoid it verse 51 says:

As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)

Jerusalem was where Jesus would die. And so Jesus marks the halfway point of His ministry by changing His focus from being the One on mission to being the One making disciples who go on mission.

And so He called His disciples together.

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Now the 12 had already been following Jesus for more than a year so this isn't their call to salvation it's more of a commissioning call.

But here we see something interesting; in spite of the fact Jesus spent a lot of time with some of His disciples – namely Peter, James and John and especially Peter – here all 12 get called together for the first time and no distinction is made between them.

Peter the fisherman is here, Matthew the tax collector is here, Simon the zealot is here, even Judas is here. Jesus calls and commissions all His disciples together.

And Jesus is still doing this. Everyone who comes to Jesus for salvation gets the call described in this text regardless of what your abilities are or how much time you've spent with Jesus. After all each of the 12 had different strengths and weaknesses; Peter believed anything without understanding what he believed while Thomas doubted even when all the evidence came in. James and John – “the sons of thunder” – were outspoken and bold while Thaddeus never said a word in the entire Gospels. Yet Jesus calls all twelve to the same thing.

The reality is that everyone Jesus calls to follow Him gets the same job. And that job is reproducing Jesus in other people. **A disciple is someone Jesus calls and uniquely empowers to make disciples.**

And the reason why is that Jesus made disciples and then commanded us to make disciples who – if they're following Jesus – make disciples. Make sense?

And so Jesus called the 12 together. Now I mentioned that the number 12 was a way of referring to Israel last week, and the picture we saw there was that all of Israel, from the poorest outcasts to the highest profile leaders, were sick and in need of a touch from Jesus. This week Jesus turns His attention to His 12 disciples.

Now Luke puts these stories back to back, but Mark tells us something happened between them, and that was that Jesus went to His home town, which was in the area, and began preaching in the synagogue. But His own countrymen responded:

‘Where did this man get these things?... Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him. (Mark 6:1-3)

In other words Jesus was rejected at this halfway point in His ministry. And so Jesus turns His attention to His 12 disciples – 12 men to represent the new heads of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Old Israel had rejected Him, but now the true Israelite was going to be, not someone born of a specific blood line, but someone who has been changed by the Holy Spirit to look like Jesus. This is why Paul says:

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. (Romans 2:28-29)

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If you are a Christian here today this is your new identity and your new purpose is to make disciples. **A disciple is someone Jesus calls and uniquely empowers to make disciples.**

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Now very briefly I want to correct a misunderstanding about the call of God on a person's life otherwise known as "the call to ministry."

A lot of people have mistakenly believed that the "Call to ministry" is something only pastors get which leads them to leave the secular work force and become employed full time by the church.

That's a mistake. You can't find that call in the Bible. The reality is that all Christians are called to ministry.

If anything you could argue that the only people who haven't been called to ministry are those employed full time by the church. Because Paul tells us:

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12 NKJV)

Paul says "Your job is to do the ministry; my job is to equip you to do that." And Jesus is modeling this here. He gave His disciples the job of doing the ministry and His job was to equip and empower them to do it.

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Now, just because we all receive the same call as disciples doesn't mean disciple making looks the same for all of us. The reality is each of us finds ourselves with different abilities, living in different neighbourhoods, working along side different people and having different friends.

And so Christ uniquely empowers us with the gifts to do ministry, or make disciples, in the context He puts us in. Look what Jesus does here in the bottom half of verse 1:

[Read Luke 9:1b]

Something we see over and over again throughout the New Testament is that Jesus' call is always huge and intimidating, but it always comes in a full-meal-deal with His enabling power.

When Jesus was about to ascend to Heaven He commanded His disciples:
 Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:4;8)

In other words I want you to embark upon an evangelism tour of the entire world – that’s huge and intimidating – but don’t do this yourselves, wait for the Holy Spirit to empower you. When that happens you **will** be My witnesses.

