

“Who is Jesus?”

Luke 9:1-10

That title is drawn from the words of Herod in verse 9 where he said of Jesus, “Who is this, of whom I hear such things?”

At the beginning of Luke 9 we find this account of the twelve disciples sent out for ministry in Galilee. And in the middle of this account we have what almost seems like an interruption where we are told about Herod’s response when he heard about the ministry of Jesus. And then in verse 10 we see what happened when the disciples returned to Jesus. There is much for us to learn from this passage, but the primary application for us this morning will come as we consider the identity of Jesus in light of this text.

I. The Disciples Sent Out (v. 1-6)

Before we even get to the words of this text, we learn something from this passage about Jesus Christ. We see here another example of His true humanity. Though he was truly God, He was also truly man. Because He humbled himself and took upon Himself our humanity, He was subject to all the same limitations to which we are subject. Jesus had a message to proclaim, and He proclaimed it as He traveled through Galilee during this period of His earthly ministry. But because He was truly man, He could only be in one place at one time. And just like us, He

grew tired and needed to rest. And so we see that Jesus used His disciples to help Him spread the message He had been sent to preach.

Verse 1 begins, “Then he [Jesus] called his twelve disciples together.” This is the same 12 that were listed in Luke 6:14-16, when Jesus chose them. On that occasion, when Jesus called them out of His larger circle of disciples, He called them “apostles.” Because of how the words “disciple” and “apostle” are used, particularly in the gospels, we might think they are interchangeable terms, but they are not.

The word “disciple” means “a learner,” or “a student.” But a disciple was more than just a pupil. A disciple was an adherent: they were personally committed to what was being taught and they sought to be initiators of their teacher.

The word “apostle” means “sent one.” In the Greek world, an “apostle” would be like an ambassador. Someone would send out an apostle with their authority to accomplish a specific task. The apostle was responsible to the sender for how they used that authority to accomplish the task assigned to them. They would not be sent out in a general way, but rather for very specific tasks. There were no freelance apostles. Apostles were sent on clearly defined missions, and while on those missions they acted with the full authority of whoever sent them and were accountable to him.

In the gospels the twelve are normally referred to as “disciples,” because their primary role during the earthly ministry of Jesus was to learn from Him. In

the book of Acts there is a shift and the twelve are never specifically referred to as disciples, but are always called “the twelve,” or “the apostles.” And this shift in terminology mirrors a shift in their ministry. They were no longer learning under Jesus during his earthly ministry. But rather, they were sent out to preach the gospel to the world. In verse 1 of our text the 12 are referred to as “disciples,” but we see them begin to fulfill their role as apostles as they were sent out by Jesus to preach in the towns and villages of Galilee.

Consider who these men were in light of their task. The message and ministry Jesus during his earthly ministry is beautifully summarized in Isaiah 61:1-2a. And this is the passage Jesus read when he announced his ministry in Nazareth back in Luke 4:18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

This was the task God the Father had given to God the Son to accomplish during His earthly ministry. In our text we see that Jesus sent out men to help Him preach this message.

Whom did He send?

The best and the brightest from the schools in Jerusalem? No.

The revered and esteemed from among the very conservative and highly-respected Pharisees? No.

The powerful, influential, and wealthy from the ruling class in Israel? No.

Jesus sent out some fishermen, a tax collector, and a zealot. These are not the men you and I would have picked for this exalted task. But it pleased God to use the foolish and weak things of this world to confound the wise and mighty (I Corinthians 1:27). In our weakness God makes His strength manifest (II Corinthians 12:9).

Just as Jesus used these twelve ordinary men to share the gospel during His earthly ministry, so He uses you and I today. We might not be the best and brightest. We might not be revered and esteemed. We might not be powerful, influential, or wealthy. But it has pleased God to call us to Himself and to use us to share the gospel with those around us.

Verse 1 also tells us how Jesus equipped the disciples for this period of ministry. He empowered them to work miracles. He “gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.” Why did Jesus do this? Like all other miracles, they were a sign to confirm that their message came from God. The message the disciples had was shocking. It was very different from what the people were accustomed to hearing from the Pharisees. And it was a vitally important message.

