

I. Set Up¹

II. Transition video: We likely need a brief warning about this. “If you are not currently fully awake, you are about to be as we roll into this sermon set up video. Watch this...”

III. Introduction

A. I suspect that got your attention and that you are now fully awake. You probably were not expecting the Beatles this morning or that iconic guitar rift. And it likely raises some questions for you, such as: revolution? Really? What exactly are we revolting against? What’s the plan?² What does God expect?

B. Two weeks ago – in a sermon on ‘Winning in 2015’ – I said we need: to focus on our assignment; be clear about our setting (more Exile than Exodus) and keep the fact that God wins in the end always before us. All of this was shaped by the idea that Jesus launched a revolution and expects us to join in – that is, that God left heaven to do something and we have been recruited to play a part. It is expected.

C. There are a variety of ways to talk about this. For the most part, all of them are too small. From time to time I’ll hear people say something like, “God wants us to be nice to others. God doesn’t want us to tell lies.” OK, right. “God doesn’t want us to swear.” OK. Ditto. Check. But that is hardly the point! Those are just minor “rules of the road.” They do not represent the big plan. Companies often have HR manuals that explain policies, but the policies are not the goal, the mission. It’s far bigger than anyone being nice.

D. There are a variety of ways to describe what Jesus left Heaven to do: He came to reveal the Father; He came to teach; He came to be an example; He came to fulfill the Law; He came to die in our place. But the headline used in the Bible – the umbrella statement all of these fall under – is to bring “the Kingdom of God.”

¹ Today we begin a new series. It’s the third series in our ongoing study of The Gospel of Luke. Mike will explain all of this and set the context more fully. But we will be focused on the opening verses in Luke 9, which is a turning point, for it is here that Jesus sends the 12 out for the first time to start ministering in his name on their own. This ten week series is being called Revolution.

² There are two linked issues in play here: 1) what is goal (or meaning) of life; and 2) what are we supposed to do to advance. Some – nihilists – say our life has no meaning. Others – hedonists – say the goal is pleasure. Nietzsche says the goal is power. Jesus says something quite different.

E. Luke 9 will develop this. It's an important chapter for a few reasons. But before we go there, let me do a quick flyover of the first eight chapters so we're all on the same page.

IV. The Gospel of Luke is one of four accounts of Christ's life found in the Bible. This one was written by Luke, who is: a medical doctor, an amateur historian and a friend and travel companion for the Apostle Paul (the zealous Jew who later became a zealous Christian.)

A. Luke wrote two books for Theophilus that make it into the New Testament: the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts (which covers the first three decades of the church after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension). We learn about this in the introductions to both books. When we first started our study of Luke, I went a step further to say that I am among those who believe that Theophilus was not just a Greek leader serving in the Roman government, but that he was either a Christ follower (or very, very close); and that he is the one who funds Luke during the time Luke needs to visit all the sites and talk to all the eye-witnesses in order to pull together his report on Jesus. Which he likely did 60 AD. Not "in the 60s" – as in the 1960s – but 2,000 years ago.³

B. For what it's worth, Luke differs from the other three Gospels in that it was written by a Gentile (Luke) and specifically for Gentiles. Matthew wrote for Jews, which is why he opens with a genealogy, showing how Jesus ties back to the Old Testament through Moses and Abraham; Mark – which we think was written first – appears to have a Roman focus; and John is clearly written for those who had drunken deeply of Greek philosophy, which is why he opens with this Greek idea of *logos*. "In the beginning was the word – the *logos* – and the word was God and the word." That's heady stuff being written for the Greek thinkers.⁴

³ The dating of Luke hinges on a few things: 1) Luke was written before Acts; 2) Acts was written before Paul died (circa 64) and certainly before the Temple fell (A.D. 70). At the same time it couldn't have been written before the latest firm chronological marker recorded in the book - Festus's appointment as procurator (Acts 24:27), which, on the basis of independent sources, appears to have occurred between A.D. 55 and 59.

⁴ Greek philosophers had used the term *logos* – which comes from the root of the Greek verb "to speak" – in a variety of ways: Heraclitus used *logos* as a principle of reason at work in the cosmic order of the universe (he urges us to pay attention to the *logos*, which "governs all things" and yet it is also something we "encounter every day"); The Stoics employed it for the soul of the world (*anima mundi*); Marcus Aurelius used *spermatikos logos* for the generative principle in nature. John's standpoint is that of the Old Testament and not that of the Stoics, but it's worth noting how he applies (and expands) one of their terms in an effort to explain Jesus.

