

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

Dr. George O. Wood

“When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, ‘Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.’ He replied, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They answered, ‘We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.’ (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, ‘Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.’ The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.’” (Luke 9:10–19, NIV).

Last week, when we were in the verses immediately preceding today’s passage, we talked about “Is Your Vision Small Enough?” We dealt with the first training mission of the Twelve. We talked about the theme that the vision the Lord had at the ultimate disposal of the disciples was a great one, “Go into all the world” (Mark 16:15), but that this was their first mission and therefore the vision was limited. We raised the question, “Is your vision small enough?” At the close of the

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

service I did something I've never done before. I made a little altar call. That is, regarding some area in your life that you needed to have a sharper focus on, a smaller vision, something that was within your power to do if the Lord could give you the added strength to do it. Many, many people responded.

Today, at the close of this service, I'd like for you to make the commitment to be part of something we came up with this week—"Gideon's 300." The Billy Graham Committee for this church realized that this church is going to be given hundreds of converts from the Billy Graham crusade to follow up. Why do we feel that way? Because of all the churches participating in the Billy Graham crusade, there are very few that have submitted detailed plans of how they're going to follow people up. We have done that. As we talked about it and prayed about it, we felt it would be wonderful if we would ask 300 people from the congregation—Gideon's 300, who weren't afraid of anything—to be part of the follow-up of the Billy Graham crusade. We're going to ask you to make a commitment that is limited. Just like in Luke 9, a limited commitment.

Seven commitments: One, befriend one person from the Billy Graham Crusade. That is, a name that is given to you by the church.

As soon as you receive the name from the church, make a phone call to the individual. Just pick up the phone, and call them and introduce yourself. We're going to give you training to set you at ease on how we want you to do that.

Third, lead the individuals through a one-hour a week, five-week follow-up study guide for living in Christ. This is a little study guide furnished by the Billy Graham organization for new converts. They just need somebody to walk through it with them. It's so simple. It's not anything

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

you can't do. Don't get worried that you have to be a Bible teacher or something. It's real simple. We're going to train you in one hour to know how to effectively use it.

Fourth, invite that person to a meal sometime in the next five weeks. One meal in five weeks—either in your home or in a restaurant. The purpose of that is that we need to break bread together as Christians. We need to be folded into fellowship.

Then invite and accompany them—if they'll come with you—to worship each week. Say, "I'm going to the 11:00 service. I'll be at the door and you meet me there." We'll have 200 people out there waiting for 200 people to show up. It'll be great!

Invite that individual to the new people's dinner. We're scheduling two of these for all the new people that have come to the church during the summer months and all the people who have come through the Billy Graham Crusade into the church; we'd like to have a special time to get them all together. We'd like for you to invite them to that.

For all of this, you'll need to attend a one hour training session. Next Sunday there are three of them. You could go to Sunday School and then come to a service and attend a training session.

Whatever time fits best. If you can't make it next Sunday, come then on one of the three times on July 28th. But we'd prefer you make it next Sunday because we're going to be getting a lot of names the week of the 21st and we'd like to get people going.

My message from this passage is "Lord, Use Me." Question mark, so we say it, "Lord, Use Me?" or we can say it with an exclamation mark, "Lord, Use Me!"

It so happens that in our regular journey through the Gospel of Luke we have come to the perfect text to enter into the Billy Graham Crusade with. If I were looking at all the Bible, I couldn't find a more appropriate place to sink my hooks this week in God's Word. It's like the Holy Spirit ordained it.

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

There are three things that this passage is telling us about being used by the Lord. Three things Jesus is telling us:

I. One, is that He is changing us—wants to change us—from disciples into apostles.

When you begin reading verse 10, notice what it says, “When the apostles returned.” If you have a real eye for detail and read the Gospels, you’ll find that up to this point in the Gospels the word “apostles” has been only used once of the Twelve. It is used in Luke 6 when Jesus initially calls them to follow Him and He says, “I’m going to name you apostles.” He gave them the title. But they had the title and hadn’t done anything yet with the title. Sort of like sitting at a desk with a title and not being given anything to do. Now, however, they had been out (verses 1–5), on their first training mission. They had actually become what He had called them, so when they come back, He is now no longer calling them “disciples,” the gospel writers are no longer calling them “disciples,” they’re being called “apostles.”

