

Some of the world's largest crabs come out of the state of Alaska and are called Alaskan King Crabs (**picture**). As you can see, they're huge. Some years back a fishing company took in a haul of six of the largest crabs on record. This fishing company, being savvy business people, decided they could make a lot more money selling them to aquariums than restaurants. So they contacted some of the world's biggest aquariums and shipped these crabs to an aquarium in Manchester, England and one in Hamburg, Germany.

They packaged the six crabs up, put them on a plane and shipped them overseas. The crabs arrived at an airport in France. The plan was that they'd spend the night in cold storage there and the next morning, two of the crabs would go to Germany and four to England.

The problem was that no one told the Chief of Distribution at the Paris Airport. When he showed up for work the next morning, he discovered six massive King Crabs, obviously in the wrong place. So what do you do with King Crabs? Well, this is what he did – he sent all six crabs to the kitchen.

A couple of weeks later both the fishing company and the aquariums were calling the airport, asking where these record-breaking crabs were. Airport officials had to hang their heads in total shame and confess that those prize-winning crabs were put in a crab salad and served up to 1<sup>st</sup> class passengers on Air France about two weeks earlier. Talk about missing the mission!

When Jesus first called His disciples, He called them to a mission. He told them He was going to make them fishers of men. He calls us to the same mission. Yet, it's through His grace and the power of the Spirit. It's only then that it's **Mission: Possible**. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 9:1-9 (p. 866).

The scene before us takes place at the halfway point of Jesus' ministry. For a year and a half, these 12 disciples were part of a traveling classroom. They'd been there when Jesus did miracles, cast out demons, healed lepers and other diseases, raised the dead, and taught truths no one else taught. But Jesus didn't call them to be "professional students." He was preparing them for the mission and this is their solo flight. Because if you can't do anything with what you've learned, what's the point? If you're a believer, you're called to this same mission. It's not about training, or Bible knowledge. It's rescuing a lost world. We are discipled so we can disciple others.

Jesus rescued us. We're to join Him in the mission of rescuing others. Too many churches are little more than spiritual social clubs. Yes, we need the classroom. We need the training of seeing God work. But that's training, it's not the mission. We're to first be disciples and then go make disciples.

They did it one by one. It's easy to think, "We have better methods in our technological day – newspapers, radio, TV, Internet, smart phones – one by one is so old school." Jesus' method hasn't changed. He's the Creator of the Universe and all technology. This needs to get our attention – He wants to use us. His power is seen in our Spirit-empowered lives. Just as these 12 were, we're missionaries of **Mission: Possible**. What Ethan Hunt (**picture**) does is child's play compared to what Jesus can do through us.

Today we're tying together two sections of Scripture. Verses 1-6 record the mission of the twelve; 7-9 report Herod's response to the mission. The other gospels record this, going into more details about the martyrdom of John the Baptist. Luke hardly mentions it, focusing instead on Herod's perplexed question about Jesus: "*Who is this about whom I hear such things?*"

For people to commit their lives to Christ, they must first understand who He is. It's a question echoing throughout Luke 9: *Who is Jesus?* When they understand who He is and believe in Him, then they must proclaim Him to others, so they too have the opportunity to be saved from judgment.

Because of who Jesus is, we must proclaim the Gospel of His kingdom. It's their mission. 2,000 years later, the mission hasn't changed. It's my mission, it's your mission. While some of the specific directives were applicable to this tour only, the principles are timeless and universal. They're for us too. What does this mission demand?

**1. We must understand we've been sent on a Kingdom mission with eternal ramifications.** "*He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God*" (vs. 2). *Kingdom*, what's the Kingdom? Neither of the two Presidential candidates mentioned "Kingdom" during their debate this past week.

The kingdom of God is the rule of God, His rule in the lives of His people. Jesus' message is that God is the King calling people to submit to His kingship. God is a gracious king who sent His Son to pay for the sins of the world. People must recognize they're sinners, repent of their sin, putting their trust in the person and work of Christ, surrendering to God's sovereign and gracious kingship. The Kingdom of God is present wherever God exercises His kingly power, wherever people honor and serve Him as their King.

