

Luke 9:1-17: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 9 verses 1 to 17 And he called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. And he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to heal.

And he said to them, Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money, and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart.

And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them. And they departed, and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Now Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen.

Herod said, John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him. On their return the apostles told him all that they had done.

[1 : 0 0] And he took them, and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. 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.

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.

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. For there were about five thousand men.

And he said to his disciples, Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each. And they did so, and had them all sit down. 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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

[2 : 0 1] In Luke chapter 9, Jesus calls the twelve together, gives them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and sends them out to proclaim the kingdom. They are sent out in many respects like spies preparing for a later conquest.

There will be those who prepare the way for the later mission of the church. And they are sent without provisions. They are dependent upon the people to whom they are sent for their sustenance and their supplies.

Among other things, this is a test of hospitality, as we see in the story of Sodom or the story of Rahab and Jericho. In the story of Sodom, for instance, there is a juxtaposition between the story of Abraham in the preceding chapter, in chapter 18, and the story of chapter 19, where the hospitality of Abraham is seen in sharp contrast with the inhospitality of the city of Sodom.

If they are not welcomed, they will shake the dust off their feet. It marks the place out for judgment in the future. And as they go, they extend the message of the kingdom. They are calling people to repent in preparation for the coming reign of the Lord.

It is a message that will be confirmed by the signs that they perform, the miracles and the casting out of demons. And news of all of this comes to Herod. Herod hears that some think that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected, and he wants to hear him.

[3 : 17] There is clearly a resemblance between the two characters. As John the Baptist performed no mighty signs, we must presume that the resemblance was chiefly in the content of their teaching and the manner of their teaching.

They are both people who teach with boldness and authority. The apostles return from their mission, and they have the news of their success. And with Jesus, they go to a deserted location near Bethsaida to rest for a while.

They need time to refresh themselves, to regain their strength. They are followed by crowds, and Jesus teaches them concerning the kingdom, and then heals. However, as the day goes on, they need to get food.

They are in a desolate place, and they need to go to the surrounding villages to buy something to eat. But Jesus challenges his disciples to give the crowd something to eat. All they have, however, is five loaves and two fish.

In the five loaves, we might recall the five loaves of 1 Samuel chapter 21, which David received when he was fleeing from Saul. On that occasion, in 1 Samuel chapter 21, verse 3, David asked Himelech, Now then, what do you have on hand?

[4 : 21] Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here. Jesus is a new David, who is going to provide for his people. Jesus instructs his disciples to get the crowd to sit down, and they sit down in groups of 50.

They're numbered as men only as well. This suggests that they are like a military company. Israel left Egypt and entered Canaan in 50s, in Exodus chapter 13, verse 18, and Joshua chapter 1, verse 14.

And in that occasion as well, they were numbered apart from women and children, in Exodus chapter 12, verse 37. We might perhaps consider the way that there are themes of Exodus at play here.

They're being given bread in the wilderness, as Israel was fed by manna in Exodus chapter 16. In Exodus chapter 18, Israel was divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens under appointed leaders.

And this chapter is very much concerned with the twelve apostles. Jesus, among other things, is instructing his disciples to take leadership in his name over the crowd.

[5 : 25] He is here then preparing them for their later ministry. He is highlighting their role as ministers, acting on his behalf towards the flock of which he is the chief shepherd. And his action with the loaves highlights Eucharistic themes.

This is like the Lord's Supper. He takes, he blesses, he breaks, and he gives it to his disciples to distribute to the crowd. The same sort of language is found in Luke chapter 22, verse 19, as the supper is instituted.

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. We've seen ways in which Jesus could be compared to David here.

Also ways in which he could be compared to Moses. There are also ways in which he could be compared with Elisha. Elisha performed a multiplication of loaves in 2 Kings chapter 4, verses 42 to 44.

Jesus here performs a similar miracle, and the parallels are very easy to hear, but it's performed on a much larger scale.

[6 : 51] Instead of 100 men, you have 100 groups of 50 men. Elisha's company has, as it were, grown into a great army. Also, as we just read about John the Baptist and the speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead, we might think about the connection between the ministry of John the Baptist and Elijah, and the way that the relationship between the ministry of John the Baptist and Christ is similar to that between Elijah and Elisha.

Jesus' performing of an Elisha-like miracle at this point may cast the succession of Jesus from the Elijah-like John in sharper relief. The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is told in each of the four Gospels.

It is obviously a very significant event. Prior to the Passion Week, there were very few events that are found in each one of the Gospels, but yet this one is. It suggests that we should meditate upon its significance.

Each Gospel also includes the detail of the 12 baskets of fragments gathered up afterwards. We are not merely told that many fragments were gathered up. It's important that there were 12 baskets of fragments gathered up.

Why 12? You could maybe think of an association with the fullness of Israel. Under the leadership of the 12 Apostles, here we have a great company, a military-like company, and maybe they're associated with a new Israel being formed at this point.

[8 : 12] Perhaps we should also see that each one of the 12 has a basket apiece. In keeping with the themes of this chapter, as Jesus has sent out the 12 and also commissioned them to feed the multitude in his name, we might think about the way in which this is a lesson to them about their partaking in the ministry of Christ.

This is also something that happens as they have returned from their mission. They were sent out at the beginning of the chapter, then they returned, and now perhaps they're being given a sign about a different stage of their mission.

The initial stage was one of proclamation. They are, as it were, heralds sent out with a message concerning the coming kingdom. However, their ministry will extend beyond that. Their ministry will also be that of shepherds.

They will have to feed a flock. And Jesus, I believe, is preparing them for that ministry at this point here. A question to consider.

Within this passage, we've seen the way that the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus are connected. We've seen the way Christ has commissioned and empowered his disciples for the ministry of proclamation.

[9 : 18] And we've also seen how, as chief shepherd, he prepares and equips the shepherds under him to provide for the flock. In each of these things, we're seeing the ministry of Christ connected with the ministry of other persons.

How can we understand our own vocations as Christians as connected with the ministry of Christ? How might this passage illumine our understanding of this?