

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message Joy in Serving Jesus

Scripture Luke 10:1-12, 17-24

In chapter 9 Jesus called the Twelve Apostles together, empowered them so that they had the authority and ability to drive out demons and cure diseases, instructed them about what resources they should take along on their travels, and then sent them on their way to the villages of Galilee where they were to do kingdom work.

We talked quite a bit about that four part formula and how it has been and continues to be applied to every person who is involved in kingdom work.

Jesus was not pleased with the report that the Twelve gave upon their return. He used the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men as a follow up object lesson to help the Twelve to understand both the limits of their own abilities and how they were to cooperate with God in kingdom work. From the lesson last week we learned that the role of the disciple is to take what Jesus supernaturally provides and to distribute it among needy people.

The events from chapter 9 are remarkably similar to what we are going to think about in chapter 10.

Read Luke 10:1-12

The first characteristic you will notice is that this passage begins the same way as chapter 9— with the four part formula. Jesus selected and “appointed” the members of this large group of disciples, then He taught them about harvest work and gave them instructions about their travels, He empowered them, which is implied in the words “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves,” and He sent them out to heal the sick and to announce that the kingdom of God was near. Generally speaking, this ministry assignment was very similar to the episode in chapter 9.

There is some controversy about the exact number of disciples who were being sent out. Some of the ancient manuscripts say 72 disciples, others say 70. It is assumed that 72 was the exact number who were sent and that 70 is a round number.

The exact number is not important. What is important is that Jesus wanted this group of disciples to go ahead of Him into the region of Judea. Previously the Twelve had traveled through the remote villages of Galilee. Their ministry represented the final effort to give everyone in the northern region of Israel the opportunity to learn about the kingdom of God.

By the end of chapter 9, Jesus had left Galilee and moved south into the region of Judea. At the end of chapter 9 we read these words, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem, and He sent messengers on ahead” (*Luke 9:51-52a*). The beginning of chapter 10 informs us that He sent the 70 disciples “two by two ahead of him to every town and place where He was about to go.”

Jesus described the conditions in Judea: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few,” and He instructed the disciples to “ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” The harvest imagery is common in Scripture, and it represents the gathering of people to God. In this context of Luke 10, the Seventy were to announce the kingdom and the presence of the Messiah in the expectation that more individuals would gather around Jesus.

There are several lessons to be learned from Jesus’ statement. The first is that the Lord is the One who must take the initiative in the harvest work. We recognize this initiative by the Lord’s “call” and “appointment” of specific disciples, such as the Seventy. Secondly, we can conclude that Jesus was referring to Himself as Lord since He was, in these verses, sending out His disciples to be workers.

A third lesson has to do with the qualifications of the workers. As was mentioned in the previous message, it is foolish for believers to attempt to serve God in their own strength. Healing diseases, casting out demons, preaching — these are not normal human abilities. Spiritual achievements require God’s supernatural guidance and help. The ministry efforts of disciples would be successful only in the context of prayer and God’s sovereignty.

When disciples ask the Lord of the harvest for help, they are acknowledging their dependency on Someone other than themselves. They know that by themselves they are helpless and inadequate to accomplish anything spiritually. Disciples must be willing to trust the radical instructions given to them by God and to follow His commands with wholehearted obedience.

When God is ready to send out workers into His harvest field, He looks for people who have appropriate attitudes. Then He indicates the direction He wants them to take, provides the resources they need, sets up the parameters for their work, and gets them started on their way.

The sense of inadequacy and helplessness is accentuated by Jesus' comment in verse 3. He was sending His followers out like lambs among wolves. This might seem like a foolish way to perform spiritual work, but in view of human helplessness and spiritual realities, it is not such a surprising statement. When lambs are in danger, they are very helpless creatures. They have no natural way to defend themselves — no claws or fangs or poison. Instead of running away from danger, lambs tend to freeze in place, which makes them easy prey. Jesus was aware that He was sending His followers into impossible situations, and yet He had victory in mind. His power and protection would be displayed through the vulnerability of His workers.

Jesus understood that the world would be hostile and antagonistic to His disciples. He was aware that they would face rejection. That is why He spoke the words of verses 10-11 "If you are not welcome in a town, go into its streets and say, 'even the dust that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you.'"

This was symbolic action. It was a declaration of separation between the people of that town and God. The workers had alerted the citizens of the town that the kingdom of God was near. Rejection of their message meant that the citizens of that town were rejecting the words of God, and this meant that they faced the prospect of God's judgment. Jesus said, "it would be more bearable on the day of judgment for Sodom than for that town." The people of Sodom had failed to repent when given a warning by God, and the city was subsequently destroyed by fire from heaven. The cities of Judea were to be given the good news of the Messianic kingdom. The rejection of the disciples' message was a greater offense to God than that of the people of Sodom; hence the judgment would be greater.

For the disciples, the fear of rejection and of ravenous evil beasts was not an excuse for them to timidly pull back and withdraw from their calling. Proclamation of the kingdom required engagement with the world and the possibility of opposition and hostility, but disciples, those called, instructed, empowered, and sent were expected to be faithful and persevere.

The instructions that Jesus gave to the seventy disciples was similar to that given earlier to the Twelve. They were to embark on their travels without money, provisions, or extra clothing. They were not to greet anyone on the road. They were to remain in one house as long as they were in a town. They were to eat what was provided to them. The Seventy were to trust God for everything they would need — their protection, food, and shelter.

They were to heal the sick and otherwise demonstrate the powers of the kingdom, and talk about the kingdom of God. They were able to do this because of the authority and power given to them by the Lord of the Harvest.

The second part of the episode is in verses 17-24.