These words—“disciple” and “apostle”—are so familiar to us, we easily interchange them, thinking they have the same meaning, but they are worlds apart in meaning. A “disciple” is someone who follows a master, someone who lives under a discipline. Someone who follows. An “apostle,” on the other hand, means, “one sent out,” “one given responsibility.” “One who takes initiative and goes at the urging of another.”

That transformation—that metamorphosis—is taking place in the Twelve. They are being metamorphosed from disciples into apostles and it’s happening right here.

When we initially come to Jesus, we say to Him, “Lord, I want to be Your disciple. I want to follow You.” Jesus says, “Great! Come on!” But then, what the Lord is really saying within Himself is, “I’m going to turn you into an apostle. You come follow Me, and when you’ve

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

followed Me, I'm going to then turn around and send you out to someone else, because you're a special gift I have to give to somebody.”

I read a book years ago which had a real influence on my life. It was the story of kind of a model, an experimentative, an innovative Christian community in Washington D.C. called Christ's Church. The book was written by Elizabeth O'Connor and its title was *Inward Journey, Outward Journey*. I've always had that title fixed in my mind, because to me it describes the wholeness of the Christian life. The Christian life is an inward journey where, through the personal disciplines of reading the Word and prayer and meditation, we go into the Lord and have Him come into us. And the outward journey is as we witness for Him and serve others in His name. No Christian life is complete unless we bring those two things together and have the inward journey and the outward journey.

So the Lord is doing that as He changes them from, not only being disciples, but being apostles. When they have become apostles, they're at a new level of responsibility. They come back and report to Jesus what they had done.

That's why we're asking in these commitment cards for accountability, because we believe that reporting is an important part of doing the Lord's work.

A little question, as we look at this point of Jesus wanting to change us from being followers to being ones who are sent out. Are we willing to permit Jesus to change us from a disciple to an apostle?

II. The second great thing about this text is, Jesus is giving us a textbook illustration of the three attitudes that will always kill evangelism.

Let me go over the three:

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

A. The first attitude is the attitude of withdrawal. The Twelve had been busy. They had been preaching through Galilee. They'd been healing the sick. They'd been staying in a different home every night, sleeping in strange beds. The crush of people around them was so great, that the gospel even says they didn't have time to eat. And they needed a break. Everybody, once in a while, needs a break. I can empathize with the Twelve. Jesus has said, "Ok! Time to go on a retreat! There's a nice park out by Bethsaida, and we're going out there overnight and we're going to have a good time. It'll just be us."

But what happens is, the crowd noticed that the boat was heading for the northeast corner of the lake. They said, "We've got to get to Jesus!" If you understand geography a little bit, I think you'll understand why this crowd felt they had to get to Jesus. In the verses immediately before verse 10, it says that Herod became aware of the activities of the Twelve and of Jesus because "some were saying that John had been raised from the dead." And he had killed John. The fact of the matter was that geographically, Bethsaida was just outside Herod's territory. What Jesus was doing was going just outside the border, where Herod couldn't lay a hand on him, and maybe the crowds from the other end of the lake said, "Ah! He's leaving us. This may be the last chance we ever get to see Him. He knows His life is threatened. Let's get over there and listen to Him one more time before we miss Him forever." So they went. They just ran around the lake and got there.

The disciples thought they were going to a quiet spot. It never fails. Anybody that's involved in ministry of any kind on a lay level or any kind of ministry knows that when your resources are the thinnest and you're the most tired, that's when you're going to be hit with the biggest challenge you've ever been hit with in your life. It's just when you want to go to bed that the

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

phone rings. It's just when you put in a 14-hour day and your level of energy and reserve is totally depleted that someone lays a heavy problem on you.

That's exactly what happened with the Twelve. You can always count on it. Your biggest challenges are going to come when you're the most tired. So if you know that in advance, you can say, "This is my biggest challenge. I've got to get a new level of energy from the Lord."

I can empathize—again—with the Twelve in that they just look forward to being together. When you have friends, it's nice to be in a cozy group. Then, if a bunch of people show up that you don't know, you'd rather them not be around. And churches can get that way. "It was so nice when we were just a cozy little group and everybody knew everybody! Then all these strangers have shown up. Now we've got to put ourselves out a little bit."

