

Mission Principles in Luke and Relevance to Contemporary Adventist Mission in Africa

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ABSTRACT—The Gospel of Luke presents to us several mission principles that are valid for contemporary mission practices. One of the passages in the Lucan Gospel that provides these principles is Luke 9:1-6 where Christ commissioned the Twelve Apostles and specifically gave them the mandate to both proclaim and demonstrate the arrival of the kingdom by preaching and healing. He also instructed them on the need to depend on Him for sustenance and how well they may relate to their audience in order to make their mission meaningful. This article studies the mission mandate in this Lucan passage and draws relevant implications for contemporary Christian Mission.

Keywords: Mission, Kingdom, Proclaim, Healing, Relationship, Audience

I. Introduction

Perhaps one of the most obvious elements of the church in the Lucan or Lukan (not sure) gospel is its missionary mandate. Among others, this idea is conspicuous in the two passages that record the sending out of the twelve (Lk 9:1-6) and the seventy-two (Lk 10:1-24). In Luke 9:1-6 as stated below, it appears Jesus intended to get the

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message of the arrival of the kingdom hope to spread across the nation of Israel.

¹Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.

² He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

³ And He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.

⁴ "Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart.

⁵ "And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them."

⁶ So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere (NKJV).

In this passage, Jesus commissions the Twelve to minister in his behalf in the towns and villages of the nations. R. C. Tannehill, (1986, pp. 215-216) posits that Luke 9:1-6 develops a theme earlier introduced in Luke 5:10, where the disciples were told they would be "fishers of men." Liefeld observed that in the time of Jesus:

The practice of sending a man on a mission empowered to act with full authority on behalf of the sender is known from the Talmud....

Such an appointment could therefore be repeated using words essentially similar though varying in detail (Liefeld, 1984, p. 918).

Thus, the core of the Lucan passage is the instructions for the missionaries with details of their empowerment, content of mission which is to proclaim the gospel in words, and physical healing of ailments and exorcism. Commenting on the relevance of these passages, scholars have argued that they were recorded not only for their historical purposes but because they were to serve as models for early Christian evangelism (Buttrick, 1976, p. 164), and that the basic principles in them have eternal values for the church (Marshall, 1978, p. 351). The question that may be asked is, how could this passage be

made relevant in the Adventist Mission in Africa as we proclaim the gospel? This essay therefore is an attempt to examine the passage in view of the question raised and draw some relevant applications.

II. A Survey of the Background of the Passage

In order to understand the significance and thrust of the passage it is important to appraise its context within the literary scheme of Luke. The passage in Luke is situated between the healing of the woman with hemorrhage for twelve years and the raising of Jarius' daughter (Lk 8:40-56) and the feeding of the five thousand in Bethsaida following the return of the disciples (Luke 9:10-17). But Mark places it after heralding his mission in his home town (Mark 6:1-6) and Matthew puts it immediately after his return from a missionary journey which heightened the awareness of the labour and the need for more workers (Matt 9:35-38). According to Barrel, Luke wishes to stress the fact that the mission task is enormous and "the demands upon Christ during the second tour made it apparent that the labourers were too few" (Barrel, 1982, p. 72).

Luke's narration of the mission of the Twelve follows the pattern of Mark 6:7-13, Matthew 10:1-14 and the material in Luke 10:1-12. The widely accepted explanation of these facts is the possible existence of two accounts of sending out of disciples on mission, one in Mark and the other in the *Quelle* material. It is believed that Luke had utilized these separately in chapters 9 and 10 respectively. However, H. Marshall notes that some scholars like Wellhausen, Beare and Hoffmann among others question the historicity of a mission by the disciples of Jesus (Marshall, 1978, p. 350). But Marshall rightly argues the authenticity of these events. He proposes that Luke intends to show that the Twelve who later figured prominently in Acts as witnesses and missionaries had already been called by Jesus and exposed to the pre-figuration of their ministry (Marshall, 1978, p. 350).

For the purpose of this paper, Luke 9:1-6, the passage of consideration, can be divided into certain a structure as shown below. These divisions are based on the thematic changes in the passage.

The calling of the Twelve and the giving them of power and authority to drive out Demons and heal diseases; v. 1

The Twelve sent to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the Sick; vv. 2, 6;

Instruction to Travel Light; v. 3 and

Relationship with those who would or reject their message vv. 4-5.

III. MISSION MANDATE

Having given a survey of the context and background of the passage, we proceed to discuss this passage within the space available for this work. The structure adopted is as stated above.

