

Sent Out into the Harvest

January 27th, 2013

Luke 10:1-20

"¹After 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. ²And 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. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."

As we reengage in the gospel of Luke after having a few weeks off during Advent, I don't want us to lose sight of the big picture of what Luke is doing in this gospel. Chapters 1-8 mainly address the question, Who is Jesus? Then, starting in the middle of chapter 9, the theme begins to shift from "Who is Jesus?" to "What does it mean to follow Jesus?" If He is the Christ of God (9:20), how then should we live?

This flow of thought is important: First, who Jesus is, and then, out of an understanding of who He is, how we should live in light of who He is. It's crucial, because that's how the gospel works: what we do flows out of who God is, what He has done in Christ, and who we are because of His work. That's why we never try to focus too much on the "imperatives" of Scripture without closely tying and connecting them to the "indicatives" of Scripture (cf. Romans 15 message).

The basic answer to this question of how we are to live in light of who Jesus is, is that we are to be His disciples, and we've seen the cost that's involved in that. And as we move on in these chapters through Luke, we're going to keep seeing more and more of what it actually means to be Jesus' disciple. What this text in chapter 10 teaches us is that to be a disciple of Jesus is to be a sent one, a messenger, a missionary. That's the main thing I want to talk to you about today.

Jesus' Followers are Sent

Let's make sure we see it in the text, so you don't have to take my word for it: "¹After this (Jesus had just been talking about the cost of

following Him) 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." Notice, this is not the twelve apostles. Back at the beginning of chapter 9, we saw that Jesus sent them on a very similar mission of healing and proclaiming the Kingdom. But this isn't the twelve. It's seventy-two "others".

I love that this is all we're told about them. They were "others". We don't know their names. They were ordinary, everyday people, followers of Jesus, commissioned to represent their extraordinary Lord: "¹⁶The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

So let's note that, even though we've seen it and made this point before, that all of Jesus' followers, not just paid clergy or "missionaries", are sent by Jesus and entrusted with His mission. Here it's on only seventy-two, but we know from the Great Commission, the book of Acts, and the rest of the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9), that this mission is for *every* professing follower of Jesus.

Maybe your vision of the Church that is far too small, and our expectations far too low. There can be, for some, a very selfish disposition that churches exist simply to gather together for friendship, fellowship and fun. And Christians *should* love one another, and live in community, and serve one another. But the church exists, in large part, if not primarily, to introduce people who don't know Jesus to Jesus.

Jesus means for all of us to be His sent people, proclaiming the good news of God's coming Kingdom in Christ (v.9), calling people to faith and repentance in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins in His name (24:47), living a life of love and demonstrating in our lives the healing power of the reign of King Jesus (1Pet2:12), and making disciples of Him, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He's commanded.

That's the mission, and that's why we want to take a season of Sunday evenings to receive some training on the mission of disciple-making, so that we might leave the four walls of this building and bring the love and life of Jesus to one another and to those who don't know Him, so that, by His grace, we might share in the privilege of seeing other people move closer to Jesus, and some come to faith in Him. And we really hope you'll all make that a priority, because living the mission is pretty important, right? To say, "I'm a follower of Jesus, but I don't care to learn more or grow in understanding how to go about making disciples of Him" is a position of disobedience.

A Great Need for Workers

There's a lot more that could be said from this text about the dynamics of this mission, how it plays out in our daily lives (word/deed ministry, sons of peace, Woe, etc.), but I'm going to have to leave that to you to work through in Life Groups or with families or friends, because there are some other important things here we need to focus on.

So we'll move on to Jesus' words in verse 2: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." And I think we need to hear that in a global - - not just a local -- context (see 24:47). It's no coincidence that my first time back in the pulpit after visiting TETM two weeks ago, that after thirteen months in Luke's gospel, this happens to be the text we're on. Because this is all I was hearing about out in Texas, not in terms of the need to be good missionaries in our schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, fitness clubs, kids' sports leagues, etc (which is important!), but in terms of the three billion.

That's the number of people on the planet currently "unreached" with the gospel of Jesus Christ. By unreached, I mean that there is no community of Christians on the ground there with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize that people group, that is, less than 2% of the population are Christian. Roughly 40% of the world population fits

in this category. And many of them are what people call "unengaged", meaning there is absolutely no gospel witness in those places. There is literally no word for Jesus in the language of these people.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few," especially among the unreached. It's not that we don't have the people. There are 103,500 evangelical Christians for every one unreached people group. Yet in terms of workers, and in terms of investment, it doesn't seem like the Church cares too much. 95% of all Christian giving is spent in the local church, and of that 5% that is spent on missions, 99.5% of it is spent among people who already have access to the gospel.

What Shall we do About this Need?