Jesus is concerned. Who's going to take responsibility for all these people that want to know Me? And it's obviously the people who wanted to be in the cozy group that are going to have to take the responsibility. Jesus does something with this crowd, which numbers five thousand men. I think that the women and children weren't counted because there weren't many of them. That's my own guess. But He did three things for the crowd.

He welcomed them. That's first. He was tired. The Twelve were tired. But Jesus says, "It's so great to have you here." He put a smile on His face and I think He welcomed them verbally and nonverbally." It's one thing to say to a person, "I'm so glad you're here," and then under your breath, "How long are you going to stay?" We Southern Californians get that feeling when relatives come. He welcomed them. How wonderful it is to welcome people. What a neat part of the service it is when we just turn around and welcome someone. That's part of doing what the Lord is doing.

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

Then beyond welcoming them, He speaks to them about the kingdom of God. What are people most hungry for? We're spiritual beings. We're hungry for spiritual realities. I was intrigued by a letter I got this week from Bob Hoskins who's the director of Life Publishers and has ministered in this church just recently. Bob was telling about the general superintendent of the General Assemblies of God in Mozambique who recently came out of Mozambique. The Christians there have been under heavy pressure from the Marxist government for years. They have been through great personal deprivation and hardship and persecution and without food and clothes. The superintendent himself is down to less than a hundred pounds. When he came out, representing the church to the missionaries that met with him, he said, "I come on behalf of the Christians. They say to you, 'Although we are hungry and although we do not have clothes, that is not our greatest need. We need Bibles at this moment more than we need food. Would you please send us Bibles and literature?'"

Why are they saying that? Because of the Bread of Life and its value. When the kingdom of God comes, the Lord is talking to us about His reigning in our life. If we reign in our own life or let someone else reign in our life, we get into trouble. But when He reigns, He brings His kingdom or His rule of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness, meekness, self-control...He brings all these things. So, He was speaking about the kingdom of God and He was healing.

Even if we do not have the gift of physical healing ourselves, I still think every Christian is called by the Lord to be a healer. Work for healing within relationships. Work for healing within lives. Work for healing within memories. Work for healing through forgiveness. We've got a group of people working this week in the Royal Family Kids' Camp with the healing of youngsters who have been brutalized by life. That's the healing ministry of the Lord.

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

The Lord is doing those things—welcoming, speaking about the kingdom and healing and He’s saying, “When the crowds show up, it’s not the time to withdraw.”

B. The second attitude that will kill evangelism is “It’s not my responsibility!” That’s the attitude of the Twelve. It’s spring. The sun sets late and it’s getting dark. The disciples are saying, “Send them away. Let them go to the villages and get food and lodging. It’s time to get out of here.”

They were right in a certain sense. They didn’t see how they were going to take care of this crowd; but the problem was the attitude of “send them away,” it almost appears to be their first instinct. It’s not the only time they say of people who come to Jesus, “Get them out of here. It’s not our responsibility.” When Jesus was in the area of Lebanon—now we call it Lebanon, in Bible days it was called Syrian Phoenicia—there was a woman who came begging Him to cast out the demon from her daughter, and Jesus let her just keep on going and ignored her, and it got on the nerves of the Twelve. They came to Jesus and said the same thing they’re saying here, “Send her away! She’s bugging us. We don’t want to be bugged. We want to have a retreat. Get her out of here.” And later in the Gospels, in Luke 18, when parents are bringing babies to have Jesus touch them, the disciples say, “We don’t have time for kids! Get those kids out of here. Send them away!” and they rebuked the parents.

We identify with the disciples because that’s our instinct sometimes. “Lord, that’s somebody else’s job. That’s the pastor’s job. You know You called him to be the shepherd of the flock and he’s supposed to be the minister in this church. Let him do it.” Sometimes I say, “Lord, I’m not the only minister in this church. Every believer is a minister in a church. Let them do it!”

I worked as a shoe salesman for a few weeks in my early days in college. All my idealized concepts of humanity came crashing down. If you tend to live with your head in the clouds, I recommend you get a job as a shoe salesman for two or three weeks. That will radically change

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

your view of life. We had one of these pushy managers who was just determined to up the quota of sales, and he told us, “Don’t ever let a customer out of the store without buying something! If they come and ask for an 8½ red shoe and you don’t have that in stock, you sell them a 9½ red shoe or an 8½ blue shoe. But you don’t let them out. And if you see that you can’t make the sale, you come and get me.” The term for this was “turnover.” Since I’m kind of a meek and mild person in sales work, I was doing turnovers all the time. I think that’s why I only lasted three weeks.

