**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE LIMITLESS ONE**

**Luke 9:1-17**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Luke 9. Today we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke called, "Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt".

We live in a culture of burnout. It’s common to meet people who are so weary, and so tired, that all they want to do is abandon all their responsibilities. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt like you’re ready to stop trying so hard, and to give up on trying to make a difference in the world and in the lives of others?

I may not be very old, but believe it or not, I have felt this at times in my life. When I was a student at McMaster, I was heavily involved with a Christian ministry on campus. It was a great experience, and I don't regret my involvement at all. But I had so many responsibilities and commitments that I was essentially functioning as a full-time student and a full-time ministry worker.

I remember after my third year of university, I felt so burnt out from university life that I was ready to give it all up. I didn't want to disciple people any more, or go around campus sharing the gospel only to be rejected again and again. All I wanted to do was go to class, read my text books, write my essays, and sleep. That summer, I went on a camping trip with my brother and some of his friends. I remember one night as I lay outside on a rock under the midnight stars, I thought to myself, "I could live here forever. No more people. No more responsibilities. Just me and the stars." It was my way of saying, "Hakunah Matata". No more worries.

If I thought I was busy then, how busy am I now as a pastor with a wife and four + one kids? In his book “Crazy Busy”, Kevin DeYoung writes about how busy he was as a single college student. Then he jokes that

“The only people busier than single grad students are people who aren’t single and aren’t grad students.”

People aren't meant to continue on and on without ceasing. We have limitations. We have limited abilities, limited energy, even limited love for other people. Our problem is that we often live as though we don’t have limitations, and when we live like that for an extended period of time, we can’t keep going. We shut down, and we lose much of the abilities and motivations we once had.

In our text today, Luke invites limited people like you and me to look to the one who has no limitations – Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus had moments of weakness and weariness, because he was human just like us. But the difference between Jesus and us is that Jesus wasn’t *only* human. He was and is God himself. And as God, he can both do and equip us to do what we could never do by ourselves.

The title of this message is **Look to the Limitless One**. My aim is to show you that **The Limitless Resources of Christ Are All Available to the Limited Disciples of Christ**. We will have three points today:

1. Limitless Authority
2. Limitless Compassion
3. Limitless Provision

(1) **LIMITLESS AUTHORITY**

Up to this point in Luke’s Gospel, the apostles have largely functioned as spectators. They listened to Jesus’ teaching, they watched him perform miracles, and they marveled at his power. They were following Jesus, but they weren’t yet imitating him. All this is about to change in Chapter 9.

Jesus never planned for his ministry to be a one-man show. His intention has always been to build into his disciples and then release them into the world. Indeed, back in Chapter 5, Jesus told some of his first disciples that they, like him, were to be “fishers of men”. Now, after showing them the power of God, and teaching them about the kingdom of God, it was finally time to send them out into the seas of people to catch men and women for the gospel.

This calling to be “fishers of men” is just as true for Christians today as it was for the first Christians, and yet it’s so easy for us to treat ourselves less like fishermen and women more like spectators on a fishing show. We would rather watch the pros do it than risk botching it all up and scaring all the fish away. After all, we tell ourselves, what do we know about fishing? Fishing is an art, not a science. It takes instincts; it takes knowledge; and it takes experience, and most of us feel like we lack all those things.

You know what? It’s true! We *do* lack instincts and knowledge and experience, and if we try fishing for men and women, we’re likely going to botch it up at some point or another. Many of us have tried sharing the gospel with others, but we felt clumsy. We felt like we didn’t have all the answers, or we felt like we didn’t represent Christ very well. We felt so unqualified that all we wanted to do was retreat back into the safety of watching others do the fishing.

But here’s the thing: our qualifications don’t depend on how well we are equipped by our own hard work. Our qualifications depend on how well we are equipped by Jesus. Jesus is the One who equips us for ministry. Jesus is the One who qualifies us.

That’s what we see in verse 1: “And he called the twelve together and *gave* them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases”. All of Jesus’ power and authority that the apostles witnessed when they saw Jesus cure a man of paralysis, raise a little girl from the dead, cast out a legion of demons, and command the winds and the waves, was suddenly at their very own fingertips. They had enjoyed front row seats to the greatest fishing show in history as they watched Jesus wield his limitless authority, and now they were invited to join in.

Try to imagine the rush of adrenaline the apostles must have felt when Jesus gave them this power and authority. It could very easily have gotten to their heads, making them feel more important than they actually were. Indeed, after this experience of casting out demons and curing diseases, the apostles started being tempted in ways they never were before. They start bickering about which of them will be the greatest in God’s kingdom. They block children from coming to Jesus, thinking that Jesus, and therefore themselves as well, were too important and busy to meet with them. They even ask Jesus if they can call fire down from heaven to consume a village that rejected Jesus. Great power often leads to great pride.