A. The Commissioning and Empowerment of the Twelve (v. 1)

The Twelve (see Lk 6:12-16) were the original number of the apostles and had already existed as an officially organized group before the time of the third Galilean tour. Luke records that they were given the power, Greek, (*dynamis*) and authority, Greek (*exousia*) over demons and physical illness. This idea is repeated in Luke 10:9. Luke includes the word *dynamis*, which does not occur in Matthew 10 or Mark 6. But this combination seems to be a reflection of Jesus' ministry of words and deeds, for "healing and proclamation of the kingdom are linked together" (Leifeld, 1984, p. 921). The coming of the kingdom was also to illustrate its power over demons by casting them out (Leifeld, 1984, p. 918); a divine seal to the good news of salvation that the church is charged to proclaim (Lenski, 1964, p. 500). Jesus had illustrated this in the episodes Luke had so far reported (see Luke 4:31-41; 5:12-26; 7:11-17; 8:40-56).

W. L. Liefeld opines that it was necessary for Jesus' disciples to have both authority and power because some itinerant Jewish exorcists were claiming supernatural powers (Leifeld, 1984, p. 921). S. O. Abogunrin sees these two elements as the spiritual weapons the Twelve needed to conquer all the forces of evil that they may confront (Abogunrin, 1998, p. 1399). Their authority extends over all (*panta*) demons. None were to be too powerful for them neither were diseases of any kind to intimidate them. This is because Luke stresses the "validation of the Gospel by among other means, the apostles'

miraculous power as God's messengers" (Leifeld, 1984, p. 918). Jesus Christ Himself provides the power for this; it is His authority over all contrary forces.

B. Proclaiming the Kingdom and Healing (vv. 2,6)

The kingdom of God is another term requiring investigation in the passage of consideration. Luke 9:6 links the "the kingdom of God" to the gospel to be heralded. Some have sought to distinguish this term from "the kingdom of heaven" which is common to Matthew but there is no basis to follow such line of thought. This position is strengthened by the evidences that the Gospels alternate the terminology in the sayings (see Matt 4:17 and Mk 1:15; Matt 13:31-32 and Lk 13:18-19).

Several meanings have been given to the term "kingdom of God." It has been variously understood as "the reign of God (Barnes, 1976, p. 107), "the divine rule of grace in the Messiah and the manner in which this rule enters and saves men's souls, (Lenski, 1946, p. 497), and "the benefits which God has provided through the work of Jesus" (Bock, 1994, p. 185). In the words of I. H. Marshall:

The term kingdom is used mainly of the action of God in intervening in human history to establish His rule. It refers to the action of God rather than the realm which He establishes, although the later idea is present in sayings which speak of entering the kingdom, and it finds its background in the apocalyptic expectation of the establishment of God's rule at the End..... (Marshall, 1970. p. 129).

The common principle in the foregone investigation and agreeable to us, is the presence of the radical principles of God dominating the affairs of men and his authority over the works of Satan, (sin, diseases and demonic possession), as introduced by the teachings and works of Jesus and by extension, the twelve disciples. It was this, primarily, rather than the future physical establishment of the kingdom that the disciples were to herald in words and demonstrate in their missionary assignment.

C. Instruction to Travel Light (v. 3)

Jesus also gave the Twelve instructions to travel light and depend on hospitality in Luke 9:3, 4. The Twelve were to travel with “neither a staff, nor a bag nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece” (NAS). Luke’s “neither a staff” (*mēte rhabdon*) agrees with Matthew 10:10 but raises a problem when compared with Mark 6:8. They were to take nothing except a staff. Some attempts have been made to harmonize these variant readings (see Liefeld, 1984, p. 919). However, the intent of the Synoptic is to report that Jesus instructed that the disciples travel light as a possible reminder of their protection and well-being being the responsibility of Jesus who was sending them. This was similar to the Jewish Essenes who practiced these travel modalities and the Jews also requested temple visitors to do the same (Fitzmyer, 1981, pp. 753-754).

But in contrast were the Greek Cynics and philosophers who constantly sought money from their audience (Bock, 1994, p. 162). Further in that time travelers often had two or more tunics for change and protection against the harsh weather conditions of Palestine; thus the forbidden bag for the Twelve may be the kind often employed by itinerant preachers and philosophers for begging (Liefeld, 1984, p. 918). The nature of the instruction not to burden themselves with excessive provisions may present the urgency of the mission task. Lenski opines “The orders are not intended to inflict hardship on the disciples but to relieve them of all worry regarding their bodily needs. He who sends them out will himself attend to all these things” (Lenski 1946, p. 498).

In the days of difficult travel conditions and poor accommodation Jesus in His instruction promised His disciples protection on the way and to make provisions for them in the homes of their receptive hosts. They were to learn to unreservedly trust in God for protection, shelter and food as they faithfully engage in the mission task that had been assigned to them.