That was their message. It's the message that still needs to be proclaimed today. The Church's message is not a political, social, philanthropic or moral one. It's a message of sin, salvation and forgiveness. It's God rule in our hearts and lives.

Up till this point, the disciples had watched Jesus do it. Now He sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He uses and sends us today, who are as ordinary as those 12 disciples, to share His message. It's our first and fundamental calling. Wonderfully...

**a. Jesus provides all the power we need for the Mission,** *"He...gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases."* Jesus didn't send them out in their own power. Later, He'd say, *"without Me you can do nothing."* God never asks us to do spiritual work in our own strength because we can't. He always provides the power we need to accomplish the mission.

He gave them *power and authority*. *Power* is the raw spiritual might to do God's work. *Authority* is the right to use that force. Here's a 16 year-old longing to drive. He sits in his Dad's sports car and feels the rumble of the engine. That's power. But doesn't have a license. When he finally gets his license and Dad tosses him the keys, then he has both the power and the authority to drive. Jesus gave His disciples power and authority.

It was exciting! Demons were cast out at their word. Diseases healed at their command. But they didn't have this power so they could show off. The miracles authenticated the message. They were sent to preach the kingdom of God. Just as miracles authenticated Jesus' Messiahship, He came to preach the good news. It's what He sends His disciples to do and what He sends us to do. God still does miracles, but we don't have "miracle workers" today.

We have all the truth we need and God wants us to have in a 66 book Book you're holding in your hands, the Bible. God is still authenticating His message with miracles – you and I are the miracle. We're the confirmation of the truth of the Gospel, the miracle of a changed life. When we claim to be Christians but our lives are unchanged, it makes the Gospel seem like a hoax. When we're transformed, as a community of God's people, we confirm His truth by our love, suffering and sacrificial way we care for people's needs.

Like Jesus and the Apostles, the Church has a double mission. We're to minister in both *word* and *deed*. God created us with a physical body. Our tendency is to veer from one extreme to the other. Some focus only on the spiritual, ignoring physical needs. Others focus only on the physical, forgetting the more important spiritual needs.

I'll be honest. I struggle here. In our culture of entitlement and enabling, I'm not sure where the lines always are. At Grace, we have requests all the time for money or assistance. But I don't want to assist an addict in being an addict. It's wrong to enable irresponsibility (2 Thes. 3:10). Yet, we must take risks and step out of our comfort zones. We know we'll be taken advantage of. Like Jesus and the early church, we must care for the hungry, the sick, reaching out to prisoners and addicts, welcoming strangers and immigrants, showing love and hospitality to the homeless. We do these things because Jesus did them. We do them because meeting people's physical needs confirms the truth of the Gospel. Many aren't ready to trust Christ until they see His love demonstrated in a tangible way.

General William Booth (**picture**), founder of the Salvation Army, was derided for offering food and clothes to London's poor instead of just the simple Gospel. The old warrior countered back, *"It is impossible to comfort men's hearts with the love of God when their feet are perishing with cold."* It's easy to overstress physical needs. It's also easy to neglect them. Our first priority is the soul, but we can't neglect the body.

**b. We must travel light to accomplish the Mission,** *"Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics."* Are you a good packer? I'm not. I tend to pack too much. When we go on vacation, I probably pack twice as many books than I can possibly read...and books are heavy. Jane's Aunt Betty had the best slogan for packing light, *"All I need are my keys, my glasses and my credit cards."* In our materialistic world, First World Christians have difficulty packing light.

Jesus is not against material things. I hope you have nice things. It's a matter of focus. It's a matter of trust. Who do we depend on? Our things or God? Things must be maintained. The test of your Christianity is not "How much do you know?" It's "How much do you trust God?" It's easy to trust in stuff, bank accounts or credit cards – when we need to put our confidence in Jesus. The last economic downturn powerfully illustrated we're foolish to trust in 401Ks, jobs or even houses that can be re-possessed. The bottom line is that God always supplies what we truly need.