And Jesus says to us, today, in 2013, in light of that global need: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." What do we do about that? Should we just hear these stats and lament how pathetic we are? No! "²The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. *Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest* to send out laborers into his harvest." There's a harvest waiting to be reaped. The Lord of the harvest promises that it is so. Our part is to ask Him (earnestly!) to send out laborers! That's what I intend to do at the end of this sermon, and I'll trust the Lord of the harvest that as I do that some of you might hear the call of these next words: "²Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³*Go your way...*"

Now not all of us are called to go. I've heard it put this way, that there are three options as it pertains to the unreached: go, send, or disobey. In light of this great harvest, and this urgent need, is there any other option? The going will be sacrificial, and the sending will be sacrificial, but Jesus is worth it, isn't He? And so my earnest prayer all week was that the Lord of the harvest might use this text to thrust some of you out into His harvest field. I know there are some of you here with aspirations of vocational ministry, some of you that have had your

hearts pricked in the past about this subject, some of you who are drifting through your twenties with no idea what to do with your life.

And I would just ask all of you to pray to the Lord of the harvest, to send out laborers into His harvest, and maybe God will work in such a way that you will be an answer to your own prayer. And as a church, we are committed to doing everything possible to help you get the training and the funds and any other resources need to get you there. We want to be a church that takes seriously the Word of God, "¹¹For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations..." What a privilege, to be used by God so that the name of God might be proclaimed and praised through Jesus Christ, by every tribe and tongue and nation. That is the mission of the Church.

The Mission is not Safe

Now I would be remiss if I didn't share that this is not going to be easy. It's going to be pretty dangerous to go to these three billion people. A lot of them are not exactly enthusiastic about your going to them, and calling them to repent and turn to Jesus or perish in God's judgment. Jesus doesn't shy away from warning us about the danger that is ahead for those who are sent out into His harvest: "³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."

I've never been mistaken for an outdoorsman, but I'm pretty sure I know what happens when a lamb crosses paths with a pack of wolves. It doesn't go well for the lambs! So, no, this is not going to be safe. And I wonder if a few minutes ago as I called some of you to go, thought, "Well, I would consider that, but is it safe?" And the answer is, no, it's not safe. But nobody promised that it would be safe! If it was supposed to be safe, wouldn't Jesus have just said, "I'd like to send you out into this great harvest, but since you're lambs and there are wolves out there, I guess I won't bother sending you"?

But there is a great promise here to propel you out into the harvest, even though you might get torn to pieces by wolves: "¹⁹Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you." I'm sending you as lambs in the midst of wolves...nothing shall hurt you. Or, later in Luke, "Some of you they will put to death...but not a hair of your head will perish." I think the best commentary to make sense of these statements is back in Luke 6:

²² "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil [that's lamb in the midst of wolf type-stuff], on account of the Son of Man! ²³Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven...."

This is the kind of safety Jesus promises: not earthly comfort and security, but the firm hope that our greatest hardships and calamities in this life (even if that hardship is a brutal, agonizing death for Jesus' sake) will in the resurrection be subjugated to serve your everlasting joy and glory: "¹⁷For this light momentary affliction (cf. 2Corinthians 11) is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." If, as you pray to the Lord of the harvest, you feel compelled to go, but worry about your safety, let Jesus and His word assure you that because of His death and resurrection, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ, and know that every hardship you suffer will only add to the weight of glory you experience when your body is raised with Him in glory.

The Mission is not Ultimate

Now I'm making much this morning of the mission of Jesus to go out and make the name of God known among all the peoples of the earth. Pray for that, go, send, get engaged, it's gonna be hard but Jesus is worth it. This is urgent. This is why we're on earth. But don't make the mission the bottom of your joy. That's Jesus' warning at the end of this text. When you devote yourself to the mission of Jesus, it's easy to

begin to attach your identity and value as a person to how successful you are. How many people are being saved, baptized, etc. Your life begins to revolve not around Jesus and what He's done for you, but on you and what you are doing for Him.

It seems like that is what had happened to the seventy-two:

"¹⁷The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'" ¹⁸And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

If the imperatives of Scripture are grounded in the indicatives, let's make sure our zeal for mission is grounded in this glorious indicative: your names are written heaven. I thought about this and I was reminded (I know this might seem strange) of being at Penn State and going to frat parties. I hated that scene, but I did it, because I was a slave to the opinions of other people. And I remember that horrible time of waiting at the front door, "...no, you're not on the list." Maybe for you it wasn't a frat party, but it was a play at school, or a sports team, or a music recital, and you tried out, but you didn't make the list.

And Jesus says to all of us who have trusted in Him this morning: Let this be your greatest cause for rejoicing, your name is written on the list of heaven. The One who sends you out into the harvest field, was Himself sent by His Father to a foreign land. He was sent as a lamb, submitting Himself to being slaughtered on the cross, bearing the punishment for your sins and rising for your salvation. And because of His performance for you, not yours for Him, your name is written in heaven. You're saved, loved, forgiven, healed, redeemed, adopted, adored, blessed, rejoiced in.

Make that the bottom of your joy today. And as you rejoice, maybe the Lord of the harvest might waken in you a burden to take this marvelous

news to those who have never heard. Maybe ten years from now one of you (or five, or ten?) might write a letter back home from an unreached people group, "I'm here helping these people put a word "Jesus" in their language, because on the last weekend of January 2013 the Lord of the harvest grabbed hold of my heart and sent me out into His harvest field.

Lord, be pleased to do that, for Your great name's sake.