D. Relationship with their Audience (vv. 4, 5)

How were the disciples to relate to a *hostile audience*? Luke 9:5 says they were to *shake the dust off their feet*. This was more or less a subtle judgment passed on such audience. The dust was symbolically to stand as witness against such towns and people. Albert Barnes gives an insight into the gravity of this practice:

The Jews taught uniformly that the dust of the Gentiles was impure, and was to be shaken off. To shake off the dust from the feet, therefore, was a significant act, denoting that they regarded them as impure, profane, and heathenish, and that they declined all further connection with them (Barnes, 1976, p. 111).

Luke in the Acts of the Apostles records that some of the apostles later literally carried out Christ's instruction of shaking the dust of their feet in their missionary tour (see Acts 13:51, 18:6). While we accept the seriousness of such act, we do not concur that this act forever excludes such people from the kingdom neither may such a condemnatory reaction be adopted in contemporary mission praxis.

In sum the missionary mandate in Luke 9:1-6 rotates around the following:

1) The church was given what we may refer to as a *holistic mission mandate* --- to preach the good news of redemption in Christ in word and to heal the sick.

2) The content of their message was the announcement of the presence of the kingdom of God in their teaching and action.

3) The preachers are to learn to trust in God absolutely for their security and daily provision.

4) Where they are not welcomed, they should not enforce their presence but leave by condemning such attitude.

IV. Mission Reflections

There are several mission principles that could be gleaned from Luke 9:1-6. Foremost amongst these is what we have chosen to refer to as holistic mission and ministry. Another important principle is the sacrificial nature of ministry and the relationship with the audience of the gospel. We have chosen to limit our reflections to these principles which form the focus of this section.

A. Holistic Ministry

1. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

The first area of interest in this section as we seek to explore the holistic mission and ministry mandate is the proclamation of the reign of the kingdom of God. The concept of the kingdom as expressed in our passage of focus and made clear earlier in this study seem to be a two-phased reality-present and future. In its present experience, the kingdom of God seems to be the reign of the radical and eternal principles of Christ over the mundane and transient affairs that dominate the thoughts and actions of man. This kingdom presence might be indicated in the values that motivate and are evident in the lives of those who respond to the teachings of Christ. It is these new and transformational values, as opposed to mundane and transient, that Christ charged his disciples to proclaim and teach in their missionary assignment.

Further, the kingdom-presence could also be the triumph of Christ's authority and power over the unwholesome and malevolent activities of the devil in the lives of Christ followers; for the presence of Christ ushers a new dawn in the life of the believer (2Cor 5:17). This is the message that should be sounded loud and clear in Adventist mission and ministry in Africa with a worldview of fear, disillusion and despondency.

The urgency of this right teaching on the kingdom-presence which may be summed as "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:15, 25) cannot be over-emphasized. There is need to place a balance between all the benefits and obligations of the Christian faith in the here and now and the future judgment in the resurrection in a culture where the core of most of the proclamations is a sustained emphasis on material prosperity and well-being and shallow theological/spirituality content.

2. Bringing Healing to the Sick

The next principle of the holistic ministry inherent in Luke 9:1-6 is a balance between the verbal proclamation and the demonstration of the reign of the gospel. This is a *holistic mission mandate*. In Christ's earthly ministry "physical healings held a place in a large ministry that alone can restore *šalom*, healing that in every category of human existence..." (Reid in Dederen, 2000, p. 766).

Thus in the mission charge in Matthew 9:35 and Luke 9:1, 2, Christ instructed the church to heal the sick. The church was to

demonstrate that “physical healings are an earnest of the fullness of the kingdom of God (Reid in Dederen, 2000, p. 767).

It might be re-called that health reform was one of the factors that motivated the theology of Adventist mission. Writing on its importance and role in the gospel commission, White counseled, “the gospel of health is to be firmly linked with the ministry of the word” (White, 1963, p. 263). She further states, “medical missionary work must be done... in many places where the truth has not yet been proclaimed” (White, 1948b, p. 211). Still, medical missionary work is described as “the right hand of the gospel...necessary to the advancement of the cause of God” (White, 1948a, p. 579).

Therefore, present Adventist ministry in Africa needs to emphasize the role of health and healing in its mission and ministry. Speaking further on the contemporary relevance of the ministry of healing by Christ’s agents, White writes:

Christ is the same compassionate physician now that He was during His earthly ministry. In Him there is healing balm for every disease, restoring power for every infirmity. His disciples in this time are to pray for the sick as verily as the disciples of old prayed. And recoveries will follow; for "the prayer of faith shall save the sick." We have the Holy Spirit's power, the calm assurance of faith that can claim God's promises. The Lord's promise, "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" ... is just as trustworthy now as in the days of the apostles (White, 1905, pp. 225-226).

