

The Kingdom Is Near

Luke 10:1-12 | September 14, 2019 | Bryce Beale

There is an old fable of the Greeks about King Midas, a ruler in the Phrygian domains of modern Turkey, who was granted that everything he touched should turn to gold. He soon discovered his blessing was a curse—he turned his daughter to gold by accident, and whatever food touched his tongue turned to gold before he could eat it.

Yet we who believe find in Jesus a greater King Midas, one who touches not the outside but the inside of mankind, and turns all to gold without regret. Just as Adam’s touch sent sin seeping into every part of our inner lives, so Jesus’ touch now spreads a sea of gold across each region of our inward being.

He extends his finger to our stony heart and the moment it touches, our affections and our love are awakened from a long sleep. Our once worthless hearts are now made to glisten, and we love the Lord with an incorruptible love. Again, he extends his arm and comes in contact with our naturally darkened intellect, and now it radiates its golden rays. The way we think about every subject is influenced by his renewing touch, which moves across the entirety of our minds.

I could go on. But, to put it all in plainer language, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”¹ We may apply to the Christian what our God says of the new creation to come: “Behold, I am making all things new.”² Jesus Christ refuses to leave any element of our inner selves untouched by his renewing power; mind, heart, will, imagination and reason, love and feeling, these all are becoming gold.

Therefore, we are right to expect, and not surprised to find, that the things a true believer values, the things that he or she thinks, the things that he or she chooses, are far different from what the unbeliever values, thinks, and chooses. And that difference proves the King has come, and that he really can turn what he touches to gold, and that he is in one sense advancing his kingdom in our midst. If we think and act no different than those not touched by

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV).

² Revelation 21:5.

the King, then we would wonder if his touch really had power; but if that difference exists and is strong, a difference in values and in priorities, then his power is made manifest. Then he proves that he, by touching each part of our inner selves, truly can transform them into glory.

Our text today from Luke shows what difference the King makes when he touches a soul and turns it to gold. When the kingdom comes near, that realm of Christ's rule, lives and priorities change irreversibly. What once was dirt and worthless rock within men and women becomes, at his touch, gold.

LUKE 10:1-12

Not long ago in Luke, Jesus sent out the twelve apostles to perform acts of power and to preach the kingdom of God. Now, he sends out others to do the same. And what we said about the commission of the Twelve applies here also: this is a hot text that we cannot touch directly, but must think carefully how to grasp. In chapter 22 of Luke, Jesus will reflect on commands like these and say, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack."³ In other words, the exact commands given in our present text no longer apply to us *directly*.

But they are recorded for our instruction, because the principles behind every command are ours and are meant for us. They show the values that we, as the renewed and golden children of God, ought to have, values quite different from our contemporaries'. They reveal what happens in a person's core when Jesus has extended his finger to touch that core.

And so we must proceed to take all of the commands *specific* to these seventy or seventy-two men, and draw from them, like sap from a set of trees, the *principles* that will nourish us. May God give us wisdom to do it aright.

Souls

First then we set our eyes on the disciples and ask, "What principles of the kingdom can we see in their actions? How does how they are commanded to act show what they, as sons of the kingdom, value and must value more?"

³ Luke 22:36.

And for our answer we call up the first two verses again:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Your translation may say there were seventy men, or seventy-two—it is hard to determine which of these is right, but as with most minor variants like this one, not a single principle we will discuss is at all affected by the addition or subtraction of those two. I will assume there were seventy-two for the sake of this sermon.

Jesus sends out these seventy-two to, like John the Baptist before them, prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight, primarily by preaching. But notice that at the outset, before he gives these seventy-two their working orders, he fixes their focus on an invisible fact. And that fact is that this world of men and women, for them that Jewish world of Palestine, is actually a field. And that field is ready to be harvested, but there are few to bring in the sheaves of wheat. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

And here we find the first evidence that Jesus has reached his hand into the hearts of these seventy-two, and has left behind his touch a strain of gold. For one of the first marks of belief in any person is an earnest concern for the souls of others.

Muse a moment on how many years of your life passed while your heart was not gold, but only common stone. All around you eternal souls were slipping from this world into terrors which cannot be uttered, the unending punishment that our rebellion against God deserves. But your stony heart was unmoved by their danger. It was so cold and lifeless that it could not feel the reality of final judgment; this world seemed to be all there is, and judgment only an imagination or vague notion of the future.

You walked through fields at harvest time, but were content to let the ripe grain age beyond ripeness and to die, unharvested.

You were, in other words, not a laborer in this field of a world, but a leisurely passer-through. If you were liked by some lost soul,

that was enough for you; or perhaps, if some perishing image-bearer helped your financial situation, that was plenty as far as you were concerned, and there was no need to inquire any further into the welfare of that individual's soul. Your stony heart was insensitive to the ripeness of the field and to the desperate need of reapers; we all would have let every stalk droop and die.