It illustrates, too, the urgency of the mission. Carrying around extra baggage distracts you. Those who study airline disasters have uncovered a chilling fact about Americans. One of the biggest problems airlines have when they must make an emergency landing or even in a crash, is that so many passengers try to retrieve their carry-on luggage from the overhead bins before they evacuate the plane. There have been many incidents of people clogging the aisles, getting their bags while the plane is on fire. Even when the jet is burning, Americans don't want to give up their stuff.

There's one cultural reference here we don't understand today. The *"bag"* may have been a reference to traveling itinerant teachers of that day who carried a "beggar's bag." Some made quite a living by appealing to the public in this way. Those on the Gospel mission are not to be beggars.

Periodically, someone moans that when we build our new building, we'll be begging for money every week. Please understand, because Scripture teaches about money, we need to teach what the Bible says, so periodically we talk about money at Grace. The Bible also says a lot about sex, so periodically we talk about sex. But we're not going to beg for money.

What we will do is repeat over and over again how much God loves you. When we finally get it, when we realize how much God loves us and gave for us, we're overwhelmed with grateful love for God. Because we're so overwhelmed by His love, we want to be like God so we too are generous.

If you're stingy it just means you don't understand how much God loves you, so you don't love God. Love is always generous. Sadly, many have an office Christmas party relationship with God. You draw names and buy just enough of a gift to get by. If you find it on sale, but it looks like you spent more, so much the better. You don't go all out because it's an obligation. Love never gives out of obligation. Love always gives out of generosity. **We must understand we've been sent on a Kingdom mission with eternal ramifications**, then...

**2. The mission requires that we bring everyone to a place of decision.** Because of the choices this year, a lot of people are talking about not voting at all – at least, not voting for President. But when it comes to King Jesus, not voting is not an option, *“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.”*

Anything less than receiving Jesus as your personal Savior is rejection. Your rejection may be polite. It may appear you've not rejected Him at all. Maybe you've simply ignored Him. But if you have not accepted Him, you've rejected Him. When you make a decision by ignoring Him and refusing to make a decision, that's a decision, a decision to reject Him. It's what Jesus was telling His disciples before He sent them on the mission.

**a. Some will accept Him and invite us in.** Notice they were to stay in a house, not houses. It was short term. Jesus was not sending them out to develop a ministry but to accomplish a mission. He was sending them to one town, to make an impact there. They weren't to move from house to house, looking for better options. Staying in one house meant you didn't stay long.

The reception they received reminds us of something we can all do and are commanded to do, *“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling”* (1 Peter 4:9). Long before the Church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the home as the primary tool of the church. The primary gathering place of the church was the home. Not everyone can serve in a foreign land or volunteer at a soup kitchen, but we can all be hospitable. Do you have a front door? Table? Chairs? Bread and meat for sandwiches? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: *hospitality*.

Something holy happens around a dinner table that will never happen in a sanctuary. In a church auditorium you see the backs of heads. Around the table you see the expressions on faces. In the auditorium one person speaks; around the table everyone has a voice. Church services are on the clock. Around the table there's time to talk. Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community.

It's no accident *hospitality* and *hospital* come from the same Latin word. They both lead to the same result: *healing*. When you open your door to someone, you're sending this message: “You matter to me and more importantly, you matter to God.” You may think you're saying, “Come over for a visit,” but what your guest hears is, “I'm worth the time and effort.”

**b. Some will reject us because they reject Him.** *“And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”* This instruction has been misunderstood. Many see it as some kind of a “curse” directed toward that city. That's not what Jesus intended. Later in this chapter, Jesus passed through a Samaritan city and they refused to let Him enter. Some of the disciples were so insulted, they asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven to burn up that city. But Jesus refused to punish the city and rebuked His disciples. He explained He didn't come to destroy life but to give it.