Here again we see God's mercy, patience, and longsuffering toward mankind. Not only did God enter His creation as a man. Not only did He preach and tell the people who He was and what He had come to accomplish. Not only did He work miracles to confirm this message to the people. Not only did He trouble himself to traveled around, going to where the people were, to preach to them. But He also sent out His disciples with the same message and gave them power to work miracles that men might hear the gospel and believe.

On the day of judgment, in view of the mercies of God, mankind as a whole and as individuals will be without excuse. What more could we ever dream that God would do for mankind? On the day of judgment what accusation will we bring against God and say to Him, "If you had just done more, we would have believed." God has done more for us than we could ever ask or think. Don't squander the mercy of God. Beware that you do not reject God in the day of His mercy lest you face Him in the day of His wrath.

Two specific areas of miraculous power are mentioned in verse 1. First, the twelve were given power and authority over all devils. Jesus had come to crush the head of the serpent. Wherever the power of Satan was manifest, there would Jesus show Himself victorious. As the twelve were sent out they were given the same authority Jesus had to cast down the strongholds of Satan in the hearts and lives of the people they would encounter.

Second, the twelve were given power to cure diseases. Certainly this would have made the disciples welcome wherever they went as they cured the people. And this ability to heal also points to the redemption Jesus came to accomplish. Death and disease are a result of sin. Jesus Christ came to deal with sin. He accomplished not only spiritual redemption, but a complete victory over sin. Right now believers enjoy the indwelling Holy Spirit, which is the earnest, or down-payment of our inheritance in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:14). And when Jesus returns all the dead in Christ will be raised. Raised physically. Raised incorruptible. Raised like Jesus Christ, who is the firstfruits of the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:20). We will be raised incorruptible because Jesus accomplished full and perfect redemption that covers every facet of our existence. The power of Jesus to heal and to give that same power to His disciples, pointed to the perfect redemption Jesus came to accomplish.

In verse 2 we see the specific tasks Jesus gave to the disciples. Jesus sent them out to “preach the kingdom of God, and heal the sick.” We just talked about healing the sick, so here we will focus on the preaching of the kingdom of God.

Consider this: Jesus sent His disciples out to preach about something they did not understand. In Luke 19:11 we are told that those who heard Jesus preach thought that “the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” In Acts 1:6, after the resurrection, the disciples asked Jesus “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” The disciples were still confused about the nature of the

kingdom of God, even after the resurrection. So why did Jesus send them out, at this time, to preach the kingdom of God? They did not need to perfectly understand the kingdom of God before they could point others to the Messiah who had come to establish that kingdom.

As we go on through the gospels and the book of Acts, we see the twelve deepen in their understanding of who Jesus was and the work He came to accomplish. At this point, they were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and that was enough.

There are two points of application I want to make for us. First, don't allow any feeling of inadequacy stop you from telling others about Jesus. You might not currently possess a great depth of theological knowledge. You might be very young in your Christian walk, and you have not yet had time to dig deeply into the Word of God. There may be things that you don't understand and if someone were to ask you about them you would have to say, "I don't know." But you don't need to have a perfect knowledge to tell others about Jesus. If that was necessary, then no one could share the gospel. It is enough to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you rest in Him as your Lord and Savior? Then tell others about Him. Don't allow any feeling of inadequacy stop you from pointing others to Jesus.

Second, don't rest content with the milk of the gospel, but grow in your understanding of the Word of God. The twelve were sent out on this occasion

without a full understanding of the kingdom of God, but they continued to grow in their understanding. Throughout the gospels they received further instruction from Jesus. In Acts, they were instructed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. They devoted themselves to the study of the Old Testament Scriptures. They grew in their understanding and then they used that to disciple others and help them grow.

