

I. Introduction

Good morning! Today we are continuing our study in Luke 9. Let's begin by noticing a couple of things about the context. Luke 9 began with the sending out of the Twelve. **Luke 9:1-2, "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."** Compare this with **Luke 10:1, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go."**

More disciples are being sent out and they are being sent to more places. The Twelve were sent only to Jewish towns, but the seventy-two, are sent to, **"every town and place,"** that Jesus was going to. This would include Jewish, Samaritan, and gentile towns. More disciples reaching more kinds of people - there is a big growth in the ministry. Luke is showing us this, and I think Luke also gives us some clues about the causes.

What does Luke place in between the sending out of the Twelve and the seventy-two? Well, in Luke 9:10-17, we saw how Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish in order to feed five thousand men, plus an unknown number of women and children. And in Luke 9:18-20, there was Peter's confession of faith.

Then, in Luke 9:28-36, there was the transfiguration, when Jesus appeared in glory with Moses and Elijah, and when God the Father spoke from the cloud. Plus in Luke 9:37-43, there was the time when Jesus cast out the demon that the nine disciples could not cast out. And also, Jesus told the disciples about how He was going to die in Jerusalem and then rise from the dead.



We can interpret these events as demonstrations of the Lord's provision, His glory, His power over evil, and as a process through which the disciples are gaining a more clear understanding of who Jesus is. I think that all of these things were working together to strengthen the faith of the disciples and to draw people in the crowd to believe in Jesus and become disciples. So the number of core, committed disciples is growing and more ministry is happening.

As we go on to today's passage we will see several more things, but I think there is one theme running through today's Scripture; the theme of priorities. Then and now, the ministry grows when the followers of Jesus make Him the number one priority in their lives. With this introduction, let's read Luke 9:46-62.

II. Scripture Luke 9:46-62 (NIV)

[46] An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. [47] Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. [48] Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest." [49] "Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." [50] "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you." [51] As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. [52] And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; [53] but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. [54] When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" [55] But Jesus turned and rebuked them, [56] and they went to another village. [57] As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will

follow you wherever you go." [58] Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." [59] He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." [60] Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." [61] Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." [62] Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

III. Teaching

In this passage, Jesus makes some surprising statements to several people who want to follow Him; it seems almost as if Jesus is deliberately discouraging them. This raises some questions. Is this passage talking about what is necessary to be saved? Or is it about how to follow Jesus into deeper discipleship and into full-time service? But if we really love Jesus, it becomes the same thing, because love for Jesus will always draw us into a deeper and deeper relationship with Him.



Sometimes we meet people who want to be, "minimum," Christians. They want to know how much sin they can get away with and still be forgiven. They want to know, what is the least they can do and still be saved. Well, there are a lot of problems with that attitude, including the problem that it produces very sad and lonely Christians, if they are Christians at all.

What coach wants players who do the least they can do to get by? What kind of team would that attitude produce? What company wants workers who do the minimum amount of work they can get away with? Who would want to marry someone who asked about the minimum amount of love needed to stay married? It is sad and lonely just to think about. And it is also very boring. Doing the minimum is no fun at all. If you are interested in the question of what is the minimum commitment that a person can make and still be a Christian, then you can research that yourself. I am not interested in that question. Instead, I want to challenge us all to be the very best Christians we can possibly be.



At the 2004 Olympic in Athens, Mizuki Noguchi won first place in the women's marathon. But she did not win the gold by asking about the minimum speed allowed for the race. She won by running the marathon as fast as she was able, pushing herself to the limit. Her victory at the Olympics was great; it is something to applaud.



But take a look in **1 Corinthians 9:24-25**, Paul says, **"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."** Paul challenges us to train and run in our Christian life like Olympic marathon runners who want the gold medal. We are not running for our own fame, but for an eternal prize, the salvation of many people around us. In today's passage Jesus shows us how to get our priorities straight so that we can run in such a way as to win.