Jesus does two things to temper their pride. The first is in verse 2: “and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.” This missions trip wasn’t primarily about the power they now had to heal, but about the power of the message they now had to proclaim: the kingdom of God is here! God’s reign on earth has started to break into the world as men and women all over the world acknowledge his Lordship and follow his benevolent rule. The fact that demons are being cast out and diseases are being cured are nothing more than signs that the Kingdom of God is here.

This was good news. In fact, it was *the* good news. Luke says in verse 6 that the apostles were “preaching *the gospel* and healing everywhere.” The news of the kingdom was the good news of the gospel. The apostles knew that the Kingdom of God was near because the King of God’s Kingdom was near. Jesus was in the world, and he was making everything right again. The apostles knew all this, and it was true. But what they didn’t know was that the Kingdom was near not only because the King was near, but because the King had come near to die.

Jesus hadn’t yet told the apostles that he had come to die. That’s coming later in Chapter 9. Even when he does tell them, they don’t understand. But those who know the Scriptures know why Jesus had to die. Jesus came to die for the sins of those who would enter his kingdom, so that our treason against God could be forgiven. All of us are sinners, and therefore all of us have committed treason against God. None of us are fit to enter into God’s Kingdom. But if we come to Jesus to save us, believing that he died for our sins and rose from the grave to give us new life, then he welcomes us with open arms to become the very sons and daughters of God.

This is the message the apostles were sent to proclaim, and this is the message that we are sent to proclaim. Everything we do, and every gift that we possess, is meant to serve this message.

The second set of instructions Jesus gave to the apostles is found in verses 3-5: “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”

Jesus gave the apostles all power and authority, and then he sends them out with nothing. They were to live in complete dependence on God for everything, for their food, their clothing, and their lodging. Why? To teach them that their power was not meant to serve themselves. It was meant to serve others. They were to receive no personal benefit from their newfound power. The only purpose of their power was to benefit those around them.

What is this text saying to us? It would be easy to say that Luke is giving us *the* model for sharing the gospel, and that all believers have the same power and authority that Jesus gave to the apostles. But that wouldn’t be accurate. Just because something is done once in Scripture doesn’t mean that it’s always to be done that way.

We need to recognize that the apostles had a unique position and role in salvation history that we do not have. They were the first twelve men Jesus ever sent out, and they were to lay the foundation for the church. That’s why they were given comprehensive power and authority. Though we believe that all apostolic gifts are available to Christians today, no single Christian is meant to receive them all like the apostles did.

So how does this text apply to us? I believe that there are three things that God wants us to take away from this text:

1. Every gift God gives us is sufficient for us to do the work he has assigned to us. The apostles needed power and authority over demons and disease. That may not be what you need. You may need courage to share the gospel with your neighbours. You may need faith to endure through a long, grueling trial. Whatever you need, God will provide it. And if you don’t receive what you think you need, you can rest assured that it’s not because God was unable to give it to you. It’s because God deemed it unnecessary to give to you. God possesses limitless authority, and therefore, there’s nothing he can’t give to you.
2. Every gift God gives us is meant to serve the message he has sent us out to proclaim. The apostles were commissioned to do miracles so that the message could go forth with power. The gifts God gives to us aren’t ends in themselves. They’re meant to serve the message of the gospel. God doesn’t give you courage just so that you can ace your job interview. He gives you courage so that you can boldly share your faith with others. God doesn’t give you faith just so that you can endure suffering. He gives you faith so that, as you endure, you can bear witness to the steadfast love and faithfulness of Christ.
3. Every gift God gives us is given for God’s glory, not ours. He gives us what we need to, so that we can serve *him* and make much of *him*. That’s why Jesus sent the apostles out completely dependent on God’s provision. He wanted them to know that everything they had – their money, their food, their clothes, and their gifts – were given to them for the glory of God, not the glory of man. It’s so easy to take credit for the gifts God has given us. We want recognition for the work we do, because we have forgotten that everything we have, we have received from God. Let us not rob God of his glory by taking credit for the work he is doing through us.

(2) **LIMITLESS COMPASSION**

Jesus has limitless authority, but all that authority would come to no use if he were not patient towards sinners. This leads to our next point: limitless compassion.

Luke tells us in verses 7-9 that, as Jesus’ ministry expanded through the sending out of the apostles, he began to attract the attention of some people in high places. Luke tells us in verse 7 that Herod the tetrarch, heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great who attempted to kill Jesus when he was a baby, and he was the one who executed John the Baptist after John called him out for sexual immorality.

As Herod heard reports about Jesus, he wondered, “Who was this man who not only had the power to do miracles, but was able to give others the power to do miracles?” Herod heard from some that John, whom Herod had beheaded, had been raised from the dead. Others told him that the prophet Elijah had returned from ancient days, and others still said that another prophet of old had risen from the dead. Whoever it was, Herod had to meet him.