So it should be for us. As we mature in our Christian walk our depth of understanding should grow. The gospel is beautiful in its simplicity. It is also beautiful in its complexity, its depth. God is glorified in all aspects of the gospel. And as we grow into our understanding, we will grow in our reverence and worship. I Peter 1:12 tells us that the angels in heaven desire to look into the depths of the gospel, and so should we, for there God is glorified.

In verses 3-5 we read the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples on this occasion. In verse 3 Jesus told them not to take any supplies with them on their journey. The instruction was clear, "Take nothing for your journey." And then Jesus gave specifics. Don't take multiple staves, or walking sticks. Don't take a script, or a pack for food. Don't take any bread. Don't take any money Don't take two coats. Jesus sent them out on this occasion with only the cloths on their backs.

Before we look at this in depth, it's important to note that this is a descriptive passage and not a prescriptive passage. That is, it tells us what happened on this occasion and not what we should do now. When someone is

preparing to go out for ministry today, we should not go to this passage and say, “This is what Jesus expects you to do.”

How do we know? Jesus made this clear later on in His ministry. In Luke 22:36 Jesus was talking about the events in our text and He said, “But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.” So it is clear that this passage is descriptive and not prescriptive.

That should lead us to ask: Why did Jesus instruct his disciples not to take anything with them at this time?

First, it was to teach them to rely on God’s provision. In Luke 22:35 we read, “And he [Jesus] said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing.” Through this experience Jesus taught his disciples to trust in the providential supply of God.

Second, it ensured that the disciples would go immediately. There was not a period of preparation for this trip. They did not gather supplies and set-up logistics. Jesus sent them out and they immediately went. This was important as Jesus’ earthly ministry was a relatively short period of time. And finally, it ensured that the disciples would be received (or rejected), not on the basis of such things things such as their clothing or provisions, but on the basis of the gospel they preached.

In verse 4 Jesus told his disciples how their needs would be met during this trip. When they were received as guests in a home, they were to remain as guests at

that home until they left that area. Hospitality like this was a common part of the culture at that time. Traveling teachers would often be welcome guests in homes. The disciples were not to take advantage this hospitality by jumping from home to home in a community. Whatever home first welcomed them, they were to stay there until they left that area. This was the means God would use on this occasion to provide for the needs of the twelve.

In verse 5 Jesus told his disciples how to handle rejection. Wherever they were not received, when they left that city they were to shake the dust off of their feet as a testimony against them. This was a strongly symbolic action for the Jews. They considered the dust of heathen lands to be unclean and thus defiling. Maimonides, the Jewish philosophers, wrote: “The dust which is without the land of Israel defile[s] by touching or carrying.”¹ Some Jews would go so far as to not buy herbs grown outside of the land of Israel lest some dust might still be on those plants and their food would be defiled by it. And some Jews would shake the dust off their feet when they left Gentile lands as a symbolic gesture to show that they would not be defiled by the wickedness of the Gentiles.

Jesus took this symbolic act and turned it upon the Jews who rejected the message delivered by the disciples. This action would have shown that those cities were considered wicked and unclean, like Gentile cities. It was a warning of God’s future judgment upon them. Their being Jews would do them no good since they

¹ He is quoted by John Gill in his commentary on Matthew 10:14.

had rejected the gospel. Interestingly, we have an account in Acts 15:51 of Paul and Barnabas using this symbolic gesture toward the Jews in Antioch after they rejected the gospel.

In verse 6 we see that the disciples did exactly what Jesus had commissioned them to do. They went throughout the towns of Galilee preaching the gospel and healing the sick.

So far from this text we have seen the disciples sent out by Jesus. What did they know about Jesus? They believed He was the Messiah. They didn't understand what His ministry would look like. They didn't understand work of redemption Jesus had come to accomplish. These things were not yet revealed to them. But they knew He was the Messiah, and at this time that was enough.

Next we see several verses talking about Herod and his speculation about the identity of Jesus. This seems like a strange place to find these verses. They almost seem like an interruption to this narrative. But in these verses as we see Herod and others speculate about the identity of Jesus, we gain another perspective on how Jesus was viewed during His ministry.

