

Part 32: Provision and Identity

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I remember watching a couple episodes of a show called, "Undercover Boss." It was what it sounded like—a CEO or president of a company would go and work for a couple days disguised as a normal ordinary employee without anyone else knowing.

Generally there was this tender moment where an employee opened up to this undercover boss and described to them their dire situation, how hard and seemingly mismanaged work was, and the effect it had on them. But then one day the big reveal came, the CEO was shown for who he really was, and he promised that person to do something about the woes they encountered.

The appeal of this show highlights something that we will see played out for us today in Luke's gospel. That is this: our understanding of what someone is able to do is always limited by who we understand that person to be. In this show, if the boss took off his disguise the employees wouldn't hesitate to change their requests and to expect real provision, but that's the drama of it. Speaking to someone who is in charge changes what we expect.

What we've seen so far in Luke's gospel is that Jesus, though fully God, was really robed in the flesh. But this was no disguise, he was really human. But more than that, he was hardly undercover. Prophets anticipated his birth, angels pronounced his birth in the fields saying: "Unto you this day is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord."

But despite that clarity and proclamation there was a problem of experience. People didn't actually know what to think about Jesus and therefore wrestled with what to expect from him. Perhaps you've had a similar experience in your own life, knowing Jesus is distinct, maybe even that he is the savior, but what does that change in terms of your own day to day experience?

This next section of Luke's book includes stories of crowds, kings and disciples wrestling with their experience of Jesus as each tries to grapple with the reality of Jesus' identity: who is he?

Today, Luke interweaves two scenes of provision with two questions regarding Jesus' identity. Our main point this morning is going to be this: **When we see God's provision in Jesus as the Christ we can trust Jesus' provision in all of life.** To put it simply we are going to see over the next two weeks how our understanding of Jesus directly impacts our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. Your understanding of Jesus', your worship of Jesus, and as we see today, your ability to be a disciple of Jesus is always limited by your perception of Jesus' identity.

We are going to see this by looking at the text in two parts. First in Luke 9:1-9 we are going to see **Power that Raises Questions** and then in verses 10-20 we are going to see **Provision that Gives Answers.**

Let's begin by reading the first portion of our text this morning: **Luke 9:1-6.**

If you've been with us the last few weeks Luke has been showing us Jesus' unique power over the forces of the world, the flesh and the devil but now the focus shifts to Jesus' apostles as he begins to share with them some of his own power and authority.

These men who Jesus are sending out are the twelve distinct men who Jesus hand-picked to be his apostles back in Luke chapter 6. These men were disciples in a general sense, but they were also uniquely chosen by Jesus to play a unique role in his ministry and in the early church (sent ones, vs. 2).

We already witnessed Jesus' choosing of these men and now for the first time we see Jesus' commissioning of these men and here we encounter our first point this morning: **Power that Raises Questions.**

Jesus not only sent out these men, but he gave them power, he gave them purpose, and he gave them provision.

We see the power in **Luke 9:1**. So far in the book of Luke it has been Jesus and only Jesus who has shown power over demons and the flesh, but here his apostles are specifically empowered by Jesus with his own power.

That's important to note. These disciples were given power. They didn't discover it. They didn't earn it. They were given it. It wasn't power innate to the disciples, it was power that belonged to Jesus yet Jesus was no less powerful as he shared a piece his infinite authority with finite men.

If you've ever been around kids you know the borrowed sense of power that comes when one child has the privilege of saying to another child, "Mom says..." That 7 year old might have incredible power in that moment, but it's not intrinsic to them, it is power bestowed by the mother.

But this power to heal and cure diseases was for a very distinct purpose in Luke 9:2, they were to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and to heal.

All of the power they were given, all of the wonders they were to work, all of the healing they were to display was to show, confirm, validate and proclaim that the Kingdom of God had drawn near. In other words the miracles were in service of the message.

Imagine, if you were to walk into a grocery store and some guy stood outside and said, "Hey, come over here. Inflation is going to end. It's being solved right now this very moment." We might think that's a wonderful hope and we are anxious to see it. But what if he walked into the store with you and every item he touched miraculously dropped in price. We would be more apt to believe him, we would be driven deeper into wanting to know more about the "what," the "why" and the "how" behind all of it.