C. The Gospel of Luke opens with an angel appearing to John the Baptist's father – thus breaking the 400 year silence from heaven that started when Malachi, the last prophet to write for the Old Testament – said that the next thing to happen would be the return of Elijah. (This is why, if you attend a Passover Seder, one of the things that happens is that the youngest child gets up from the table to go to the front door to see if Elijah (the greatest Old Testament prophet) has returned. According to God's plan, before the Messiah would come, Elijah would return to get things ready.⁵ Well, John the Baptist fulfills this prophecy. He symbolically serves as Elijah by playing the role of prophet. So, the silence is broken and the Old Testament era comes to an end when the angel announces to Zechariah that Zechariah's wife Elizabeth is pregnant with John the Baptist.

D. Luke 1 includes a bit about the same angel going to see Mary.

E. Luke 2 then gives us the Christmas story - Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem to register; the birth of Jesus in a stable; the star, the shepherds and angels and more.

F. Luke 3 shifts back to John the Baptist, though it also contains Christ's baptism and a genealogy – which is slightly different because it traces Mary's line, while Matthew traces Joseph's. And this is worth briefly commenting on.

1. One of the things about the Bible is that it never says, "A long time ago in a faraway land," it grounds events in specific times and locations. It is clearly making historical claims. And one of the talks coming up in Alpha looks into that. It goes after the question, "Do we really have solid reason – evidence – to support the idea that a man named Jesus lived 2,000 years ago, was born in Bethlehem, etc. etc., performed miracles and changed the world. Can we trust the Bible? Are there accounts of Jesus outside the Bible to corroborate the story? If you know people who have these questions, bring them along. Invite them.

G. Luke 4 follows Jesus as He heads into the desert to prepare for the work before him. It includes the battle he wins over Satan, who tempts him there. It also goes into a bit of detail about a sermon he preaches back home. Jesus is gaining a reputation. He's got lots of people following him in Twitter. Everyone is downloading his podcasts. At this moment he returns home for the first time in a long time and on the Sabbath they ask him to teach. They are expecting favors, miracles and more. He reads Isaiah 61:1-2:

1. The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

⁵ Malachi 4:5 "Behold I am going to send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord."

2. He then casually claims that Isaiah – this great prophet of Israel, who lived 1,000 years earlier – was actually talking about him. Jesus says, “This passage was about me.” And for this claim and various other reasons – his refusal to show them any favors – they just about kill him. I’ve been to the spot where they took him to throw him off the rocks, but he walks away.

H. Then, starting in Luke 4 but continuing through 8, Jesus does a series of things that make it clear that he is more than just another young rabbi.

1. If you were here you will remember I named this part of our study *Amazed*, because Jesus systematically amazed people with a series of miracles – all of which were done as acts of kindness and compassion, not simply to show off. He didn’t say, “watch me bend this spoon.” Or, “pick a card, any card, but do not tell me what it is.” They were done to help, but when taken collectively they demonstrate his power over nature, evil, death and more. He heals people, multiplies food, calms a storm, raises some-one from the dead. Taken as a whole, it’s clear that Jesus is making the case that He is more than just a gifted teacher.

2. By the way, some other things happened during these chapters: he selects the twelve apostles; and we begin to hear what He is teaching. (Luke starts to include snippets of what Jesus is saying as he travels from town to town – i.e., our red letter Bibles start to have some red text).

I. Well, we are now entering a new phase – which I am calling *Revolution*, because Jesus is going to establish the framework for things to expand after his brief stay in the Middle East. You saw the trailer with snap shots of revolutions. Lots of people promise change. There are many fiery young ideologues who want to overthrow the oppressors and make things better. They usually make it worse. What Jesus launches is different in two profound ways:

1. First: It’s a revolution of love and grace and peace – not violence.

2. Second: it's bigger and better than every other revolution. In many ways we have failed to fully embrace what Jesus put in place. In addition to apologizing for my own failures and shortcomings, I often end up apologizing to people for what the church has or has not done to someone. I did last week. We have not always done a great job of incarnating what Jesus taught and modeled. But from time to time it's worth reminding ourselves that, among the other amazing things Jesus did is this: He launched a movement that is now the largest, oldest and most geographically and ethnically diverse organization in the world. Forget Henry Ford, Steve Jobs and Elon Musk – forget even Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. If you want to look at the one who founded the most amazing and important – the most influential and transformational organization of all time – you look at Jesus

3. He launched a revolution. It has spread everywhere and done a lot of good (and more than a little bad) and it continues to spread. The church's growth in the West has slowed way down, but it is growing rapidly in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

4. I am particularly taken by this because back in 90s I started an association for college pastors called "The Ivy Jungle Network" and it grew to have about 4,000 people involved. And we had a magazine, conferences, forums, consulting, etc. It grew for about ten years and then it stopped. And now it's basically gone. It served its purpose and then it went away – it was replaced. What I started lasted ten years. What Jesus started is still going and growing two thousand years later.