*“Shaking the dust off their feet”* was a spiritual principle we need to understand and practice today. If a Jew under the Old Covenant entered Israel from a pagan land, he'd shake the dust from his feet. It symbolized that he didn't want the corruption of that land to effect his own land or people. In other words, he wanted to remain faithful to God, even if the surrounding nations wouldn't turn to God. So what does this mean in Luke 9?

When the disciples entered a city and began talking about Jesus, there was the possibility of rejection. If the message was rejected, they'd be discouraged and feel they'd failed. The worst thing they could do, would be to get discouraged and quit serving God. *“Shaking off the dust”* was a way of saying, “I don't want anything of that cities disobedience to remain on me. I don't want their love of sin, their unbelief to remain part of me.” Jesus didn't want discouragement to bog them down, so He told them to shake it off and move on to the next village. After all, they were going to suffer rejection and persecution for His sake. He'd warned them it would happen. They must be faithful, even when their

message wasn't popular. It's also a powerful warning to Jewish cities that they were as evil in God's sight as Gentile ones.

The bottom line is that it's a question of stewardship. When it comes to ministry, we need to prioritize. There's only so much time to share your faith and evangelize. Time is too precious to waste on those who've hardened themselves to truth and the Gospel. There are times to simply walk away.

**3. The mission is not optional but demands obedience.** “*And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel...*” What would you do if you told your child to do something and he immediately did it? Jesus' disciples immediately obeyed. When Jesus tells us to do something, it's not up for negotiation. It's wrong to even procrastinate – *delayed obedience is disobedience*. When the Holy Spirit lays someone on our heart, it's time to move. We never know when it may be the last time.

I love Billy Graham's transparency (**picture**). One time, Billy spoke to President John F. Kennedy about the Gospel and the Second Coming of Christ. Kennedy blew off what Graham had to say. Yet, sometime later when he and Graham were together, President Kennedy asked Billy if he could ride with him to his hotel room—clearly something was on his mind. Billy was suffering from a nasty cold and told the President he didn't want to give his cold to him. So they settled for another time. Yet, just days later, JFK was assassinated in Dallas. That conversation never took place. We never know when it will be the last time we can share the Gospel with someone.

**4. The mission results in confusion and curiosity for some.** Look at verses 7-9. King Herod was like a small tyrant, a Castro or Hugo Chavez. This Herod is the son of the Herod who murdered babies when Jesus was born.

Guilt is a tough master. Herod had unjustly executed John the Baptist. He's plagued with guilt. It's Lady Macbeth (**picture**) trying to wash away invisible bloodstains from the murder of the King. Eventually, she becomes mentally deranged by her guilt and in the end, kills herself.

This scene shifts from Jesus' disciples to the palace of Herod Antipas. What a contrast! Herod is extremely troubled by what he'd been hearing about this itinerant preacher, Jesus of Nazareth.

So why is this passage in here? In verse 6, they had *converts*, now we're returned to *conflict*. They had great *opportunity*, now we're back to *opposition*. If we faithfully share the Gospel, it will generate conflict. If we're faithful, we'll have *fruit*. But if we're faithful, we'll also have a *fight*.

This all brings the focus back to the person of Jesus. The disciples would have been so excited about the success of their mission and their new found power over demons and disease. But the Holy Spirit quickly brings us back to the fact that it's not about our ministry, it's about our Master. It's always about Jesus! And we must never forget that!

This is summarized in the question Herod asks, “*Who is this about whom I hear such things?*” In spite of the perversity of his heart, Herod asks the right question: *Who is this?* That's the most important question. *Who is Jesus?* It's the question every person must answer. *Who is Jesus?* – you must answer that question in this life or the next.

And Herod was close. He's really close, but he missed it. Either you understand who Jesus is and it transforms your soul...or, you don't. Right now there are billions of Muslims who have this idea that's written about Jesus in the Quran. He's a great man and prophet but they'd say he's only a great prophet. Or, there are people who knocked on your door yesterday and told you Jesus is a good man, even a god, or was a man that became God. Billions around the world are close, like Herod was, and they miss it.