However, the healing ministry of the church is not limited to direct answers to prayers. But not everybody has full understanding of these principles that healing may not occur as a result of direct answer to prayers. Some think that such circumstances indicate a weak faith. Therefore, in doing mission and relying on God for healing, people need to be taught to “... employ nature's agencies for the restoration of health (White, 1905, p. 231 emphasis mine) and accept God’s will in such circumstances.

The balanced understanding on healing and mission becomes very imperative in Africa with the Pentecostal somewhat perverse emphasis on the present bliss the gospel offers and the total gospel theology of the Pentecostals. For them, salvation is holistic thus encompassing all of life’s problems, and the presence of ‘signs and wonders’ was the realization of the presence of the kingdom of God

(Anderson, 2002, p. 525). This is an indispensable part of Pentecostal evangelistic methodology and has no doubt, been a major attraction to Pentecostalism in Nigeria and other African countries because many see these miracles and healings as validation of the word of God and have been persuaded to become Christians. Hence, the absence of some of 'these signs' in the Adventist ministry has been judged by some as a lack of faith.

Equally important and perhaps, more fundamental than healing either by prayer or use of remedies, is health itself. This is because the knowledge of the Gospel should also bring the knowledge of how to live. Perhaps it was in this vein that White counseled:

True religion and the laws of health go hand in hand. It is impossible to work for the salvation of men and women without presenting to them the need of breaking away from sinful gratifications, which destroy the health, debase the soul, and prevent divine truth from impressing the mind (White, 1950, p. 131).

The imperative of a healthy lifestyle which could ensure good health and less emphasis on healing processes is what God implies in Exodus 15:26. Therefore, a sustained teaching on the principles of healthful living as known and practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church is needed not only at evangelistic programs but also for church nurture.

B. Relationship with Audience

Christian ministry and mission in Africa, in the midst of uncertain political situations, conflicts, violence and religious bigotry by adherents of some religions seem very challenging. It is also certain that the Gospel would not be easily accepted by some who mistake the good values it teaches as western and thus objectionable. In these circumstances, doing mission and ministry in Africa calls for tact in methodologies of presentation and even missionaries' assessments of their audience. Thus, there is need for intentionality and appropriate but biblical methodologies that would not insult the sensibilities of those we intend ministering to. Because where inappropriate methodologies are employed in the proclamation of the gospel it could lead to hostilities that may adversely affect further mission work in such places.

In Luke 9:4, 5 as we observed earlier in this study, Christ admonished his disciples to be sensitive to their audience. They were to receive the hospitality of friendly audience/host but not insist on ministry to those who might resist them. Therefore, in doing mission and ministry in Africa today, with its peculiar situations, the counsel of Christ to his disciples in Matthew 10:16 to be prudent and discreet in avoiding danger is imperative.

C. Sacrificial Ministry

A final significant implication of the mission praxis especially in Luke 9:3 is the sustenance of the ministers. At a time when Gospel ministers were not on wages, the Twelve were admonished not to take anything, such as staff, bag, bread, money and extra tunic, for the journey but to rely on the hospitality of their host. One may conclude that Christ does not intend that the pre-occupation about their physical welfare should affect the disciples' mission since He would care for them as long as they are engaged in his work.

Similarly, in this era of paid ministry, Christ's instructions to the Twelve may imply that ministers of the Gospel need not be consumed by their concern for well-being, greed and ostentatious lifestyles that might be impediments to proclamation and acceptance of the Gospel. Therefore, the counsel of Christ in this passage seems to point to a modest lifestyle in which much comfort and security of gospel ministers are not emphasized at the expense of the proclamation of the Gospel and the mission of the Church. Thus, gospel ministers are not to compromise their spiritual task and integrity in the quest for acceptance and comfort.

V. Conclusion

From the foregone discussion of the passage which records the sending out of the Twelve it is obvious that Jesus clearly spelt out their mandate and assured them of His power and authority sufficient enough to meet the challenges that might confront them. They were to preach the good news of the kingdom, which includes Christ's provision of salvation from the dominion of Satan, a victorious life for a believer now, and the reality of the coming judgment and life eternal. Christ also counseled the gospel workers to put confidence in Him for provisions and safety; for while their daily needs and safety

are important, they are not to be occupied with such at the expense of mission and eternal life. These mission instructions are as valid for contemporary missionary assignment as they were for the Twelve. Thus all who engage in the vocation of Christian mission are challenged to reflect the ideas of mission evident in Luke 9:1-6 and discussed in this paper.

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