

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

Luke 10:1-24

Key Verse: 10:2

“He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

In chapter 9, Jesus sent out the Twelve on an evangelistic journey. But here Jesus sends out seventy-two others. Only Luke records this event. Luke gives us a broader perspective on Jesus’ disciple-raising ministry. In sending the 72, Jesus had a great vision to evangelize the whole world. With this vision, Jesus called ordinary people and trained them. Then he sent them into the world as his ambassadors. Vision is so important. What vision do we have? When we see people and the world with human eyes, especially the threat of terrorism and degenerating morality, we can be very scared and anxious and no one seems hopeful. Also, we are living in a day to day struggle; it seems enough just to survive. Having vision seems to be a luxury. But we need vision. It is a first step in being a kingdom worker. How can we have vision? This passage explains that Jesus gives his vision to his disciples. Let’s accept Jesus’ vision and learn how we can participate in his work.

First, Jesus sends out the seventy-two (1-16). Verse 1 begins, **“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others....”** When Jesus taught the cost of following him seriously, we may think that many would turn back. But to our surprise, many disciples committed themselves more deeply to Jesus and were ready to serve him with all their hearts. In fact, he could appoint seventy-two and send them ahead to every town and place where he was about to go (1b). Why 72? The table of nations in Genesis 10 mentions 72 names. Accordingly, Jesus had the whole world in his mind when he sent out the 72. Just as the first journey of the Twelve signified mission to Israel, so this journey of the 72 signifies mission to the Gentile world (2:32; 24:47). Though Jesus had been rejected by Samaritans, he was undaunted. Jesus had vision to restore God’s reign over the whole world. Jesus’ vision does not depend on visible results; it is inherent in Jesus’ person. The phrase, “he was about to go,” indicates that he had a burning passion to reach all the people in that area. So he sent his disciples out as his ambassadors. In this way, Jesus drew them into his vision, which is God’s mission for the world. Recent theologians refer to God’s mission as “Missio Dei,” which means “the sending of God.” David Bosch wrote: “Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an

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attribute of God. God is a missionary God.”¹ Mission originates with God, and he is the one who orchestrates it. Mission is God’s plan, and he empowers people to carry it out. God is living and works mightily in history. He calls people and guides their lives and work. He never stops carrying out his mission, in spite of rebellion against him. When we serve God’s mission, sometimes things don’t go well and we fall into a sense of failure and despair. That is the time to realize that it is God’s mission, not ours. Then we can see things differently. God never fails. When God begins to work, he finishes his work without fail (Php 1:6).

Jesus sent his disciples two by two. We might think that he could cover more territory if he sent them one by one. But there are important reasons to go two by two. “Two by two” implies public witness. Proclamation of the kingdom is a public occurrence in view of the coming of God’s salvation and divine judgment. Jesus is reclaiming the whole creation for God, not just a few individuals here and there. Moreover, “two by two” implies working together. Each person has their own weaknesses that make them vulnerable. But when two work together, they can cover each other’s weaknesses. They can work more effectively and powerfully than one person (Ecc 4:9-12). Of course, this requires each one to die to themselves. We must die to self-glory seeking desire and an opinionated, self-centered mindset. We need to learn a Christ-centered mindset and to reveal the glory of God alone for his kingdom purpose. If we work together in this way, God will surely bless us. Jesus said, **“If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them”** (Mt 18:19-20).

What did Jesus tell his disciples before sending them out? Let’s read verse 2. **“He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”** Jesus’ first words were, **“The harvest is plentiful.”** This means that people are ripe to hear the good news of the kingdom of God. When we see people with these eyes, we can have vision for the harvest. People try to look happy and successful. But in reality, we are all suffering from our sins and want to hear the good news of forgiveness. We feel empty and meaningless and want to find a real purpose for life. We are tired of living a petty life, and want to pursue greatness. We feel weary and tired and

¹ Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, 389–390.

