

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(February 12, 2023)

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom
(*Studies in the Gospel of Luke*)

Playing with Power

(Luke 9:1-23)

Study #6

Introduction: The danger of power...

One of my favorite books is *A Tale of Three Kings*, by Gene Edwards. (I read it a couple of times a year. It's short.) Like the passages in the Bible we'll see today, the book is about power.

In Part I, we take a look at the young pre-king David and his dealings with the first king of Israel, Saul. Then, in Part II, we look at old King David and his dealings with his own son, Absalom, who tried to overthrow his own father.

I have learned a lot about the uses and abuses of power from Edwards' book, and I highly commend it to you.

The thesis of the book is that, for Jesus followers today, as for Old Testament kings, the power of God to make great impact for God and His kingdom is *available* - but *dangerous*.

Gene Edwards points out that it is possible to possess the power of God for mighty deeds...while throwing spears at young shepherds, plotting to kill, and even consulting witches.

A Tale of Three Kings brings us face to face with power, rightly and wrongly used. What we'll see in the Bible today also forces us to wrestle with how to use the power *of Jesus for Jesus*.

Review...

Over the last couple of Sundays, we have been exposed to some of the most famous Gospel stories.

We watched as Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee and then calmed a storm in the heart of a man possessed by demons.

Last Sunday, Paul Ortiz led you through Jesus' healing of a woman with a twelve-year hemorrhage and the raising of a twelve-year old girl from the dead.

Following these events, Luke begins to focus more attention on Jesus' training of His disciples than he has to this point.

To this point they have mainly been spectators to His ministry. No longer. Now, He will involve them in Kingdom work. He will equip them with His power to create impact.

And this is going to kindle a fire in their hearts for making a God-centered difference in their world. Today, let's ask God to kindle a fire in our own hearts, too, for exactly the same thing.

We watch as Jesus huddles His disciples before sending them out on a short-term missions trip.

Jesus Gives His Disciples a Taste of Power (9:1-17)

Igniting Vision for Powerful Kingdom Work (9:1-6)

Sent and trusted (vv. 1-2)

[9:1] Now He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and the power to heal diseases. [2] And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

I read this and wonder if the power was transferred by prayer or by the laying on of hands? Did the apostles notice the difference when He gave them His power? Did they grasp the enormity of the authority Jesus was entrusting to them?

We don't know the answers to these questions. We do, though, get to hear the marching orders He gave them.

Instructed and provided for (vv. 3-5)

[3] And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics. [4] And whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. [5] And as for all who do not receive you, when you leave that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."¹

In other words, they were to go as they were. Make no special preparations.

Every missions trip I've ever taken has involved lots of preparation and lots of consideration to the items in my luggage. And, I have depended on the support of those who have sent me out on this or that trip - YOU!

The apostles were leaving for their trip depending on the goodwill of the people to whom they are going. And wherever they found receptivity to their message, they were to stay a while, share the Good News, heal the sick, and cast out demons.

Mission accomplished! (v. 6)

[6] And as they were leaving, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Evidently, this was a very productive time of ministry, as we see from the response of Herod Antipas.

[7] Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, [8] and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen.

¹ Pharisees shook off the dust from their feet when they re-entered Judea after traveling in heathen lands.

[9] Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see Him.

Herod had gotten rid of the problem of the pesky John the Baptist. But in the absence of John, Herod is facing Someone who was far more disruptive: Jesus.

And not only was Jesus stirring up trouble, performing miracles, teaching, preaching, and gathering a following - His followers were doing the same things, and with great success.

Luke tells us that when they came back, they got with Jesus and told Him about all that happened on the trip.

Can you imagine the thrill it would have been to have traveled with Jesus, watched Him heal the sick - and then do the same yourself?

Can you imagine having seen Jesus hold crowds spellbound while teaching God's truth - and then to do the same?

This missions trip pulled these men way out of their comfort zone. These were not well-traveled men. But they obediently proclaimed the Good News to people they didn't know in cities they had never visited.

And on the trip, God provided for all their needs. He also provided, through them, for the needs of those they met. They experienced, firsthand, God's power.

Jesus has altered His interactions with the Twelve.

No longer are they merely spectators, watching Him do stuff. They are now partners in proclamation and in healing.

They are tasting what it is to wield the power of God in the lives of others. If you were one of the Twelve, a new vision of how you want to invest your life would be forming.

You'd be thinking, *"This - pressing eternity into the lives of others, taking a risky faith venture for Jesus, seeing the power of God - is what I was made for."*

With that experience behind them, Jesus blessed His men with one more vision-expanding event.