Why? Perhaps Herod wanted to see if he also could receive power. Perhaps he just wanted to see something amazing. Whatever it was, it wasn’t because he had a genuine desire to know Jesus and follow him. Luke tells us about Herod’s first encounter with Jesus in Chapter 23. Herod is brought in to intervene as Jesus is about to go to the cross, and it is there that Herod shows his true colours:

“When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer…And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.” (Luke 23:8-9, 11)

Jesus had no time for a man like Herod. It didn’t matter that he was a powerful ruler, an influential “mover and shaker” in the world at the time. Jesus had come to reach “the poor in spirit”. He came to those who knew they needed help, not those who wanted an audience with Jesus for their own selfish reasons.

And so, Luke mentions this earthly king as a mere footnote to the story of this Heavenly King who had come to bring God’s kingdom into the world.

Verse 10 tells us that the apostles returned to Jesus and “told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.” After a busy season of ministry, Jesus hoped to find some solitude with his closest companions so that they could rest and enjoy one another’s fellowship.

As it turns out, however, Jesus and his apostles were about to get the exact opposite. Verse 11 says, “When the crowds learned it, they followed him”. How many people? Luke tells us down in verse 14 that there were “about five thousand men”. Five thousand men. That’s not including the women and children. If we were to just take the five thousand number, we’re talking about 14 sanctuaries this size all packed with people.

More than five thousand people came to Jesus with their problems at a time when he wanted to rest. How do you respond when you’re exhausted and tired, and you just want some R&R, but people keep coming to you with their problems? I can’t help but think of moms with young kids. For them, it’s 24/7 of needs, requests, and problems, from “I’m hungry” at 3:00 in the afternoon, to “I peed my bed” at 3:00 in the morning.

Sometimes all you want to say is, “Change your own sheets” or perhaps, “Just sleep on the other end of the bed.” We will never stop loving our kids, but sometimes we don’t like them very much. We run out of compassion, and we either fail to attend to their needs, or we take care of them with a frown on our faces.

But Jesus is different. Verse 11b says that “he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.” The parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark’s Gospels say that Jesus had *compassion* on them. Jesus looked out at this crowd of more than 5,000 people and didn’t roll his eyes and say, “Here we go again”, or “Just take care of yourselves”, or “Sorry, not available right now. Instead, he welcomed them, taught them, and healed them.

This doesn’t mean that Jesus was always serving and never resting. He slept on a boat in the middle of a raging storm that almost caused all his closest friends to drown! That’s how exhausted he could be. Like us, Jesus could run out of energy. But unlike us, he never ran out of compassion.

Think about that the next time you’re up in the middle of the night with your toddler, or a coworker asks you for help when you have deadlines to meet, or your classmate asks you for study help when you’re behind on your own homework. You may not be able to help everyone, but you can show everyone compassion.

And when you don’t feel compassion towards those who come to you (and there will be many times when you don’t), then remember that Jesus isn’t like us. He never runs out of compassion. His compassion for those who come to him is an unceasing fountain of mercy that never runs dry.

It’s crucial for us to know that Jesus isn’t like us. Our compassion is limited, but his is limitless. One of the reasons why we stop going to God in prayer is that we think he’s like us. We think he grows tired of us coming to him with our needs, because that’s how we respond to the needs of others. But God isn’t like us. Jesus reveals the Father to us, and shows us that he is a God of limitless compassion. As the prophet Jeremiah so beautifully wrote in Lamentations 3:22-23:

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

When you’re tempted to stop coming to God with your needs because you’re afraid he’s grown tired of you, let this image of Jesus come to your mind: Jesus, exhausted and tired, ready to retreat and rest, turns and sees the crowds of thousands coming towards him. He doesn’t walk away. He doesn’t tell them to leave. Instead, he smiles, and he welcomes them with open arms and a compassionate heart.

We need to know this Jesus more. This is who he is. This is why we adore him and worship him. He did not only show us compassion when he went to the cross. He shows us compassion *every day*. And if you have put your trust in him, believing that he died for your sins to bring you back to God, then his compassion will extend to eternity.

And as we grow in the knowledge of his limitless compassion, a miracle happens. We become more compassionate people. Our capacities for compassion expand and stretch, so that we become more patient, more forbearing, more loving. The more we know Jesus, the more we become like him.

(3) **LIMITLESS PROVISION**

Our text today ends with one final lesson about who Jesus is and how he wants to use us. Luke has shown us the limitless authority of Jesus and the limitless compassion of Jesus. Now he shows us the limitless provision of Jesus. This leads to our third point.

Verse 12 tells us that, as evening approached, the disciples counselled Jesus to start sending the crowd away. Bethsaida was a “lonely place”, which meant that there wasn’t enough lodging and food there to provide for the needs of the massive crowd.