But then the Savior harvested us. He plucked us from among the chaff, drew us out of the pile for burning, and brought us into the storehouse of his love. And when his rough carpenter's hand took hold of you, your heart of stone met a foe too great for it. Suddenly, your cold and lifeless heart came to life and the eyes of that heart opened for the first time. And what did that heart behold, as it looked up, but a vast field reaching to the horizons, golden with ready wheat. And you wonder how you never saw it before, all these years as you lived in that very field.

Your heart was then struck with a love for the perishing, joined to this sort of urgency: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." And this sort of earnestness: "Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Before, you did not pray; now, finally awake, you pray earnestly.

Our King is in earnest to have the souls of men and women, the very men and women who surround us every day. Among them are the stalks of wheat which he seeks for himself. And we who are the citizens of his kingdom swear fealty to his agenda. We cry, "Here am I, send me!" And we cry, "Send others also!" We make disciples, that those disciples may then become laborers with us to make more disciples.

Here is the first principle of our text: those whose hearts Christ has touched now love the perishing and go out to labor among them, seeking to bring them in to his storehouse of salvation.

Sincerity

But immediately afterward we find a second principle which underlies all the specific directions for these seventy-two, and it is a principle that looks strange in a world like ours. The principle is sincerity.

See again verses 3-9:

Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no

sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace be to this house!" And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

We have here not one or two, but at the least seventy persons who are all willing, at the call of their Master, to go out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Jesus is not promising them safety—in Matthew 10 he explains to his Twelve that men "will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake...Brother," he says, "will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake."⁴ What else would happen when you set a lamb in the middle of a pack of wolves? Even the Essenes, a wandering Jewish group of that day, though they carried very little with them, still took weapons to defend themselves.⁵ These Christians did not.

Yet this is what they signed up for, and eagerly.

So if they did not sign up for the sake of safety, which they have surrendered, one would wonder if money is behind their choice. But these commands make that unlikely. "Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals." None of these essentials are essential to the Christian worker, and these seventy-two are willing to give up the security that savings bring.

Well, perhaps they act with the motive of the Pharisees, who were strict in their religion so that they could be noticed by men and praised by them. Yet look again: "greet no one on the road." I guarantee this is no way to make friends. Jesus requires that they be so fixated on their task of harvesting that they not even turn aside to greet or make small talk with those they encounter on the way.⁶

⁴ Matthew 10:17-18, 21.

⁵ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.125.

⁶ See 2 Kings 4:29.

Verse 7 does show that they got something for their labors: “And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.” They will have what they need: food and shelter. But they will not have more than that: “Do not go from house to house.” The command not to go house to house prevents any expectation of ease, or of finding the best accommodations. And, though they are given food, they are not to seek out the best sorts of food: verse 8, “Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.”

If one of these pairs of persons were to walk into your home this week, you may question their methods, but you could hardly question their sincerity. Yes, there may be a greedy Judas among them who only bides his time, yet the commands are meant to show that these seventy-two are sincerely devoted to the task entrusted to them. They will not take your money—where would they put it, since they have no moneybag?

This leads us to inquire about what drives them. The answer is that the King has touched their will and turned it golden. Their wills now come happily under his; their desire, like his, is to do the will of the one who sent them. They want to accomplish the work for the sake of his pleasure and his glory—this is their food, even when the literal food set before them is less than pleasing. They see the fields white for harvest, and they are in earnest to have workers sent into them.

The particular task is given in verse 9: “Heal the sick in [the city that receives you] and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

And really, these cities would know the kingdom had come near because of the power flowing through these seventy-two—they were healing in compassion and as confirmation of their message.

Yet just because we do not, as a habit, heal miraculously today, this does not mean we have no principle we can draw from their task to inform our own. For the devil has his disguises, and can fake even miracles, as we see with Pharaoh’s magicians or with the second beast in Revelation 13. “It performs,” that chapter says, “great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work

in the presence of the [first] beast it deceives those who dwell on earth.”⁷ The devil has his miracles, or what at least look like them.

Yet there is one miracle the devil can never do, which would undoubtedly prove the presence of God’s kingdom, and the overthrow of Satan’s. That miracle is sincerity.

Since the time of this text many antichrists have gone out into the world, proclaiming with fervor a false gospel. But they have lacked this product of divine power: a heart touched and made gold.

These seventy-two went out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing but their necessities. They abandoned safety and ease, and proved by their conduct that they actually cared. They cared about the harvest field, their fellow men and women still snared in sin and subject to the will of Satan. They cared, in sincerity, about the will of their Master, and his name, and his reputation. And if they did not, it was no doubt a difficult journey for them! The commands were designed to eliminate ulterior motives. Those who loved souls and loved the Savior would love the task; those who did not, would struggle.

