

Sending the Twelve & Feeding the Five Thousand (Luke 9:1-17)



We are coming to the final stages of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee region. Following this passage is Peter's confession of Christ, and it marks a great turning point in the gospel.

A. Sending of the Twelve Apostles

1. This is where the twelve disciples became apostles, i.e. 'sent ones.' This is the first release of the apostolic ministry on the earth. Jesus does it again in the next chapter in Luke 10 with seventy of his disciples, a six-fold increase from the twelve. I believe we are very close today to this point in the church also. We need to ask the Lord to release the apostolic ministries on the earth again. Note that there are no more apostles who will write the Scriptures, but there will be apostles who will be sent forth by God with authority and power from heaven.
2. In commissioning the Twelve, Jesus gave them His 'power' and His 'authority' – and they needed both - over all demons and sicknesses, including coronavirus. This commissioning could have been done by the laying on of hands, we don't know. But the apostles were commissioned to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick just like Jesus did. For 2 ½ years they were the understudy for Jesus. Understudy is a person who learns another's role in order to be able to act in their absence at short notice. Now they were sent to do the same, but away from Jesus' physical presence. You learn certain things by doing them, not just attending seminars. Praying for the sick and casting out demons are great examples of such.
3. They were given certain commands.
 - a. They were to travel light, i.e. not to take extra resources (v3). Why? (1) They needed to learn to depend on God's supply, and (2) They were to depend on the people they were sent to and on their hospitality, for food, change of clothing, money, etc. It is a challenge, and mission statistics confirm this.
 - b. They were to stay in the house that has welcomed them and not move from house to house. Why? They were to avoid the temptation to move from a small humble place to a better and bigger place. It can cause unhealthy competition among the recipients of the gospel. For the messengers sent by God, their most important task is to deliver His message clearly, and they must avoid unnecessary scandals and obstacles if at all possible, in order not to hinder the gospel they are sent to preach.
 - c. If people did not receive them, they were to shake off the dust from their feet and leave it as a 'testimony' against them. Why? They were sent by Jesus with His authority. Therefore, receiving them was the same thing as receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew's gospel Jesus teaches the twelve not to fear man who can kill the body but not the soul, but instead fear God who can destroy both the soul and the body in hell. (C.f. Matt 10:28).
4. The impact of Jesus' ministry is now multiplied by the twelve apostles, and the news reached Herod's ears. Remember Herod Antipas was a tetrarch, one of the four kings in charge of the holy land, and Chusa, Herod's steward (~accountant) was married to Joanna, one of the women disciples who supported Jesus' ministry. (Luke 8:3)
5. People were now saying Jesus must be one of the great prophets of Israel, who has come back to life with even greater power, such as John the Baptist or Elijah etc. This troubled Herod because he'd executed John for calling out his incestuous behaviour of taking Herodias, his brother's wife, to be his own. In fact it was almost impossible to construct Herod's family tree because of the rampant incest and murder within the family. And now Herod wanted Jesus to come and see him.

But Jesus never goes to see Herod, but he refers to Herod as "that fox..." (Luke 13:32). Just before the crucifixion when Jesus was taken to Herod in chains, He never speaks a word to Herod.

B. Feeding of the Five Thousand – the Providential Picnic

1. This is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all the four gospels.
 - a. The twelve apostles came back from the mission trip, very excited. Jesus took them aside to the little village of Bethsaida to rest and to debrief (v10). But the word got out and the crowd literally ran ahead of

them on foot, and was waiting for Jesus and the disciples in Bethsaida! (C.f. Mk 6:33) Five thousand men plus women and children! (Matt 14:21)

- b. Their natural reaction would be to run from more people! They needed rest from the long mission trip. But what was Jesus' response? He received the multitude - 'ἀποδέχομαι' means 'welcomed them with hospitality' (v11). When you arrive at your holiday destination for a quiet day of rest, only to find a big crowd waiting for your ministry, it takes a lot of grace to welcome them.

Their precious day off became a day of heavy labour again. Mark records that Jesus was moved with great compassion for the multitude who were like 'sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6:34), and he preached and healed the sick all day. This was Jesus' last ministry in Galilee and his last meal with Galileans.

- c. As the sun went down, the disciples did the responsible thing by asking Jesus to dismiss the crowd so that they can go home or at least go to nearby villages to find food and lodging. It was time for dinner, and the multitude consisting of many families were miles from home. In their enthusiasm, they'd followed Jesus too far into the deserted place.
- d. But to the disciple's confusion, Jesus responded, "You (emphatic) give them something to eat" (v13). The disciples were shocked, *What? We only got five loaves of barley breads and two fish!* Actually, it was a little boy's lunch, not even their own, which Andrew found (c.f. John 6:9). Feeding five thousand men with a boy's lunch was impossible! Philip quickly calculated 200 denarii worth of bread would not be enough to feed the crowd.

2. Then a great miracle broke out!

- a. Jesus organised the crowd into groups of fifty (v14), ie. 100 clusters.
- b. Jesus looked up to heaven, blessed the food, i.e. 'gave thanks' and broke it. (v16)
- c. Jesus distributed the bread to the disciples. As He handed out the food, the food multiplied, creating something out of nothing! The multitude all ate and were 'satisfied'. It satisfied five thousand men's hungry stomachs plus the women and the children!
- d. They even gathered up twelve baskets of leftovers. Multiplying food is nothing new. God sent manna from heaven in the wilderness for 40 years.

Hoarding doesn't create miracles. Sharing does. In this time of global crisis, the key to God's supernatural provision is sharing.