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seek true rest and peace for our souls. Who can give all these things? Politicians? Entertainers? Google? No. Only Jesus can. Only Jesus died for our sins. Only Jesus rose from the dead. Only Jesus opens the way to the kingdom of God for us. Only Jesus can give us the Holy Spirit, who has power to transform us and enable us to bear good fruit. People need Jesus! When we know this and boldly proclaim Jesus Christ there will be a harvest; a spiritual awakening will happen. It may begin with the change of one person. When Jesus saw the deep spiritual need of a Samaritan woman and helped her repent and worship him, she became an evangelist to her whole community. One pastor, Dean Esskew, came to know the agony of a professional baseball umpire. It is that after calling a nearly perfect game, they can make one mistake that arouses hatred of 40,000 people all at once. Their mistake gets replayed over and over again in slow motion on national sports networks. People they never knew begin to hate them and their children. It is crushing, like being judged guilty in court. Pastor Dean shared the gospel of Jesus who saves us from the judgment of the law and heals our wounds. The umpire accepted Christ and became a new person. Through him many more umpires have found salvation in Jesus through “Calling for Christ” ministry.² All kinds of people in all walks of life need Jesus more than anything else.

We in UBF focus on campus ministry. Recently, there was a great work of God in a college professor. Holly Ordway grew up in a non-Christian home. She never read the Bible and knew nothing about church. As a college student she was influenced by anti-Christian bias and became an atheist. She was proud of her enlightened and elite rationalism. She earned a Ph.D. in English from the U. Massachusetts at Amherst and became a college professor. Strangely her favorite authors were C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkein—Christians. One day, her fencing instructor, a devout Christian, began to simply share his faith with her. This led to her to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. Now she teaches English and Christian Apologetics at Houston Baptist University. There are so many ripe souls like her.

How do we see people? Ripe for harvest, or hopeless. Two shoe salesmen visited a tribal African village. One said, “No one wears shoes! This is a terrible place to do shoe business.” The other said, “Everyone needs

² http://espn.go.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/11107264/mlb-umpires-flock-pastor-dean-baptized-espn-magazine

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shoes! This is a great place to do shoe business!” They saw the same thing, but had very different points of view. There are so many wonderful Bible teachers in our community. The people around us are desperately in need of Jesus. We are the most important people in the world to them. We may be the answer to their desperate prayers. Let’s listen to Jesus’ word, **“The harvest is plentiful,”** and pray to open our eyes to needy souls around us.

After sharing his vision, what did Jesus ask his disciples to do? He first told them to pray: **“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”** Before doing anything, we need to pray. Prayer draws us into Jesus’ mission. We cannot engage in God’s mission by human effort or zeal, but only as the Lord calls and empowers us. So we must pray. We pray for many things. Primary among them should be to send out workers into the harvest field. We should pray for each campus in the Chicago area, the USA and the nations of the world. As we pray, we may be the answer to our own prayer. God may send us to share the good news of Jesus. Let’s pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers.

Though we have vision and pray, the practical reality is that the world is like a jungle, where hungry wolves are ready to devour each other. People try to take advantage of each other; they deceive and are deceived. In order to live in this world, we can easily become like wolves. But we should be like lambs, just as Jesus’ disciples were. St. Paul saw himself like a sheep sent to the slaughter (Ro 8:36). Though the disciples looked like tasty lunch for the wolves, Jesus sent them anyway. He trusted that God would protect them and work through them. He commanded, **“Go!”** When Jesus tells us to **“Go!”** we should go, trusting in him to protect us and provide for us.

In verses 4-11 Jesus gave his disciples specific instructions about how to carry out their mission. He said, **“Do not take a purse or bag or sandals...”** (4a). Jesus wanted them to depend on God for their needs, and not to depend on material things. Jesus said, **“...and do not greet anyone on the road”** (4b). Since the mission was urgent, they should not spend time hanging out pointlessly. When they entered a house, they should first say, **“Peace to this house”** (5). This greeting of peace or “Shalom” imparted the blessing of wellbeing on a household economically, socially and spiritually. It was like “God bless you.” If a peace-loving person was there, they would receive the blessing, welcome the disciples into their homes, and provide for them. If not, the blessing would return to the disciples (6). Wherever they

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were welcomed, they should stay—not moving around here and there (7). Jesus mentioned eating twice because eating fellowship is an important part of gospel ministry (8). They should not be picky, but joyfully eat whatever was set before them. They were not beggars; the worker deserves his wages.