II. Herod was Perplexed (v. 7-9)

This Herod is the same Herod we studied at length in Luke 3. As a quick summary, he was one of the sons of Herod the Great. He was appointed by the Roman emperor as the ruler of Galilee. And as this passage reminds us, it was this Herod that executed John the Baptist.

Verse 7 tells us that Herod heard of all that was done by Jesus. As we have already seen in Luke's gospel, news of the miraculous healings and remarkable preaching of Jesus had spread far and wide. And here in this text we are told that news of Jesus had reached Herod.

We know Herod was curious about the identity of Jesus, as we will see in this text. We know from Luke 23:8 that Herod had a strong desire to see Jesus. Listen to what we are told in Luke 23:8, "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him."

I find Herod's behavior very interesting. When Jesus was brought before Herod as a prisoner, he was glad to see Him, exceedingly glad. But earlier, at the time of our text, when Jesus was active in His ministry and Herod had every opportunity to go and see His ministry and hear Him preach, he never troubled himself to go find Jesus.

Beware of a vain curiosity about Jesus. It does you no good to speculate about Jesus. It does you no good to merely hear about Jesus. You must seek Him

out. You must go to Him as He commands: in repentance and faith. In repentance acknowledging that you are a sinner: a sinner by nature and a sinner by choice deserving of the wrath of God. And in faith, believing that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior, the only way to the Father, that His blood is the only sufficient covering for your sins. Many people have been curious about Jesus, but have died under the wrath of God. Beware of a vain curiosity about Jesus.

Verse 7 continues and tells us that after Herod heard about Jesus he was “perplexed.” It is a strong word that is translated here. It indicates perplexity amounting to despair.² Why would Herod be so troubled by Jesus?

Who was Jesus, from a human perspective? In the opinion of His enemies, He was nobody. He was the illegitimate son of a poor carpenter from Nazareth. He was an ignorant, meddling, want-to-be rabbi. Nothing more.

Who was Herod? Herod was somebody in the world. Herod was a friend of the Emperor. Herod ruled Galilee. Herod had money, influence, and power. It was completely in his power, humanly speaking, to execute Jesus if he desired. So why was Herod so perplexed by Jesus? He was perplexed because of what people were saying about Jesus.

Verse 7 goes on, “Because it was said of some.” What follows in this text is several theories about the identity of Jesus. First, at the end of verse 7 we read that some people said, “John was risen from the dead.” You can understand how that

² *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, entry on Doubt A. 2.

possibility would be troubling to Herod. He had executed John the Baptist. He had seen John's head on a platter. John had been a thorn in Herod's side. If he had come back from the dead, what would that mean for Herod?

The first part of verse 8 tells us others said "that Elias had appeared." Elias is the transliteration of the Hebrew name for Elijah. What do we know about Elijah?

Elijah was the prophet who boldly confronted wicked king Ahab. Because Elijah warned Ahab of God's judgment that would come upon him for his wickedness, Ahab sought to kill Elijah. He never succeeded, but he tried, and he did kill scores of other prophets and true worshippers of God in Israel during his reign. God would eventually use Elijah to pronounce a final judgment upon Ahab and his descendants because of his great wickedness. This judgment came to pass and all of Ahab's immediate family died a violent death.

Again, you can understand how this possibility would be troubling for a man like Herod. He and Ahab had much in common. Elijah had pronounced Ahab's doom. Had he returned to pronounce Herod's doom?

Finally, at the end of verse 8 some said "one of the old prophets was risen again." Think about the Old Testament prophets. God never sent prophets to congratulate His people for doing a good job. Prophets were harbingers of judgment. There is a lot of gospel to be found in the Old Testament prophets: a lot of hope, a lot of encouragement to the faithful, a lot of prophecy about the

Messiah. But the message of the Old Testament prophets to the wicked who would not repent was clear and consistent: You will face the wrath of God. It was an unwelcome message when the Old Testament prophets delivered it, and many of them were killed for it. And it was an unwelcome message when Herod received it. John the Baptist was killed for it. Herod may have wondered: “Has another prophet come to announce God’s judgment upon me?”