The miracles of the apostles and in the early church were given as proofs and validations that this message is the ultimate miracle. Jesus himself alluded to this priority in Luke 4 when he set aside the work of healing and said this: **Luke 4:43-44.**

So not only did Jesus give the disciples his power, he also gave them the purpose of preaching the first missionary messages. They were to share the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Lastly he gave them provision. Look again at **Luke 9:3-6.**

Jesus tells his disciples not to pack any additional items because even though some towns will reject them, other towns and other households will care for them. God was going to take care of the mission of his church and while some towns rejected the disciples and so incurred a just condemnation, others would be stirred to allow the apostles to stay in their homes, eat their food, and be welcomed by their hospitality.

I wonder how the disciples felt at this commission: Go to people you don't know, proclaim the good news of a Kingdom which is not ours, and do miracles humans are unable to do.

But what happens (vs. 6)? They go to the towns, they went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing. Jesus' wasn't blowing smoke. He really gave them all those things and he really provided for them everything they needed.

But this ministry of spectacular provision caught the eye of someone who was incredibly powerful. Look with me at **Luke 9:7-9**.

Herod the Tetrarch was the son of Herod the Great who was king when Jesus was born. And one thing history knows about the Herod's is that they were paranoid and power hungry.

Earlier in Luke this same Herod beheaded John the Baptist because he threatened his own power. John publically opposed Herod taking his sister-in-law as his wife so Herod used his power to solve the issue.

In killing John he thought he quashed anything to do with this coming messiah nonsense, but now all of a sudden an inquisitive fear seems to creep back over Herod. Not only is there power being displayed which he cannot control, but it's power regarding a kingdom, a realm in which he would find himself directly concerned with.

And more than that, it is now not only this one rogue traveling teacher who is able to perform signs like this, but there's 12 more of them causing a stir in Herod's area. People have begun to wonder themselves who this Jesus is. Did John the Baptist rise from the dead? Was it Elijah returning from heaven? Was it another prophet resurrected? And Herod asks his own question: **Luke 9:9**.

Luke often gives us these biographical glimpses into the emotions of real people and he does so not only to explain, but also to cause us to examine our own hearts. It's possible for many of us to know things surrounding Jesus. We can know the church, we can know community, we can know the worship songs, but do you know who it is who is behind these things? Do you have clarity?

Because as Luke continues we see that even the disciples at this point don't have a clear answer to the question yet. This is our second point this morning: **Provision that Gives Answers**.

Would you read with me **Luke 9:10-17**?

There are four books in the Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—all of which provide us a glimpse into Jesus' life and ministry. But this miraculous feeding of Jesus is one of the rare events recorded in all four gospel accounts and therefore its significance shouldn't be lost on us either.

Luke has chosen to share with us this account by surrounding it with context that helps us see the primary point a bit more clearly.

Consider the context Luke gives us in verses 10 and 11. These twelve apostles return from their first missionary journey and like giddy children, begin to tell Jesus all that they did. So Jesus took them away from the crowds and departed to a town in a remote area where, Mark tells us, they could rest.

But the crowds heard about it and crashed their little retreat and Jesus did what Jesus does. He welcomed the crowds. He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, and he healed those who had a need. Jesus himself continues in the ministry he began and invited the disciples into. Even when Jesus and his disciples are seemingly weary, Jesus is not too weary to welcome those who come to him.

But the day began to wear away, if you remember the geography of where we are at in this moment, we are in the Middle East, in the desert, in the heat of the day.

The tired disciples look at the crowd which included 5,000 men plus women and children and they begin to realize that something needs to happen. No one is prepared or equipped to feed all these people. The disciples just did ministry, but it was in villages and towns where people provided for them out of the abundance of society. They are out in the wilderness now, there's nothing here.

So they ask Jesus to send them away, to go back into the villages so they can find shelter from the sun and food to eat. But Jesus says something so perfectly Jesus-y. He looks at the twelve as they come to him with this seemingly genius idea, and he says, "You give them something to eat."

And that's the day you and I quit being disciples.

In what I can only imagine is a sort of dismissive frustration the twelve respond saying, "All we have are five loaves and two fish." These are the two most common staple foods of the time and the point would have come across like this: "All we have are five PBJ's and two protein bars. What are we supposed to do? Do you want us to go buy food for them?"