What was the main point of their mission? Jesus said, **“Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’”** (9). Healing expresses God’s personal love for suffering people and is the tangible evidence of kingdom’s power. They should proclaim the message of the kingdom when they were welcomed and when they were not welcomed (10-11). Those who did not accept it were responsible for the consequence. The message was the same, but according to the response the consequences were quite different. Those who welcomed this message would receive God’s salvation. But those who rejected it would be condemned (Jn 3:18). What, then, does the message, **“The kingdom of God has come near to you”** mean? It means that Jesus has come as the Savior King sent by God. To those who willingly accept him, Jesus reigns over us as king with love and peace. Jesus forgives our sins, drives out all darkness, protects us from the evil one, and enables us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness. We experience God’s glorious reign in our heart, our household, and our community. Accepting Jesus as our king is the secret of true and lasting happiness. This is the most wonderful news which everyone needs to hear.

In verses 12-16, Jesus helps his disciples to have a clear identity as ambassadors of Christ when the message of the kingdom is not accepted. Jesus told them, **“...it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”** Although Sodom was so sinful that God destroyed it, the people who heard the message of the kingdom of God and rejected it were even more worthy of judgment. The words “that town” refer to places where the message of the kingdom had been rejected. Included were Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, where Jesus had spent most of his time and done most of his miracles. But people did not repent and accept the message of the kingdom. They thought of themselves more highly than Gentiles. Yet they would be judged more severely than the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon. Here we see that even when Jesus proclaimed the kingdom many people did not accept it. So disciples of Jesus should not be discouraged when they proclaim the message of the kingdom and it is rejected. Jesus concluded, **“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me”** (16). When we share the

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word of God through Bible study or in a message, there are always two responses. Some people accept it and others reject it. When rejected, we should not do it personally. It is for Jesus' sake. He will hold people accountable. We should just keep sharing the message of the kingdom.

Second, victory, joy and true blessing (17-24). In this part, when the disciples returned, we can see how Jesus evaluated their journey, and learn what is the secret of victory, what is the source of joy, and what is true blessing. The seventy-two returned with joy and said, **“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name”** (17). They were no longer like lambs, but like conquering generals. They had experienced the power of Jesus' name. At their rebuke, demons shuddered and submitted. Here we learn the power of Jesus' name: it is superior to all forces of evil. Dr. Joseph Murphy, one of my theology professors, testified that he was once like a prodigal son who wandered around Europe indulging his flesh. Then one night, as he tried to sleep, he had a nightmare that he was falling into a bottomless pit, on the way to hell. In a state of total terror, he called out, “Jesus, help me.” It was the first time he had ever called on Jesus' name. And he was not sure why he did so. But immediately the nightmare vanished. This is the power of Jesus' name.

Seeing that his disciples were very excited, as if they had done something great, Jesus reminded them of the source of victory. He said, **“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you”** (18-19). In this verse **“snakes and scorpions”** symbolize dangerous and evil spiritual enemies, who poison and destroy people. At the name of Jesus, Satan's power is completely cast down, and people are restored and healed. Jesus' name so powerfully protects his people that no evil force can harm them. Though sharing the good news of the kingdom of God is a spiritual battle against Satan, victory is guaranteed in Jesus' name. When we want to do God's work, we need to call on Jesus' name in prayer. Jesus continued, **“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”** (20). Kingdom workers need a reason to rejoice. It should not be rooted in our success in ministry, but in having eternal salvation. This is a constant and unchanging source of joy.

At that time, Jesus was full of joy through the Holy Spirit. He said, **“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden**

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these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do” (21). As Jesus experienced the work of God through his disciples, he was amazed at the wisdom and power of God. God hides spiritual truths from the wise and learned, who are proud and self-glory seeking. But God reveals them to little children who are humble and obedient. This does not mean we should be anti-intellectual. It means that we cannot know God through our own wisdom and knowledge, but only when he reveals himself to us.

In verse 22, we find another important truth about God’s way of working. God carries out his salvation work uniquely through his Son. There is an intimacy between the Father and Son which no one else can know. Jesus knows God and reveals God to those whom he chooses. His disciples have a great privilege to know God through Jesus. In verses 23-24 Jesus wanted his disciples to know how blessed they were. He said, **“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”** True blessing is not one’s possessions or achievements, but to have spiritual eyes to see Jesus and spiritual ears to hear his words. When we know Jesus, we are truly blessed. Do you feel that you are truly blessed? I hope so. Jesus is the center of God’s salvation history. When we have Jesus in our heart we are truly blessed. When we see the world through the eyes of Jesus, we can see that God is working mightily. God never fails. God is the Lord of the harvest. He has vision for all people in the whole world. Let’s accept his vision in our hearts, and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.