But rather than send them away, Jesus gives the apostles a command in verse 13: “You give them something to eat.”

How were the apostles supposed to do that? They’re not sure. After some deliberation, they come up with two options. Option #1: gather all the food from the crowd and distribute it evenly. Option #2: go and buy take out. The problem with the first option was that the crowd possessed a grand total of five loaves and two fish, which was maybe enough to feed five, but far too little to feed five thousand. The problem with the second option was that it was too expensive. Mark’s Gospel tells us that it would have cost 200 denarii to buy bread for that many people, which would have been more than seven months of wages for an average labourer.

They didn’t have enough food, and they didn’t have enough money. So how were the apostles to obey this command?

The answer was to pursue Option #3: ask Jesus! It’s amazing how easy it was for the apostles to forget who it was they were serving. When they were on the boat in the middle of the storm, they desperately tried everything to save themselves. It was only after they thought they were going to drown that they woke Jesus up. We see the same thing here. As the apostles struggled through a seemingly impossible situation, they forgot that they could turn to the One who routinely makes the impossible possible.

Jesus decides to take over the situation. Verses 14-17 say, “And he said to his disciples, ‘Make them sit down in companies, about fifty each.’ And they did so, and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were satisfied. And they took up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces.”

People often refer to this story as an example of how Jesus takes our weaknesses and accomplishes powerful things through them. Our focus tends to be on what Jesus does with the bread and fish. They are like the gifts, abilities, and resources that we bring to God, and he uses them to bless far more people than we could ever imagine.

While this is no doubt true, I don’t think this is what the text is all about. The focus isn’t ultimately on the multiplication of the bread and fish. The focus is on how the multiplication enabled the apostles to obey Jesus’ command.

Jesus could have fed the people himself, but that’s not what he did. Instead, he had the apostles do it. He had them order the people into groups of fifty in verse 15, and he had the apostles distribute the bread in verse 16. Why? Why did Jesus get the apostles to do what he could have done himself? He did it this way to show them that they still needed to keep his command, and the only way to keep it was for Jesus to provide what they needed.

It is no different with us. Jesus may not command us to feed more than five thousand people in the middle of nowhere, but he does give us commands that are impossible for us to keep by ourselves. He commands us to love our enemies. He commands us to stop loving money. He commands us to trust him in impossibly difficult seasons of suffering. He commands us to lay down our lives for the good of others and for the glory of God. Can we keep these commands? Not by ourselves we can’t.

But if Jesus helps us, then we can. The impossible becomes possible through Jesus’ limitless provision. Jesus always provides for what he commands. Too often, we try to keep his commands with our own resources and abilities. We try to feed thousands of people with only five loaves and two fish. It won’t work. We need Jesus to multiply the loaves and fish first. Only then, when Jesus has provided, can we keep his commands.

How do we know that Jesus will provide what he commands? Because Jesus has already provided for our failures to keep his commands. Our confidence in his ability to provide for what we need *now* is rooted in our confidence in how he has already provided for us *on the cross*. On the cross, Jesus did not spare his own life in order to free us from the penalty for our sins, and because of that, we can be sure that Jesus will provide all we need to free us from the power of sin.

**CONCLUSION**

So let me ask you, are you struggling to keep God’s commands? Perhaps you’re struggling with sexual purity after a long fight against pornography. Or perhaps you’re struggling to trust God during a season of intense suffering. You know what your struggles are. If you don’t, you need to spend some time with the Lord asking him to reveal your sin to you, because all of us have sin. If we say we have no sin, we’re deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

Whatever your struggle may be, the message is the same: come to Jesus. Jesus has limitless authority, so if you come to him, you know he will equip you with the gifts you need to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus has limitless compassion, so if you come to him, you know he will never tire of you coming to him for help. And Jesus has limitless provision, so if you come to him, you know he will provide for what he commands.

Come to Jesus for help this week. Whether you are struggling to do the work God has assigned to you, or you feel like your reserves of compassion are empty, or you’re failing to keep God’s commands, come to Jesus, and you will find the help that you need.

How do we come to Jesus? Through prayer, and through his people. We must come to Jesus directly in prayer, asking him to provide what he commands. Sometimes he answers in a matter of seconds. Other times he answers in a matter of years. But if you are asking him to help you obey his commands, you can be assured that he will answer.

We must also come to Jesus through his people, the church. The church is “the body of Christ”. Yes, we are a flawed collection of sinners, but we are also saints, made holy by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. The church is one of the most important means of grace that God has given us to fight sin and grow in godliness. So come to Jesus through his people. Share your struggles with others. Talk to one of the pastors.

Keeping your struggles to yourself is like trying to feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. It’s impossible. But if you come to Jesus through prayer and through his people, then you will find everything you need to overcome them.