And here is where we see how quickly we misremember truths about ourselves and truths about Jesus.

For all of us, I'm sure we would have responded a similar way. These disciples have the last season wandering around the hot country side from city to city, they gave up part of their vacation to let Jesus preach and heal, and now it's hot and there's nothing for the people to eat.

But let's pay attention to the text here. In verse one Jesus sends out the twelve with power and authority to heal and preach. In verse six they go out preaching and healing everywhere. News of their miracles and message reach Herod's palace. They come back to Jesus in verse 10 and tell Jesus of all they were able to do with his might and his message even when he was not with them.

Then less than a day later, they are with Jesus in a barren place, under the hot sun, and they find themselves utterly hopeless why? Because they can't do anything.

Did you notice the "we" statements? "We are in a desolate place," "We have no more than some loaves and fish," "are we to go buy food for all these people?"

How easy it is to misremember both identity and provision, and how often do we do the same. At the beginning, they understood that it was power given to them by Jesus, they understood that it was Jesus' favor which opened the doors of hospitality. But after time, they begin to subtly think they were able to heal because they had the power. They were provided for because the towns had the means.

And here they were in the desert without power to multiply bread and without a town to provide.

If we have an incomplete understanding of who Jesus is we will always struggle with assuming Jesus is just like us, and we are just like him. There was nothing the disciples could do here. They only had a few fish, they couldn't buy food for everyone. But since when was their ministry contingent upon "them."

Imagine if my kids came to me and wanted me to open a bottle for them so that they could go into the backyard and share with their friends. So I use my mighty dad muscles, and I twist the cap off and send them back to share with their friends. But then that night we all gather around the dinner table, and I put another bottle on the table and they look up to me and begin to cry saying, "I can't do it! I can't open it."

The point is, they never could. It was always my gift to them, they gave as I gave to them. But so often when God gives us gifts of provision we begin to think that those gifts were contingent upon us, or our circumstances, and not the God who provides.

Following Jesus into desolate places under high heat will always leave us frustrated and hopeless unless we are able to understand the identity of the one who we sit with.

In the book of Hosea the Lord paints an intense picture of his relationship to his people when he calls Hosea to marry a prostitute to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness to God. In chapter 2 he talks about how Israel pursued other men for the sake of finding provision. Look at **Hosea 2:5b**. But look at what God says was the true reality: **Hosea 2:7-8a**.

Israel wanted oil, they wanted security, they wanted peace but they forgot who gave them all of that to begin with. They lacked oil, they lacked peace, they lacked security not because of their husband, but because they had left their husband.

Here, what the disciples were willing to accept with zeal in the cities apart from Jesus, they find themselves doubting in the desert with Jesus. Which shows one of our greatest problems too, that we learn to trust the gift and not the giver.

But look at what happens, here is where I love the sovereignty of God and how he makes a point: **Luke 9:14-17**.

Of all the mic drops in the Bible, this one hits the loudest. If you've ever hosted you know how hard it is to make the right amount of food without having far too little or far too much. Here Jesus takes five loaves of bread and two fish, blesses them, and breaks them up again and again and again and again so that a crowd of 10,000 plus is able to eat.

And not only did Jesus not run out, but it just so happened, that of those thousands of meals there are exactly, no more, and no less, than twelve baskets left over!

This isn't explicit in scripture, I'm taking a playful liberty here, but I like to imagine that after everyone ate and was satisfied, and the disciples, all twelve of them cleaned up and came back to Jesus, each with a doggy bag for tomorrow's lunch, Jesus just looked at them and said, "Huh, weird how that worked..."

This provision springboards into Luke's closing scene today where we see the main point of this whole portion, and arguably Luke's entire book: **Luke 9:18-20**.

Luke asks his disciples about his identity. He asks them first about what the crowds believe and they echo the same guesses that the people around Herod had. But then he asks them an even more pointed question: Who do you think that I am?

And Peter answers the bell with what are the most significant four words of his life: "The Christ of God."

For us the word Christ might mean a myriad of things, but it's not just a title or last name, it's a role. To be the Christ of God was to be the anointed of God. It was to be the Hebrew messiah of God.

Look at how the Hebrew word for Christ shows up in **Psalm 2:2**, but now look at what follows in **Psalm 2:6**.

The anointed one (the Christ of God) is also God's King.