Millions sit in churches like ours and miss it too. For them, Jesus is the guy they talk about for 60 minutes or so on Sunday morning. But Monday through Saturday He makes absolutely no difference in their lives. Practically speaking they live as if Jesus doesn't exist. They show up to church on Sundays because it's what we're supposed to do.

Who is Jesus? Don't just give a *historical* answer: Jesus was a Jewish prophet who lived and taught 2,000 years ago. Don't give a *theological* answer: Jesus is the Son of God. It's critical you give a *personal* answer. Let me rephrase the question: *Who is Jesus—to you?* It's the most important question you will ever answer. Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know what He did for you when He was crucified? Life can be pretty complicated, but if you can answer that simple question and make knowing Jesus the one ambition of your life, your life will be blessed now and for all eternity.

**Conclusion:** Do you know Jesus? If we do, we'll do what those disciples did. We'll realize we're on a mission and share what we've learned and seen modeled as we've been discipled. We'll share the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and make disciples. We'll realize we're called to this great mission!

During World War II as the United States battled the Japanese in the Pacific, a sailor in a United States submarine had an appendicitis attack and was near death. But the nearest surgeon was thousands of miles away. A good friend of the sailor was Pharmacist Mate Wheller Lipes (**picture**). He was the only medic on board. He watched the sick sailor's

temperature rise to 106 and knew he'd die if they didn't get that appendix out. Lipes said to his sick buddy, "*I have watched doctors do this operation. I think I can do it. What do you say?*" The sailor consented.

In the wardroom they stretched the sailor out on a mess table for an operating table, with a floodlight overhead. The mate and his assisting officers washed their pajama tops and wore them inside out as surgery gowns. They taped gauze over their mouths. Crew members stood by the diving planes to constantly monitor them and keep the sub as level as possible. The cook boiled water and they sterilized knives. They had ether for an anesthetic and used a tea strainer as an anesthetic cone. Alcohol drained from torpedoes was the antiseptic. Using a scalpel with a broken handle, they sliced open the sailor and held the muscles open with bent table spoons. After cutting through the layers of muscle, it took 20 minutes to find the appendix. Two and a half hours later they stitched him up with catgut just as the last of the ether gave out. 13 days later the sailor was back at his post feeling strong. It was a far greater accomplishment than any of the hundreds of surgeries performed that day by trained surgeons. Not because the Pharmacists' Mate was a skilled surgeon, but precisely because he was not.

It reminds us of what Jesus said to His disciples before His death, "*Whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father*" (John 14:12). You and I can do greater works than Jesus, not because we're greater or more skilled. We're rank amateurs, weak...fallible. Yet, because we're frail and sinful, Jesus said the power of the Spirit using us would be an amazing thing.

One of the greatest privileges God has entrusted to us is we've been chosen to carry on the work Jesus came to this earth to accomplish. Just before He ascended, He told His disciples, "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

Think of it, we're the *ends of the earth*! We are about as far from Jerusalem as you can get! We're here today as Christians because others before us in the chain were faithful to tell us of Jesus' saving grace.

God could have chosen a more efficient method of spreading the Gospel than entrusting it to the likes of us! He could have picked angels to share the good news and it'd have gotten done much more quickly. Jesus could have returned to earth to visit a different people group every month and single-handedly, He'd have done a much better job than the Church has done. But He chose us to proclaim the good news.

Our message is not how Christ can improve your life, or give you a better marriage, family, more money or even improve your sex life. The Kingdom does affect such things. But we fail if our message is not *Who is Jesus*. Jesus is everything. Do you know Him? Is He everything to you?

Are you sharing Him? It's **Mission: Possible!** Have you accepted the Mission? We're all living for something. What are you living for? Don't waste your life! Jesus is everything! The mission is the most important thing you'll do in this life. What are you doing with your life?