Now look at Herod’s response in verse 9. This was Herod’s conclusion on this matter. He said, “John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things?” Matthew’s account in Matthew 14:2 indicates that of all these theories about Jesus, Herod was most inclined to believe that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. But Herod didn’t come to any conclusions about Jesus. He left this matter with an open question: “Who is this?” And the end of verse 9 tells us “he desired to see him.”

Again, notice the vain curiosity of Herod. He wondered about Jesus identity, but he never came to any conclusion. He wanted to see Jesus, but he never sought Him out. Beware of a vain curiosity about Jesus. It is empty, worthless, and its end is the judgment of God.

So far from this text we have seen the disciples sent out. Then we saw Herod perplexed as he heard about Jesus. In verse 10 the focus is again on Jesus and the disciples as we read what happened when the disciples returned.

III. The Disciples Returned (v. 10)

Verse 10 begins, “And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done.” Notice the change in terms. When Jesus called the twelve together in verse 1 they are called disciples, or students. When they return they are called apostles, or sent ones. The term “apostle” is used on this occasion because it matches the work from which the twelve had just returned. They had been sent out by Jesus with authority to preach the kingdom of God.

And notice what they did at the end of this time. They returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done. They recounted to Jesus the work they had accomplished in his name throughout the towns and villages of Galilee.

Remember, they had been given power and authority over devils and to cure diseases. They were to heal the sick and preach the kingdom of God. And they recounted to Jesus their actual experiences as they had preached throughout Galilee.

Consider that Judas Iscariot was among the twelve at this time. He was one of those who returned and told Jesus what he had done. He was involved in this ministry. He acted in the office of an apostle at this time. And yet, he was not a true follower of Jesus. He would go on to betray our Lord. We learn from this the deceitfulness of sin and the power of God.

First, the deceitfulness of sin. Sin blinds us to reality. Judas was not a true follower of Jesus. His heart was not transformed by grace. His faith was

superficial. Yet he ministered in Jesus name. He told others about Jesus, but he never truly knew Jesus. Or, more accurately, Jesus never knew him.

Let's apply this to ourselves. You can do all manner of good works, you can know good theology, you can go to a good church, you can be involved in ministry, but still be blinded by sin and never truly be born again. Jesus gave this solemn warning in Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Salvation is not found in the good things you do, or the bad things you don't do. Salvation is not found in the truth you know about God. Salvation is not found in the people you associate with in a local church body. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ. You can have all the trappings of Christianity and none of the reality. You must know Jesus. Jesus must know you. Beware lest on the day of judgment you hear these terrible words from Jesus, "I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

How can you avoid such an end? You must accept Jesus at His terms, and His terms are full and unconditional surrender. Confess your sins. Acknowledge them before God. Call them what they are, high treason against the God who created you. Acknowledge that your sins bring you under the just judgment of God. And then look in faith to the finished work of Jesus Christ for forgiveness. He paid

the price for sins. He is able and willing to forgive. I John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

You might be sitting here today and you have heard this before. Maybe you have even done this. You have confessed your sins. You have cried out to Jesus for salvation, but you don’t feel forgiven.

I can’t see your heart. What happens there is known only to you and God. But this I do know: If you were sincere, then you are forgiven. Beware that you do not exalt your feelings above the promise of God. Don’t add to your sins unbelief. Rest in the precious promises found in the Word of God.

I appreciate these lines of poetry from Martin Luther and they are very pertinent to this topic:

“Feelings come and feelings go,

And feelings are deceiving.

My warrant in the Word of God—

Naught else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should feel condemned,

For want of some sweet token,

There is One greater than my heart,

Whose Word cannot be broken.”

Your feelings don't dictate reality. God does. Rest in His unchanging Word.

The second thing we can learn from the ministry accomplished through Judas Isacriot is the power of God. God is in no way limited in who He uses to accomplish His purposes. Sometimes the most unlikely people are the ones God chooses to use to accomplish His purposes. We see this throughout the Bible.