Sometimes, that’s what we do in our Christian experiences—turnover. We face an opportunity and say, “I’m not up for that! Get somebody else to do it. They’ll know how to handle it.”

Turnover.

That’s exactly what the Twelve wanted to do here. Turn it over. “Jesus, You send them away. We wash our hands. It’s not our responsibility.” Jesus does something that really shines out in the Greek language, more so than in the English. In the Greek language, when pronouns are used, they are most often a part of the verb form. So you can tell what pronoun is being used by looking at the verb ending. The English language uses the pronouns, but in other languages you can hide the pronoun in the verb. In a language like that, when you want to emphasize a pronoun, you state the pronoun explicitly. That’s exactly what happens here in Luke 9. For Jesus says to them explicitly “*You* [underline the word “you”] give them something to eat .” He was not letting them escape by saying, “It’s not my responsibility.”

C. Which gives rise to the third thing that will kill evangelism. The attitude of “I’m not qualified.” That’s our next response. They do an inventory of their resources and they say—we know from John’s Gospel what they say—because there’s a little boy there with five loaves and two fish, they get them and they say, “This is all we’ve got. How can you expect us, with the

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

limited resources we have, to feed this crowd? It's not up to us. We are not qualified." They look at the need as opposed to their resources. The need is five thousand men plus women and children. The resources are five loaves and two fish. We'll always err if we match the need to our resources. The trick is to match the need with His resources that He will commit to our hands. That's when we become a success.

I've got a little sermon I preached here called "How To Be a Failure," based upon this text. Look at the size of the task, look at the little bit you have, leave the Lord out of the picture. The size of the task is five thousand men plus women and children to feed. The little bit you have is five loaves and two fish. And leave the Lord out of the picture. If you will use that formula in any thing you're doing, I guarantee—money back!—failure. You'll fail.

That's what the disciples are doing here. I'm not qualified. Surely I couldn't do that. This miracle, though, is key to understanding the methods of Jesus' work. Of the thirty-five specific miracles that are recorded in the Gospels, this is the only one of the thirty-five that is in all four Gospels. That underlines its critical importance. Jesus takes the little and makes it match the need, if we will yield ourselves to Him.

So this story is telling us that Jesus wants to turn us from being disciples to being apostles. He gives us a textbook example of the three things that will kill evangelism. And finally, the third thing that this gospel story is telling us is...

III. Jesus is giving us the privilege of being involved in His miracle.

That's a staggering thing for me. He could do His work without us. He could feed the multitude without the disciples being involved. After all, if He has the power to expand bread and fish so that it feeds a multitude, it seems like He also has the power to create a sort of invisible vacuum belt or something that He puts the bread and fish into and it shoots bread and fish into their hand,

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

going one by one, zapping the bread and fish to everybody. Everybody could have been fed and the Twelve wouldn't have had to be involved at all. They could have sat down and relaxed.

But the Lord does things that only He can do. And the things that we can do that He doesn't need to do, He lets us do. That's where we get involved in the miracle. So Jesus has the disciples do three things.

He has them organize the crowd. He says, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each".

Mark says, He also says, "So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties" (Mark 6:40). That suggests that He may have had them in fifty rows of a hundred each.

Then serve the food.

Then gather up the fragments, because Jesus was an environmentalist. He says, "We're not going to leave all this stuff on the ground. We're going to save it for snacks later." Actually Jesus had in mind for the fragments a very important thing. We know that, after this feeding of the five thousand, the Twelve get in a boat and wrestle all night long with a tremendous storm at sea.

When they finally get to the other side, Jesus asks them if they've forgotten about the loaves.

Meaning, "Have you forgotten My miracle making power?" What He's saying to them is, "All night long you've worried, when the fragments of the last miracle you experienced are underneath your seat in the boat." That's the way we are at times. God does something for us.

We get in a new challenge and we're sitting on a basket full of our last miracle, but we've forgotten that the Lord did it.