And so Jesus says to Fort George “I want you to make disciples out of the sinners you work, study and live beside. Oh and by the way I know that’s huge, so do you want to make that a meal? Here’s My Holy Spirit who will give you the power to do it.”

Jesus uniquely gifts us with us the ability to follow the call He lays before us.

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Now, notice how Jesus empowered the 12 on this occasion. Luke tells us Jesus gifted them with “authority to drive out **all** demons and to **cure** diseases.”

That’s huge! Because Jesus is sending the 12 to prepare people in the surrounding regions for His teaching for the first time He gives them the same power that He Himself had.

And this brings us to a controversial subject of how do Jesus’ supernatural gifts operate today. There are basically two camps among Christians on this subject – those who believe the supernatural gifts ended with the early church, and those who believe the supernatural gifts continue to this day.

Now this debate is big and there are lots of scriptures to consider, but today I don’t have time to get into all of that so what I’m going to do is tell you where I come down on this – and if what I say makes you angry, or perhaps if you are just interested in learning more, come talk to me after and I will direct you to some good resources.¹

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I believe that the supernatural gifts of God are very much alive and active today, but all the gifts God gives are only given to those God chooses – not to everyone, they are only given when needed, and they may change over the course of a person’s life.

¹ See for example John Piper’s “Are Signs and wonders for today” (Preached Feb 25, 1990) on www.desiringgod.org

And I think this position is biblical because this is the way we see the disciples operating in this chapter. In verse 1 we read the 12 had the “authority to drive out **all** demons” – and they did. But then after they got back from their trip this specific gift diminished because in verse 40 a man with a demon possessed child came to Jesus saying:

I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not. (Luke 9:40)

So the abilities Jesus gave the 12 changed from time to time depending on what they had been called and empowered to do. That’s all I’m going to say about that today.

So therefore, while all Christians are all called to make disciples, how we go about doing this is dependent on the situation we have been placed in and the gifts Jesus gives us.

So let’s make this practical and personal.

Ask yourself “Where has God placed me now? Where am I working or studying or living? Who are my friends? What social circles do I interact in?” This is where Jesus has called you to make disciples because Jesus made disciples where He was. And **a disciple is someone Jesus calls and empowers to make disciples.**

The next question is “What gifts has Jesus given me to do what I have been called to do?” While the call to make disciples of Jesus is never easy, Jesus always gives us the gifts to be effective in our situation. Paul says:

For just as each of us has one body with many members... so in Christ we... have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. (Romans 12:4-6)

The only question is “are you using the gifts that you have been given to make disciples.

Maybe you have been gifted to serve, are you meeting the needs of those Christ has put you in contact with? Maybe you have been gifted to teach, are you opening the word to those around you? Maybe you have been gifted to give, are you passing on the blessings you’ve been blessed with? Maybe you’ve been gifted to lead, are you leading?

The Bible tells us Jesus has gifted every person He has calls to follow Him. If you’ve been called are you using the gifts you’ve been given to make disciples?

Friends, I know this strikes close to home because it strikes close to home for me.

This is where discipleship has been derailed in the church of the West. It has become something we study about rather than something we act out. But Jesus is remarkably clear – He empowered His disciples with specific abilities for the purpose of reproducing Himself.

And verse 2 lays out how that happens.

[Read Luke 9:2]

So all the disciples were called regardless of their natural abilities, regardless of how much they knew or how long they had been with Jesus. Then they were empowered with specific gifts to do the ministry they had been called to. And now finally Jesus sends all of them out to make disciples like Jesus made disciples.

So how did Jesus make disciples?

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Well it's actually pretty easy to boil Jesus' ministry down to a few things. Now here I'm not talking about Jesus' mission. His mission was to save humanity, and He did that through His death and resurrection.

But His ministry happened in the 3 years leading up to that point where His primary goal was to make disciples. And He did this by proclaiming the kingdom of Heaven and healing the sick.