In Exodus God used Pharaoh, even through the hardness of his heart toward God, to deliver His people from Egypt with a mighty hand, demonstrating His power against the proud Egyptians.

God used first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians to carry his people off into captivity. These were wicked, wicked nations. They had no interest in obeying or serving the Lord. Yet God used them and their lust for conquest, to chastise and correct His people.

In the book of Acts God used the Sanhedrin and the Roman appointed authorities to spread the gospel. These were the people responsible for killing Jesus. How could God use such people to spread the Gospel? In their zeal against God, they persecuted the church in Jerusalem. As a result, the believers fled and were scattered, and as they scattered they carried the gospel with them.

Here in our text, God used Judas Isacriot, wicked Judas Iscariot, to heal the sick and preach the kingdom of God in Galilee. God uses even the wicked to accomplish the ends He has ordained.

Man is free to do as he will, and he always chooses sin. The Bible is clear that man has a free will. And the Bible is also clear about what man's free will produces: sin. Even in the garden, where mankind was created perfect, without sin, we still chose to disobey the one command God had given. Do we think that in our corrupted state, where Adam failed to obey God we will succeed? We don't need to wonder. All we need to do is look around us. Look at ourselves. In our freedom we choose sin. It is our nature. Even when we seem to do good on our own, below it all is sin.

But this puts no constraint upon God. He rules and overrules in the affairs of men. And even the most desperately wicked cannot constrain the hand of God. God will turn their wickedness to His ends, to accomplish His good and perfect purposes. Woe to the wicked who seek to resist God. Not only does their wickedness heap upon them the judgment of God, but it is completely ineffectual. God is in no way hindered from accomplishing that which He has purposed. All that is and was created is for the good pleasure of God (Revelation 4:11). We exist for His glory. There is no way to escape this purpose. The question is: will God be glorified in your salvation or your judgment?

The end of verse 10 tells us that Jesus used the success of the apostle's ministry in Galilee as the springboard for a major campaign in the region. Jesus, who had been resting while the disciples had been out traveling, immediately launched into an intense period of ministry in the major cities of Galilee. Building

off the momentum gained by the apostles, this campaign saw the followers of Jesus grow exponentially in number and soon the kingdom of God was established in Galilee.

No. That's not what happened. It might appeal to us. It might be what we would have done or what we might expect. But that's not what Jesus did.

Rather, the end of verse 10 tells us, "And he (Jesus) took them (the 12), and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city of Bethsaida." The disciples were not yet ready to take on their full role as apostles. Jesus still had much to teach them. Instead of sending them back out to preach, Jesus took them into a desert place. And Jesus did this privately. He did not tell the crowds where He was going. He was still very popular in Galilee at this time, but soon those crowds would diminish. And eventually they would even turn against Him as He drew closer and closer to the cross.

Who was Jesus? The disciples knew that He was the Messiah, but at this time they didn't understand why He was there. Herod was perplexed when he pondered the identity of this unknown man who was doing so many miraculous deeds. But Jesus had no identity crisis. He knew who He was, His purpose, His mission, and His end.

We have the benefit of looking at the ministry of Jesus with the perspective of history. We know the story. We have read the gospels. We know who He was.

Who He claimed to be. Who He is presented as in Scripture. Who are you like in this text?

Are you like Herod? Does Jesus perplex you? Are you troubled at the thought that Jesus may be like John the Baptist or one of the Old Testament prophets? That He came to announce God's judgment upon the wicked. The first time Jesus came, He came to accomplish redemption. When He returns, He will return as judge. And the wicked should be fearful of this coming day of judgment.

Are you like the 12? You know who Jesus is: the Messiah. But you don't fully grasp what that means. Rejoice in the milk of the gospel, but don't be content to remain there. Dig deeply into the word of God and grow in your understanding of the person and work of Jesus.

Know Jesus for who He truly is, as Scripture reveals Him: your Savior, your king, and your God.