J. And we are supposed to be contributing members of it. What does that mean? What does it look like to be part of a revolution? Are we supposed to put on fatigues and look like a young Fidel Castro? No. Stay with me, over the next ten weeks we are going to look at what Jesus does in Galilee before he turns his face towards Jerusalem and starts the long and important walk there.⁶

1. We've been breaking our study of Luke into a units – it's a series of series. That will continue. Down the line we'll be more focused on what he teaches and eventually we'll focus on the last week of his life – which is about one-third of the Book.⁷

⁶ See Matthew 9:35f for additional context.

⁷ One of the reasons the Gospels are called Gospels and not biographies is that they are clearly written to make a point – they want to persuade us to come to faith. There are lots of things they leave out, and they focus pretty exclusively on what is important. One-third of the Synoptic Gospels – i.e., Matthew, Mark and Luke – are devoted to the last week of Christ's life. In John's Gospel it's closer to one-half.

2. Right now I want it to be clear that Jesus had a plan and we can learn from it. He launched a revolution, and we need to understand the *what* and the *why* of this revolution.

K. To that end we turn to Luke 9 – a very important chapter. A lot will happen here: Jesus sends out the twelve; they become so disruptive that the king hears about them; he feeds the 5,000, then asks his disciples who others say he is, and Peter will give the big confession, “you are the Christ.” Then we have the Transfiguration. Throughout it all there will be a lot of emphasis on suffering. There is a lot in Luke 9. Today we focus on the first part of the passage, the section that was already read for you.

V. Let me walk us through this. Luke 9:1

A. *When Jesus had called the Twelve together*

1. One of the things we are immediately reminded of – and it only makes what Jesus does all the more impressive – is that He had not read Collins book, *Good to Great*. As many of you know, Jim Collins, a management and organizational guru, did a big study to find out what led some organizations to leave others behind, to transition from being good to being great. And one of the lines is, “you’ve got to get the right people on the bus.” Jesus didn’t read that chapter.

2. Before launching his movement – before inaugurating the kingdom of God in order to reconcile all things, right all wrongs – Jesus assembles a team of misfits and malcontents. They were not wise and affluent. They were not powerful or influential. To make matters worse, they did not share the same values, background or politics. They had no earthly reason to be together.⁸ But they found a common cause in Jesus and his kingdom

B. *When Jesus had called the Twelve together he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases*

1. I’ll be saying more about evil and the dark side of the supernatural later in the series.

C. *V2: to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*

⁸ Skye Jethani, “On the Same Bus,” *With God*, 3 November 2014. He goes on to note that Matthew was a tax collector – i.e., he had agreed to work for the Romans (and against his people) while Simon was a freedom fighter – i.e., a domestic terrorist willing to take up arms to fight against Roman occupiers.

1. He sent them out to announce the kingdom: that a new way of living – based on love and grace – was here; that a new King was taking over – with values that were upside down, where the great served and the goal is to be last not first; He sent them out to announce the kingdom – that there was a new King, and He was it.

2. There is a proclamation piece that pivots around Jesus and who He is and what He does and what He wants.⁹ And – and the “and” is key, because lots of people miss it (they will get one of the two pieces but not both) – and to heal the sick. And to care for the real, practical, physical needs of those who are hurting. I will say more about the and next week as we see Jesus feed the 5,000, but let me just note here that the church has had a hard time holding these together. Some churches are all about proclamation – they rightly want to talk about Jesus, the king, and what He has done, and the forgiveness – and salvation! – available through him. But they struggle to do more. And others want to focus on doing more – feeding or clothing or educating or housing the needy, fighting racism and opposing injustice. But they struggle to keep Jesus front and center. A plane needs two wings to fly. We do not get to edit the assignment. It’s both / and: it’s communicating and caring; it’s Proclaiming the Good News AND Engaging in Good Works. More on that next week.

3. So, he sent them out two by two.¹⁰ And...

D. V3: He told them: “***Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.***”

1. You might have thought that that phrase “shake the dust off your feet” came from your Mom. Not so.

2. The reason they are not to take anything with them is that their security wasn’t to be in their stuff. He wanted them very dependent on God.¹¹

⁹ The proclamation piece is developed a bit more fully in Mark’s account – Mark 6:12 – where the theme is more on repentance.

¹⁰ See parallel passage in Mark 6:7f

¹¹ He also wants them living simply and not giving any reason for people to think that they are doing this for the money. The reason they are to stay in the first house is that they are not to ‘move up’ to a nicer one. Also, the call to move on has clear overtones of treating the Jews (God’s people) as the Jews were treating Gentiles. Shaking off the dust was a symbolic act that suggested a lack of fellowship between the people of God and aliens. (I. Howard Marshall, *NIGTC on Gospel of Luke*, p. 351.)