Just for example we see this in verse 11 of this chapter, after the disciples return a crowd forms and we read:

He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. (Luke 9:11)

And it's no coincidence that Jesus calls His disciples to do that same thing He had been doing because Jesus was about making disciples and **A disciple is someone Jesus calls and empowers to make disciples.**

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Now there are three things in verse 2: Jesus sent them out to proclaim, the Kingdom of God, and heal the sick.

First this word proclaim could also be translated "herald" and Luke is picturing something specific.

In the first century they didn't have cell phones or facebook – I know, how did they survive? – and so they relied on town criers to deliver news especially in matters of life and death.

And this played itself out when an opposing army would attack a walled city. The men of the city would go out to fight and everyone else would stay back behind the walls waiting to hear the outcome of the battle.

If the battle would be won they would live in freedom even enjoying some of the plunders of war. However, if the battle would be lost they would likely be forced from their city, their wives and children would be killed or enslaved and life as they knew it would be over.

But from inside the city nobody would have any idea how things were going out on the battle field. And so a crier or herald would scout, either from a tower in the city or from close to the battle. And when the outcome was evident he would run back as fast as he could.

And if the battle was lost he would come to the city yelling “run for your lives, everything is doomed, you are about to die!” And if the battle was won he would come in yelling “good news” victory is at hand, your life and liberty are ensured!

But regardless of what the outcome was the method of proclamation was the same – it was passionate because the message was so important and the herald had seen it first hand.

So when Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God He wasn't teaching about it like a high school teacher talks about going to the moon, He was describing it because He was bringing it – He knew about it first hand.

And Jesus sent out the 12 in the same way. They had tasted what Jesus was bringing, and now they were to passionately proclaim what they had experienced.

Are you passionate about your encounter with Jesus?

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And what the disciples had experienced was the kingdom of God. So what is the kingdom? In Mark 1 we read:

Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15 NKJV)

Now the kingdom of God is a tricky thing to sum up because Jesus never sums it up for us. And that is because the kingdom was what He was about for 3 years – all His ministry, all His miracles, all His teaching leading up ultimately to what He did on the cross and in the tomb.

But Mark ties all of what the Kingdom of God was about together for us with the word Gospel.

So the kingdom of God then is God coming to earth in the person of Jesus to pay for and free humanity from sin that enslaves us, and to re-create us in His image so that we can re-enter communion with Him. The Kingdom is God breaking into the world we live in and changing us. That is the Good News of the Gospel that we are to proclaim...

Have you told someone recently about how the kingdom of God broke into your life and changed you from what you were to what you are becoming?

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But what does that have to do with healing the sick?

The reason these two things go together is because the message of the kingdom of God is that there is healing for humanity. God is making all things new and that means there is healing for the sin sick and the spiritually sick, and there is healing for the physically sick.

But this healing doesn't necessarily mean we can cast out all demons or cure all diseases now – there is an “already” and a “not yet” component to the kingdom. But today it means that God's people are the salt and light of the world we live in; we bless the world around us and in so doing draw it to the True source of Healing – Jesus Christ.

And so Christians can bring healing to their cities in lots of ways. If you have the gift of curing diseases by all means use it, if you have the gift of giving then use your money to heal. If you have the gift of service than use your service to heal. If you have the gift of leadership then use your gift to lead people to healing.

Is your life bringing healing in the place God has put you?

If you have been called by Jesus then use whatever gifts He has given you to proclaim the kingdom of heaven and heal the sick because this is what Jesus did and this is what His disciples do. **A disciple is someone Jesus calls and uniquely empowers to make disciples**, and we do this by using the gifts He gives us to proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick.

Friends, ask yourself, am I a disciple of Jesus, or have I been hiding out in church making discipleship something I do once a week with other Christians?

The fact is there are two kinds of people who encounter Jesus, those who keep that encounter head knowledge, and those who go out proclaiming the Gospel, bringing healing and making disciples in the way He has empowered them to do. And only the second kind of people are actually disciples.

Friends it is time for people like you and I to use the gifts we've been given to make disciples.