Is this not a principle meant for you and me? The specific requirements of poverty—no, that is not required for every Christian, though certainly for some. But the principle of a golden heart that cares, untainted by the subtle motivations of money and ease, that is for us.

We ought to be responsible with our finances, and we are allowed a moneybag, that is, a savings account, in our day. But we should remember that no one will ever be saved by the evidence of our savings accounts. We know that God alone can fill our treasuries; but the lost do not know this. If our preoccupation is the number on the ATM screen, then how do we differ from the world? Isn’t life more than money, and food, and the body more than clothing? The Gentiles eagerly seek all these things.

But what shows that the King has touched our heart, and that the kingdom of that King is near, is that we seek first, before all else, his kingdom and his righteousness. Whether we have much or meager amounts is irrelevant. We know the secret to

⁷ Revelation 10:13-14.

contentment with a lot or little: I can do all things through him who has touched my will and strengthened it.

Judgment

This brings us to the final mark of Christ's golden touch in our text. When Jesus comes into a life, he makes the heart gold with love for the lost, and the will gold with sincerity for the task.

But he also touches the mind and focuses it on matters higher and more important than it considered before.

Remember first the activity of verses 5 and 6: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you."

And if that peace returns too many times, the seventy-two are to enact the order of verses 10-12:

But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

The disciples of course preferred to bring peace to their hearers—so they begin with the blessing, "Peace be to this house!" And if a son of peace—that is, someone characterized by peace, probably a believer in Yahweh who was ready to embrace the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, when the news of him was brought—if a son of peace were present, then peace would remain on the house. God's peace would guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Yet only a simple mind refuses to consider consequences, both good and bad, for one's actions. A cold and sterile mind cannot imagine future judgment; it says, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry!" Or, "Let us build bigger barns for ourselves; we have many days ahead of us."

But when the King draws near, when his envoys run before him, his influence is felt first in this way: men and women begin to think about the most important things. They begin to consider what they were made for, and whether they are doing what they

were made to do. They begin to think of that unpleasant but so necessary subject of future judgment.

These seventy-two, if rejected, would take back their peace and, out in the public streets of the city, would wipe the dust from their sandals. Like the prophets of old, they were to couch their message in a symbolic act, as though by the wiping of the dust they were saying, “We and the King who sent us have nothing to do with you. You have rejected us; we reject you. We don’t even want your dirt to attach itself to us, for we have no attachment to you.” Perhaps they even meant to say, “You are like unclean Gentiles to us, who reject Israel’s God and his Christ, and we do not wish your unclean dirt to cling to us.”

But just because a pair of these seventy-two should leave any given town, this did not indicate that the bother of their message went with them. You can turn away the messengers of judgment, but you cannot turn away the judgment. And so the pair would say where everyone could hear, “Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.”

But why would that matter? Why should it matter if the kingdom came near but then, at the town’s decision, was pushed out and made to move on?

It mattered because the nearer the kingdom comes to any person before that person pushes it away, the greater future judgment will be for that person.

This is what Jesus means by his concluding comment in verse 12: “I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” Sodom was full of immoral persons, given over to homosexual lusts and injustices and inhospitality, and so God made an example of the city by raining fire and brimstone down upon it. Yet if the kingdom of God should come so near, as it comes this moment to you, as a messenger proclaims it clearly before you, and then you reject it, your judgment in the day of Christ’s appearance will be worse than whatever judgment this city of Sodom receives, a city that wished to rape angels.

And here the King lifts our minds up out of their smoggy valleys, up out of our lesser and lower ruminations on the small matters of this present life, into the higher realms of an eternity that sits before us all. God prefers our peace—oh that we would know the

things that make for peace, and would be sons and daughters of peace, and not of destruction!

I say right now with sincerity, “May peace be yours!” but now the blessing is beyond me. It comes to you, and you must choose whether you will receive it or refuse it. The kingdom is near to you right now; and you may enter in this moment. You stand at its very gates, and all the King requires for entrance is that you bend your knee and swear your loyalty to him. You must trust and serve no longer yourself, but him. He is a good Master who wishes your good; he has prepared a kingdom for all who love him.

Will you not enter in? He has built the gates with his blood, and set the foundations with his suffering. Entrance is yours, because he was cast out for a time, to suffer outside the city on the hill Golgotha. He has done all that is necessary in preparation, and you may enter into his kingdom this moment *if* you will leave your pride outside.

I pray you do, and that you enter in on basis of his death alone.

But I must say what was commanded also of these seventy-two: if you refuse him, he suffers no harm. His kingdom will continue on, turning hearts to gold. It will be proclaimed to the next person, unhindered by your refusal. But you yourself will face a judgment worse than that of Sodom.

The King is making all things new, reforming all that is broken by his touch. His kingdom is near—may you not miss it.