Igniting Vision for Bringing Powerful Blessing (vv. 10-17)

A time for retreat - Oh well... (vv. 10-11)

[10] When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. And taking them with Him, He withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.

I'm guessing that they had been traveling for some weeks. The adrenaline was still flowing from their recent return. But Jesus knew that exhaustion was just around the corner. He knew that they needed some "down time."

So, He arranged for a little R&R near the village of Bethsaida, located at the north end of the Sea of Galilee.

I imagine that Jesus and the Twelve had been enjoying their retreat for a very short while (a few hours? a day?) when a crowd crashed their privacy.

Almost certainly the R&R time wasn't as long as Jesus had intended. It sure wasn't as long as the Twelve would have enjoyed.

[11] But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and He welcomed them and began speaking to them about the kingdom of God, and curing those who had need of healing.

I'm struck by Jesus' response - "***He welcomed them.***" I can picture myself being somewhat less gracious. But then, that's Jesus for you.

Luke tells us that He engaged with them. He told them what they needed to hear about God's kingdom and gave health to those in need of healing.

But while all of this good stuff is going on a crisis is looming. Surprisingly, the disciples seemed to more aware of this crisis than Jesus was.

A crisis of resources (vv. 12-13)

They knew that they didn't have the resources to care for this enormous crowd that had gathered. There are no restaurants or inns nearby. No food at hand.

Now, I'm impressed that the disciples seem genuinely concerned for the welfare of the crowd. Listen.

[12] Now the day was ending, and the twelve came up and said to Him, "Dismiss the crowd, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; because here, we are in a secluded place."

They want Jesus to do something about the crisis - and He will do something. But first, He speaks. And what He says was surprising / ridiculous / insensitive (you choose) - but emphatic!

[13a] But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!"

To which they shot back,

[13b]... "We have no more than five loaves and two fish,² unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people."

They were utterly confused by Jesus' words, "***You give them something to eat.***" They don't have the resources to do that.

That acknowledgement led to Jesus' next move.³

3. Crisis resolved! (vv. 14-17)

² The fish appear alongside the loaves as a relish like a modern sandwich filling.

³ This is one of the only miracles recorded by all four Gospels.

Luke tells us that there were about five thousand men present, not counting the many women and children who certainly would have been there.⁴

[14]...But He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." [15] They did so, and had them all recline.

They did what He commanded - but to *"eat"* what?

What do you think was going on in the minds of the disciples as they divided the huge crowd into groups of fifties?

Whatever their confusion, Jesus' next move brought clarity.

[16] And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and, looking up to heaven, He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples again and again, to serve the crowd. [17] And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.⁵

In the spaces between the groups, the apostles move freely and distributed the food. They passed out the food that Jesus multiplied.

I can just picture them walking back and forth from Jesus to that group, back to Jesus and then over to this group, until everyone had eaten all they wanted to eat.

In the telling about this event, Luke says not one word about the response of the crowd to what happened. While feeding them was the point, their response was not the point.

The points are: (1). the power of Jesus, (2). the abundance of the provision, and (3). the role of the disciples in providing what the multitudes needed.

While on their missions trip, the Twelve would have begun to catch a vision for impacting people with the power of God.

Here, at the feeding of the five thousand, their vision would have expanded to see the ministry they could have through Jesus. He provided fish and bread, and they gave it to people.

Jesus enabled them to do for the multitude what they could never have done by themselves.

In fact, for the rest of their lives, they would be passing on to others what they received from Him. They would bring life and health and joy and Gospel through the resources Jesus provided.

It was that vision of being conduits of Jesus' love and power that He wanted to fan into flame in the hearts of the Twelve. It's the vision He's putting before us today, too.

Think about being God's instrument in the lives of the people around you.

Imagine yourself, walking through your world like the disciples walked through Galilee. You're meeting needs in Jesus' Name. You're speaking about Jesus to those who need Jesus.

Imagine walking through life like the disciples did at the feeding of the five thousand, being God's conduit of blessing - distributing food and joy and peace and healing and love and Gospel - to people you know.

Who among us doesn't want that? Doesn't that sound good? Doesn't that sound powerful?

Well, I'm sure that the first disciples were loving it. They were having the time of their lives.

But, having seen this, we move from a focus on the exercise of power to something else disciples need. Something essential.

Jesus wanted the disciples to know, and He wants us to know, that for the power of God to be used as God wants it to be used, it must be wielded by disciples, as defined by Jesus in what follows.