When the disciples began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest they were focused on their own ambitions. They wanted to know who would get the best seats at the table when they all sat down together in Jesus' Kingdom. But what did Jesus say? **Luke 9:48, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest."** For the disciples, greatness was to be achieved by forgetting about social status and humbling themselves to minister to the least in society, represented by the children,



After that, in **Luke 9:49**, we read, **"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."** John and the others wanted to keep their group closed and protect their brand name. They thought that only they should be permitted to do

ministry in Jesus' Name. This reminds of me of how some denominations and churches today seem to think that only they have the right way to do ministry. But Jesus corrected this attitude, saying in **Luke 9:50**, **"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."** I think the application here for us is to not worry about how other churches or ministries do things and just rejoice that they also are glorifying the Name of Jesus. There is plenty of work everyone; it is of no use to criticize the work others are doing.

Jesus was on His way to minister in a certain Samaritan village, but the people there did not welcome Him. They didn't want Jesus in their town. **Luke 9:54-56** tell us, **"When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village."** James and John probably got their idea from 2 Kings 1, where Elijah called fire down on the soldiers who were coming to arrest him. That was a time of judgment, but Jesus came to preach grace. Jesus is telling the disciples, don't get mad and waste time on retaliation. If the door to ministry in one place is closed, just go on to another place. The task of preaching the Good News is urgent; we shouldn't waste time judging those who reject Jesus; judgment is God's job.

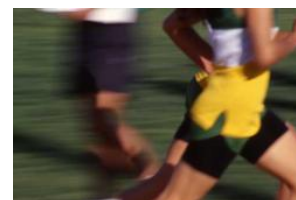
Luke 9:57-58, says, **"As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."** Here is a man who wants to follow Jesus. But Jesus warns Him that he may not have a bed to sleep in anymore if he becomes a disciple. Basically Jesus is saying that there is no promise of earthly security or comfort for His followers. If personal comfort is your priority, you won't be able to go where Jesus is going.

Luke 9:59-60, **"He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."** We should understand that this man's father is probably very much alive. If the father had been dead, then the son would not have been away from home talking to Jesus. The choice of words may seem odd because of cultural differences, but I think that what the man is saying is that he will follow Jesus after he has fulfilled all of his family obligations. The obligation to bury his father is probably just an example that represents all the duties expected of a son.

The Bible teaches us to honor our father and mother and there is no disrespect for parents or ancestors in the Scripture. A Christian son or daughter should be a blessing to the whole family. But if we love the Lord, then following the Lord comes first and family obligations come second. And if we want to see our families come to Jesus and be saved, then we need to set the example for them by making our relationship with Jesus our first priority.

Luke 9:61-62, **"Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."** We don't even have to read the whole verse to see that this man is not ready to put Jesus first. He says, **"I will follow you, Lord; but..."** Whatever we see the word, **"but,"** we understand that this man wants to set conditions before he follows Jesus. If he had been whole-heartedly committed, then it is likely that Jesus would have sent him back to visit his family and witness to them. But this man wants to set conditions first and follow Jesus later. He is not looking forward to walking with Jesus; instead, like Lot's wife in Genesis 19:26, he is looking back at his old life.

Do you want to follow Jesus? I mean, do you really want to follow Jesus? Then the way to run the race is to set aside all earthly ambitions and earthly security and make Jesus number one in your life, ahead of all earthly ties and earthly distractions. No conditions. No, "buts." Just, **"I will follow you, Lord."**



This doesn't mean that you will never have any more earthly pleasures, success, or time with your family. Today's Scripture isn't really about what you have to give up to follow Jesus. It is really about priorities, making Jesus your first priority, and letting everything else take second place. Jesus knows what you need and He will take care of you as long as you stay close to Him. **Matthew 6:33** promises us, **"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** We gain far more than we lose when we follow Jesus.

What are the top priorities in our own lives? Our position at work? Our status in society? Our families? Our health or our comfort? These things are OK as number #2, #3, or #4 priorities. But if we love Jesus then we will make following Him our number one priority.



IV. Conclusion

At the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to minister in the Jewish towns. But later, after Jesus had strengthened their faith and helped them to get their priorities straight, then Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples to every place He was going. And eventually Jesus was going to send even more disciples even further. **Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

If you start in Israel, then maybe here in Osaka we are already at the, **“ends of the earth.”** For two thousand years the Good News of Jesus has been spreading around the world. But the work is not yet finished. There is much more to be done. Are we ready to make following Jesus our first priority so that we can reach more and more people In Osaka and beyond? I am convinced that we will see many more people come to faith in Jesus when we make following Jesus our number one priority. Let’s pray.

V. Closing Prayer