Gene Martin preached a sermon in this church a year or two ago. I'll never forget it. It relates to this passage. It was from Luke 11, where Jesus raised Lazarus. Martin said, "When the Lord called him forth after four days in the grave, He said, 'Lazarus, come out!' and Lazarus came out, all wrapped up. But then Jesus said, 'Loose him!' or 'Unbind him and let him go.'" Gene

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

said, “There’s a difference in that story between the things that only Jesus can do and the things that we can do.” None of us could say, “Lazarus come forth!” That’s only the thing the Lord can do. So the Lord does His thing, but when Lazarus comes out, all bound up, somebody else can take the garments off that have bound him up.

That’s the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus does the thing only Jesus can do. Only Jesus can multiply the loaves and the fish. But the disciples can be the waiters and the busboys. They get involved in the miracle.

I use that analogy to apply to the Billy Graham crusade. Only the Lord can save a human life. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can reach in and meet the need that we have. Only the Lord saves. We don’t save. We just witness to people, we don’t save them. I don’t even think we have converts. The Lord has the converts. It is His work.

Then He says, “I’m going to save them and your responsibility is to love them.” One evangelist, G. Campbell Morgan, said, “I am not for winning souls to the Lord,” and people got real shook up. He said, “I am for winning people to the Lord.” A lot of times, when people use the word “soul,” it is sort of disembodied and they don’t put a name and a face to it. But it is people we’re trying to reach. And only the Lord saves people, only the Lord saves souls.

But we’re His body, and when a new person is born into the kingdom of God, they need to be brought into the body of Jesus Christ. Just like Saul of Tarsus. He was saved. The Lord never said, “You’re going to be a Christian on your own strength.” Immediately, the Lord popped him into the body and said, “That’s where you grow. That’s where you live. That’s where you learn. That’s where you’re built up. That’s where you’re corrected.” We all need the body.

We have, coming up for us now, one of the greatest opportunities to see a crowd miracle. We look back at the Gospels and say, “I wish I could have been with Jesus the day He fed the five

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

thousand.” Beginning Friday night, we can be with Jesus when He feeds seventy thousand a night for ten nights in a row. The single greatest Christian meeting in North American history. That’s what this crusade is slated to be. There will be more people coming these ten nights than any other comparable period of time of Graham crusades in North America. There’s a chance, they estimate, that as many as seventy thousand people will come to know the Lord in these next ten days. It’s a great chance for the church of Jesus Christ, of which we are a part; we’re one small member of all the people that God is using. There is a part we can do. There is a part that only the Lord can do. There’s something that only the Lord can do, but He’s saying to His church, “There’s some things that I want you to do.” This Billy Graham crusade is going to happen once. Billy Graham is getting older. Who knows what style of evangelism the Lord will use in the 1990s, but this is our time. This is our hour. This is what the Lord is going to do. It’s a call. I issue a call to be committed to be involved. We need, we believe, for three hundred people to match the three hundred converts that are going to come to us for pastoral and loving care in the next two weeks. I would like all of you to be involved. I believe the Lord wants us all to be involved. That’s why I want you to be involved.

Fill out the card if you will be a part of the band of three hundred. We’re have very limited objectives. We’re just asking you to follow up one person over a five-week period. We’ll help you do that by giving you one hour of training. It’ll be a snap. The Holy Spirit is going to help you too!

We need young people as well, because there’s going to be a lot of teenagers at the crusade that are going to be coming forward. Young people, we want you to fill this out. An eleven-year-old girl asked me after the last service, “Can I fill one out?” I said, “If we have an eleven-year-old convert, I’m going to give you the eleven-year-old convert.” So even the kids can be involved.

LORD, USE ME

Luke 9:10–19

We want the young people and the adults. If you're a married couple and want to sign it as couple, you're welcome to do that.

Closing Prayer

Father, it's time for the feeding of the seventy thousand. We're alive to be a part of that. It's so great to read about Your miracles in the Bible. But it's so great too to see Your miracles today. You're going to do so many wonderful things in the days ahead. We just ask, Lord, that You would use each one of us. Lord, each of us can invite someone that doesn't know you to the Graham crusade. I pray that each of us will do that. Many, many of us can be available to follow up and be part of the Gideon's 300, the band that is small in number, but mighty and doesn't fear anything. Help us, Lord, before this day is out, to have in this church three hundred people we can depend upon to love the new people You're bringing into the kingdom. We ask it in the Lord's name. Amen.