⁴ Verse 14 - The women and children were not included in this reckoning, but women and children would have been on the scene.

⁵ The baskets (*σπυρις*) may have been large enough to hold a man (Acts 9:25), although they might have been smaller.

He sets the stage for a focus on discipleship with a question.

Jesus Teaches His Disciples Submission (vv. 18-27)

The Revelation of Jesus' Powerful Identity (vv. 18-20)

[18] And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?"

No, Jesus didn't lead by paying attention to the polls. But He was interested to know what people were saying about Him. And He rightly assumed that His followers had heard the latest scuttlebutt.

[19] They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

Then, Jesus asked them another question, which was likely the point of asking the first one: ***[20a] "But who do YOU say that I am?"***

Peter (always the spokesman) responded without hesitation: ***[20b] The Christ of God."***

After all they have been through with Jesus, they are confident that this miracle-working, disease-healing, demon-casting-out, sin-forgiving, parable-preaching, walking-on-water Man is the long-awaited Messiah.

Peter was right. He got an A+ on the test. Jesus was the Messiah. and the other disciples were behind Peter all the way: *"What he said!"*

Implications of Jesus' Identity - For Disciples (vv. 21-23)

Don't share THIS powerful Good News (v. 21)

[21] But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone...

Hmmm... This earth-shattering news will not be shouted from the rooftops. It won't be proclaimed in the streets.

The one message the disciples were sure would propel Jesus to a position of power will be hidden under a basket. It'll be kept quiet.

And this is Lesson #1 in the disciples' graduate level course in the use of power.

If they had asked Him, *"Why not spread the news?"* what do you think Jesus would have said?

It was not unusual for Jesus to command silence. Besides here, He told a leper He had cleansed to tell no one (Luke 5:14) and He did the same after he raised a little girl from the dead (Luke 8:56). And there were other times.

There were different reasons for commanding silence in each case. But the disciples would have understood in each case - especially here! - that the path to power is not always the path to follow.

There are times when it is best to let the power play pass. Sometimes, it is best to NOT do the thing that would lead to position and to prominence, to popularity and to power. Go the other way.

I think that the ***"[don't] tell this to anyone"*** message would have left the Twelve very confused. Well, they were about to get way more confused as Jesus continued with Lesson #2.

The powerful Messiah's immediate future (v. 22)

[22] saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised on the third day."

According to Luke, this is the first time Jesus revealed to His disciples that He was going to be killed.

And don't you wonder how the apostles processed this.

Jesus agreed with Peter's identification of Him as Messiah - and then told them all that He will suffer rejection and execution.

Jesus was the most powerful Man these men had ever known AND He will be rejected and killed. That is exactly what doesn't happen to the powerful.

If they were confused before, they are doubly confused now. He will allow the rulers to do this to Him? Talk about power turned on its head. Talk about power left on the table.

This lesson would take a while to sink in. But it eventually would ring true for these men that **sometimes**, even for protection, power should be shelved. **Sometimes**, there are bigger games going on than self-protection. **Sometimes** it is best to play the bigger game and keep power under wraps.

Lesson #3 follows as Jesus outlines the implications of His non-use of power for those who follow Him.⁶

We will see this again in a few weeks, and in greater detail. But here is where, for the first time, Jesus lays out to those who have received the gift of eternal life what is involved in being His disciple.

Defining powerful discipleship (v. 23)

Coming after Jesus (v. 23)

[23] And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross⁷ daily, and follow Me.

"DENY [YOURSELF]"

Disciples who follow Jesus will routinely deny themselves. It is not unusual for disciples to deny wants and desires if those wants and desires get in the way of following Him.

⁶ This is a glimpse at the cost of the incarnation for Jesus. So, of course, it is hazardous to follow such a man. Judea rejected him (John 5:18); Galilee cast Him out (John 6:66); Gadara begged Him to leave its district (Matt. 8:34); Samaria refused Him lodging (Luke 9:53); earth will not have Him (Matt. 27:23); Heaven finally forsakes Him as He takes the sin of the world upon Himself (Matt. 27:46)

⁷ This is the first mention of the cross in Luke.

Toward the end of this chapter, a man told Jesus that he was willing to follow Jesus. The Lord used the vocabulary of self-denial to make sure that he knew what he was getting himself into.

[57] As they were going on the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." [58] And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Jesus was warning this man: *"Really? Are you prepared to forego creature comforts if that is what it takes to follow Me? That's what being a disciple means."*

In every age and in every place, foregoing something that would be satisfying SO THAT we can satisfy the grander glory of following Jesus is at the heart of following Jesus.