E. So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

1. “Healing people everywhere” We will see lots of mixing it up with others – and it doesn’t take much reading between the lines to realize that the people they are mixing it up with are “poor.”¹²

F. V7: Now Herod the tetrarch

1. Herod the Great – the extremely paranoid man who was ‘King of the Jews’ at the time Christ was born, and who, after being approached by the wise men from the East about the birth of the new King of the Jews, ordered the slaughter of all of the boys living in Bethlehem two years old and younger – had a number of children. He killed several of them. He also named all of them Herod or Herodias (the female) form of Herod. Herod the Tetrarch (also called Herod Antipas) is one of them. He was Governor of Galilee. This is the guy who had John the Baptist beheaded at the request of his wife – Herodias (we read about this in Matthew 14, and yes, she was his step sister, and niece and brother’s wife).¹³ This was one of those cases where the family tree didn’t have many branches. It was a massively dysfunctional family.

2. The point here is, Jesus sends them out and almost right away their work creates enough buzz that Herod hears about it.

G. V7: Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him.

¹² “In Luke 9:6, Luke points out that the ‘crowds’ are following Jesus, seeking to hear his teaching and receive his healing. In verse 15 Jesus and his disciples feed the people. Later, although Peter wants to stay up on the mountain of transfiguration, Jesus descends to encounter the crowd (vs. 37,38) – and to heal the man’s only child. This incarnational identification with the poor, sick, powerless, and oppressed, is the heart of Jesus’ mission. The disciples of Jesus chose to exist for the sake of the world.” (Charles E. Van Engen, “The Gospel Story: Mission of, in, and on the Way,” Pamphlet published by Fuller Seminary, May 15, 1996.)

¹³ Mathew 14:1-8 & Mark 6:17-29. Herod Antipas was first married to Phasaelis, a daughter of Aretas IV, an [Arabian](#) leader. Later, he divorced her in order to marry Herodias. She had been the wife of Herod Antipas’ half-brother (who was also called Herod). Marriage to the ex-wife of one’s brother was not uncommon, but Herodias was also the daughter of another half-brother, Aristobulus. Marriage to one’s niece was also permitted, but marriage to a woman who was both one’s sister-in-law and one’s niece was unusual.

VI. So what does this mean?

A. We have an assignment – and it’s not small. It’s not a Sunday assignment. It’s actually much bigger and grander than most Christian’s think. We are to be part of rolling out God’s kingdom. It affects everything and everyone.

1. I am not suggesting that we can do this on our own. That it unfolds in a straight line. It’s not entirely clear how it ultimately comes about. I find the Book of Revelation a bit harder to understand than some do. I am slowed down by the fact that many have got it wrong over the last 2,000 years. But this much is clear, we work on it now – and take whatever ground we can. There is an aspect of the coming of the kingdom that is gradual – which should motivate us to push ahead.

2. And it’s also clear that we wait for the king to return and when he does lots of things happen then. We wait for that. We pray for that.

3. However, we are to be sitting back and waiting. We are not passive. We are to live today in light of tomorrow. We are to do all we can to attend to the things that matter to God – to care for those who are oppressed – and to invite others to join us.

B. We do this together – as a church. We are called to be a group of people who do our best to live our lives as acts of worship, and in response to Jesus – to be his disciples in community and for the sake of the world. The church is not the end point. It’s a means to an end. The church doesn’t have a mission, God’s mission has a church.

1. We have frequently gotten this wrong. Over the years the church has often been shaped more by cultural, historic or political factors than by Jesus. We’ve often been sidetracked and distorted.

2. But when we get it right – please get this, when we start to live into it – it gets people’s attention. Case in point: Pope Francis. I’m not Catholic, but I’ve among those cheering Pope Francis on. I do not have him figured out, but I like a lot of what He has done. The Roman Catholic Church has been embroiled in scandal for many years and in large part has been seen as heavy handed, bureaucratic and unresponsive in the face of it. Then all of the sudden, there is a new Pope who does a few things and is suddenly viewed by the press and world as being an authentic disciple – a deeply humble man who is trying to follow Jesus. And people look on at his economic, social, political comments and often marvel and say, “Is that what the church is about?” And for the most part it seems as though Francis is shocked by their shock. Yes. We are called to serve. We are called to humility. We are to march to a different set of values.

C. Third: Finally, we have to keep our eyes on Jesus. We have to keep reading and rereading the Gospels or we will get this revolution wrong.

1. Our instincts are to fight for our rights; or to withdraw from all of the evil around us; or to narrowly define what we are after.¹⁴

VII. Men and women, we are to be revolutionaries! Given that many people think of the church as boring, safe, tepid – we must be doing some things wrong! Let me encourage you to hang on. There is more to come.

¹⁴ For instance, many think the goal is for the church to grow. Sure, we want that – we want more people to come to faith and sign up to be part of the revolution – but the goal is so much bigger than the way it's typically understood.