Read Luke 10:17-24

Last week, when we thought about the return of the Twelve, we observed that they had not used appropriate words to explain their success in ministry. They had failed to acknowledge the source of their power when healing diseases and casting out demons. They had failed to give the glory to Jesus.

The seventy-two disciples returned with a much different attitude and report. They were excited that “even the demons submitted to them in Jesus’ name.” They did not brag about their personal achievements, nor make unwarranted claims for personal glory. The excitement of the seventy-two was understandable, and fortunately, they were excited in the correct way — giving the credit for their success to Jesus. “Even the demons submitted to us in Your name,” they said. The seventy-two had grasped the basic spiritual lesson that the Twelve had not understood.

The liberation of individuals who were oppressed by demons was evidence of the superior power of Jesus. The power of Satan had been overcome. As Jesus acknowledged, "Satan fell like lightning" because the disciples had faithfully ministered in His name.

The terms "snakes," "scorpions," and "power of the enemy" are used in Scripture as symbols of the forces of evil. The authority "to trample on snakes and scorpions" was the delegated authority which Jesus can give to those who are called by Him to go work in His harvest fields. Those who are so empowered by Jesus can "overcome all the power of the enemy." "Nothing can harm them." That is an incredible statement in view of the fact that Jesus sends His disciples out like "lambs among wolves."

The returning disciples were naturally elated about the spiritual victories which had been accomplished through their obedience. Jesus, however, had some advice that they needed to keep in mind. He wanted them to understand that His power at work in their lives was not their major blessing. They were not to "rejoice that the spirits submitted to them, but to rejoice that their names were written in heaven."

Jesus was not prohibiting the joy that comes from spiritual victories, such as the subjugation of demons. Rather, He was calling attention to the ultimate cause for rejoicing — the fact that eternal salvation had been established for His faithful followers in the registers of heaven. Yes, ministry with God is a privilege, and access to God's power is exciting, but our real cause for joy is the everlasting life that we have with God. It is not what we do, but who we are in Christ.

The joy of the disciples was expressed in verse 17. Verse 21 indicates the joy of Jesus. He, "full of His own joy through the Holy Spirit," turned to His heavenly Father in prayer. Notice that Jesus didn't express His gratitude and joy for the defeat of Satan, or for the accomplishments of His disciples. He expressed His gratitude and joy for the method in which the Father had revealed His ways to "little children" and hidden them from people who were "wise and learned." Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving and joy highlights the important spiritual lesson that Jesus had been trying to get across to His followers.

What did Jesus' prayer statement mean? The words "these things" refer to the basic fundamental principles of kingdom ministry — to the essential spiritual truths that disciples must understand if they are to do effective spiritual work.

What had the “little children” discovered about “these things?” They had discovered that God sovereignly selects and appoints the workers for the harvest fields. They had discovered that God gives His supernatural power to His workers so they can help people with their physical and spiritual needs. They had discovered that God’s work done God’s way with God’s resources will bring victory over the devil and the powers of evil. And they had come to realize that all the glory belonged to God.

The Father, in His sovereignty, had not revealed these truths to intellectuals — to those who were inclined to have an inflated idea about their own importance and inclined to take credit for themselves. Rather, it was the Father’s “good pleasure” to reveal His ways to those who, in childlike simplicity and humility, recognized their human weaknesses and inadequacies, yet placed their trust in God and were willing to obey Him with enthusiasm.

Verse 22 explains how these truths became known to the disciples. First, Jesus announced that “all things had been committed to Him by the Father.” In other words, the attributes that make God God, things like sovereignty and authority and power, had been committed, literally, “handed over,” to the Son. Next Jesus explained His special relationship with the Father, “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son.” They know each other in an absolute intimate sense.

Then Jesus came to the most important part of the verse. In the last phrase of verse 22 Jesus announced that He could reveal the Father to whomever He chose to do so. The seventy disciples had come to know the Father in a special way because Jesus, the Son, had chosen to make the Father known to them. They had come to know the Father through their personal interaction with Jesus. This is an important principle. Jesus was the mediator, the “way” between God and humanity. The disciples had been called and appointed by Jesus, they had listened to and obeyed the instructions of Jesus, and they had ministered in the power and with the authority of Jesus and, as a result, they had come to know the Father in a special intimate way.

Verses 23-24 complete the teaching which was started in chapter 9. You recall that the Twelve needed some further spiritual education after their ministry efforts in Galilee. It is my opinion that Jesus did not include them in the group of Seventy who ministered in Judea. I think that Jesus held the Twelve back so that they could observe the attitudes and behaviors of the Seventy.

I don't know if my idea is true or not, but I'm sure that the Twelve recognized the excitement of the Seventy as the reports of their ministry were given. And I'm sure that they recognized the excitement of Jesus — brought about because so many of His followers had learned the deep spiritual lessons of kingdom work. And the Twelve heard Jesus say to the assembled group of disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."

Jesus went on to state that many prophets and kings had wanted to have an experience like the seventy disciples. Those Old Testament saints had prophesied about the powers and sovereignty that the coming Messiah would manifest, but they had not had the opportunity to see and hear the Messiah in person. The disciples, however, had the special privilege to both hear and see the Messiah, as well as personally experience the incredible powers of the kingdom of God. The ways of the kingdom had become known to them because Jesus had chosen to reveal the ways of the Father to them. No wonder the disciples were filled with such incredible joy.

Their joy can be the joy of believers today, because present day believers can be workers in the Lord's harvest fields, and because they can know the Father through Jesus Christ, and because their names are written in heaven. We can and should have the same kind of joy in serving Jesus.

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