The disciple will sometimes deny himself *"down time"* to serve someone in need, will often deny herself money to help a loved one through a crisis, and at times will deny the longing for sleep - early or late - to sit with a friend whose world has just broken.

You will ***"come after"*** Jesus by denying yourself when you serve your family, your church, or your neighbors and friends.

Disciples are living for something grander than the satisfaction of personal desires. They expend energy when they don't feel like they have any reserves to give.

Jesus had something else to say to those who would come after Him: ***"Take up your cross daily."***

"TAKE UP YOUR CROSS DAILY"

Taking up your cross was a well-understood reference to crucifixion, a common method of crucifixion in first-century Palestine.

There are records of mass crucifixions in the Roman Empire in Jesus' day where hundreds of people were crucified at the same time.

So, a vivid picture would have appear in the minds of Jesus' disciples as He spoke - a picture of death.⁸

And Jesus certainly may have intended for His followers to be prepared to be crucified. But I suspect something else is also in view.

His disciples had all seen a man take up his cross and carry it to the place of crucifixion. They had never seen anyone come back from crucifixion.

So, while I am not sure of all that ***“take up [your] cross daily”*** means, it at least means starting a journey from which there is no return. No turning back, no matter what.⁹

Again, towards the end of the chapter, another man spoke to Jesus and said, ***[61]...“I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say goodbye to those at my home.”***

I hear nothing unreasonable in that man's request.¹⁰ But Jesus told him, ***[62] “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”***

Following Jesus involves taking a forward-looking, positive “next step” with Jesus ***“daily”*** - today and tomorrow and the next day.

Finally, Jesus says, ***“Follow Me.”***

“FOLLOW ME”

Interesting. Taking the verse as a whole, if we want to ***“come after”*** Jesus (which can only mean ***“follow”***), we must...***“follow”*** Jesus.

⁸ The cross was a familiar figure in Palestine and would have brought to their minds what “electric chair” does to ours.

⁹ We are to view ourselves as traveling the same road Jesus traveled as He walked from the Roman Praetorium to Golgotha carrying His cross.

¹⁰ In fact, in 1 Kings 19:20, Elisha asked Elijah permission to do exactly this (say good-bye to his mother and father) before he left the farm to minister to the prophet - and Elijah granted him leave. Maybe this man is recalling that incident as he speaks to Jesus..

The sense is that if we have determined that following Jesus is what we're going to do, we are to ready ourselves for self-denial, embark, daily, on this journey as if on our way to a cross, and follow wherever He leads.

We follow our Leader, one day at a time, one step at a time.

In fact, that's what we mean here at Northwest when we talk about taking a ***“next step”*** with Jesus. Here at our church, taking a ***“next step”*** with Jesus is code for growing as a disciple.

There is no telling where our Leader might lead. He might lead us anywhere. What is clear, though, is that as we follow wherever He leads us, He intends that we become powerful people who impact our worlds for Him.

Conclusion:

But you will notice the great omission in what Jesus has said to His followers today.

From the discussion of His identity as the Christ and the command for silence, to the prediction of His own death, to telling them what it means to be His disciple, He said nothing about power. Not a word about casting out demons, raising the dead, healing the sick, or making proclamation.

The timing of Jesus' words to His disciples was perfect for what He wanted them to learn. And here is what I see as Jesus' lessons for His followers, then and now, arising out of the flow of His dealings in Luke 9:

- Power grows as we intentionally release our grasp on power.
- Power flows as we stop seeking popularity and prominence.
- Followers of Jesus become powerful when we imitate Jesus, who submitted to suffering, rejection, and death.

And we don't live in self-denial and cross-carrying so that God will perform wonders through us. Rather, it is in the self-denial and cross-carrying that we become powerful, impactful people for Him.

Jesus longs to do powerful things through you, His disciple.¹¹ He is calling you into deeper following, because the committed, consecrated, submissive, obedient disciple is the disciple through whom His power flows.

¹¹ After placing a vision of being used in powerful ways in the lives of others to the glory of God, Jesus put the disciples on a learning track designed to fulfill that vision. That curriculum included lessons at every stage where their categories were exploded, their beliefs challenged, their capacities enlarged, their prejudices confronted, their often-twisted actions and attitudes reproofed. After placing a vision for ministry before them, Jesus put the disciples in situation after situation where their shortcomings would become manifest and where they had to be corrected. They had to CHANGE if they were to be fit conduits for God's power, sharp instruments He could use. Will it be any less the case for us?