And here's something astounding that we see in this passage. It wasn't until this point that the disciples fully understood that Jesus was the Messiah and God's anointed King. Yet remember what they were traveling the countryside preaching? The Kingdom of God.

Remember what this was perceived as in verse six? To proclaim the kingdom of God was to preach the gospel. Again that's Luke's favorite word it literally means they went about gospeling, good-newsing. But this was a good news that didn't yet see who Jesus was.

It was a good news about a Kingdom, but the nature of that Kingdom was so incredible that crowds and kings wanted to see it. It was a Kingdom where God drew near once more to his people, which meant the full benefits of God's presence became a present reality. No one was hungry, no one was sick, no one was fearful, no one wrestled with evil, no one worried about the economy, no one begged, no one was homeless. There were no tears, no sorrows, nor death in the Kingdom.

This message of this Kingdom is at the heart of what the American conscience still dreams about. But here we see the most significant aspect of this Kingdom—we see the King.

Here we see the proof and promise of God's provision for everything because Jesus is the Christ. The kingdom is great, but we can't get in apart from the King. For Peter, it clicked.

In the Old Testament, God miraculously provided bread for his people with mana, but here God sent more than bread, he sent the man who multiplies it. He sent the one who was going to die for our sins, he sent the one who was going to give us then all things.

But don't forget when this revelation came to Peter. Jesus tells us in Matthew that Peter didn't figure this out on his own, but instead God opened his eyes to see it. That's true for any of us who have clarity on Jesus, God opened our eyes to see what was already there. But how did he do it?

Not only did he see Jesus' cumulative ministry, and hear specific teaching, but this came on the heels of seeing Jesus commune with the Father through the Spirit in prayer. It was the uniqueness of this relationship which solidified Peter's understanding. If this Jesus who can calm the seas, rebuke the devil, call the dead to life and feed all who come to him is still dependent and fully provided for by communion with God, then how much more am I dependent upon God's messiah.

Here is our provision. Look at how Paul speaks of this in **Romans 8:31-32**.

If Jesus is the Christ of God, then in Jesus we have everything we need. His identity is our provision. If Jesus is the Christ, if God has provided salvation in him, then we know there is hope even when we sit hot and hungry in the desert as long as we sit with Jesus.

So what does this mean for us today? I have two quick points of application.

First, to those who desire to see Jesus, identity matters. Herod wanted to see Jesus, he had all the wealth to do it too, but he wasn't motivated enough to find Jesus himself. Don't make that same mistake. Curious interest is not the same as confessing faith in the clear identity of Jesus.

Herod and all his wealth wasn't able to find Jesus, but those with a need did. Why? Because Jesus provides. You might question if you really have a need, but we feel it. Look at our world, do you really think this is the best it will be? Don't you have a haunting hunger, a wish dream lurking in your soul for a reality where suffering is removed? That's the longing for the Kingdom. That's the need you have, you need to be there, but sin separates you.

But here's the solution **Colossians 2:19-20**. Here's the messiah who brings us peace. Here's the King who gets us into the Kingdom. Here is the King who is the Kingdom. Come to him in your need, and find his provision and be satisfied.

Second, for the church, that is for anyone who is a follower of Jesus the Christ of God—you too are a disciple. Though we are not apostles, all apostles are disciples. All are sent out by Jesus with the good news of his gospel. We are all equipped for the work of ministry.

And here we see that there will be times where caring for others, and growing in your own faith might seem insurmountable. Remember, the disciples were themselves hungry, hot and tired. But at the end they had leftovers for tomorrow. Everything Jesus asks of us, he also provides for us. Jesus asked the disciples, tired and confused to feed the people, and then Jesus broke the bread, and put it in the hands of the disciples so that they could share it with others.

Jesus doesn't call you to give to others anything he hasn't already given to you. And if Jesus has given you himself, then he has given you exactly what you need to give to others. So trust in him, labor on in evangelism and discipleship knowing that just when it seems you've found the end of your power you might have the privilege of finding the beginning of Jesus'.

Look at what Peter says later on in **1 Peter 4:9-11**. Here, decades later, Peter affirms what he witnessed that day in the desert. We labor as disciples in the strength God provides. We go out of our way to give a glimpse of what God's kingdom will be like because we have seen the provision of God in Jesus Christ.