

Text: Luke 10:1-16

Title: Seventy Disciples Sent

Truth: The Lord sends us (!?) to proclaim His message.

Date/Location: Sunday May 19, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

In the last two sections of Luke, we saw the self-centered zeal of the disciples and the need for a whole-hearted commitment to Christ. In the first section (9:46-56), the disciples demonstrated self-centered zeal by arguing about who is the greatest, showing a sectarian spirit, and exhibiting a very harsh attitude of judgment. All were opposite of how Jesus would teach them by word and example. His word and example consisted of humility and mercy. In the second section (9:57-62), several people encountered Jesus and either offered or were commanded to follow Him, but they had to count the cost and be willing to set aside family joys and even some responsibilities to follow the Lord.

We found all of that to be quite directly applicable to us in our day.

The narrative picks up again after these events. Luke connects the storyline back to 9:51-52 where the Lord planned to go to Jerusalem and as part of that plan, he sent some disciples ahead of him to prepare the way. He did it before as Luke records in 9:2. Now, he uses the same methodology, only on a much larger scale with 70 such messengers. They had a lot of locations to cover, and evidently, He had at least a basic plan about how they were going to do it. It appears from Matthew 19:1-2 that Jesus gave some focus to the region of Judea “beyond the Jordan” which is also called “Trans-Jordan” or what we might call the “East Bank” to mirror the “West Bank” on the Jerusalem side of the Jordan.

I. Labor Shortage, v. 1-2

A. There is lots of work to do for God’s church and His future kingdom. But few workers are equipping the saints doing or the work of an evangelist.

Illustration: In the United States, a rough estimate suggests that there are 455,600 clergy for 330 million people, equivalent to

one clergy worker for every 724 people. This number is woefully insufficient—and many of those clergy are not teaching the whole truth! Consider the number of healthcare workers in the US: 14.7 million. We would need more than an order of magnitude increase in clergy to match the healthcare workforce. And it is even worse: *more* people have a constant need for spiritual care and instruction than need medical care!¹

- B. We must pray that the Lord will send out workers. This is the two-fold need—for us to pray and for the Lord to move the hearts of people to do the work of church planting, evangelism, disciple-making, etc. Jesus is not at all shy to put both of those things into a single sentence: we pray, God moves.
- C. If you are a worker, like these 70 sent out by Jesus, then the fact that there are few like you means that there is no shortage of work for you, and no time to waste in getting to it. That is exactly what the Lord says next.
- D. The truth of the matter is that every disciple should be a worker. So, my illustration above is short-sighted. We should be able to count *all* the members of all the churches as “spiritual health care workers”—not just full-time clergy. This makes the ratio look a lot better.

Illustration: Some studies show three in ten Americans attend religious services every week. Of course, not all their churches give the good news the way it is in the Bible. But this should increase the laborers from several hundred thousand into the millions. If only they would embrace the calling!

- E. Still, not enough disciples take their calling with the urgency that the Lord uses later in the passage.

¹ The NIH says that in 2020 there were 65 million healthcare workers in the world. For a population of 8 billion people, this means that the ratio of workers to population is approximately 1:123 people. (See <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35760437/>.) According to the above numbers in the U.S, there is 1 clergy for every 724 people, a factor of 6 less. In the U.S., healthcare:population is about 1:22!

II. The Danger and Urgency of the Matter, v. 3-4

- A. The Lord warned the disciples. They would be like lambs among wolves. They must be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves in such situations (Matt. 10:16). In their groups of two, or in larger confabs, they can figure out what to do to face the difficulties thrown at them.
- B. He also instructed them not to carry extra things. It would weigh them down and was an unnecessary hindrance to the work. Do not pack, just jump into the car and go—now!
- C. He told them not to greet anyone on the road. Each such greeting, like the farewell in 9:61, would be a drawn-out situation. The urgency of peoples' need prior to the Lord's arrival was too great to waste time with formalities.

III. Provision for the Ministry, v. 5-8

- A. Jesus indicate that God would provide for them in each place where they stayed. They were to give greetings to the household where they proposed to stay. That greeting was something like “Peace to you!” This was a peace in all its saving fullness. Somehow the disciples would know if the household was one of peace or not. I do not think this means necessarily that they were already saved, but they were people who did not want war with God.
- B. The Lord instructed them to receive the provisions that He supplied as they went on the way and not to go from house to house in a single community and so extend your stay or look for better hospitality. One practical benefit of this approach is that you would naturally be sensitive to not outstay your welcome by hanging around and becoming a freeloader, not doing the work. Instead, you would keep working and moving. Living free off others is not just a social no-no; it is a sin. This one-stop approach would also save them from the task of moving from house to house, which takes time. Their work was to be laser focused on making disciples of Jesus.

- C. The disciples were not to see themselves as freeloaders either, because the spiritual worker is worthy of his wages. If he is doing the work, he is worthy of the wages. No work = no wages.

IV. The Ministry Assignment, v. 9

- A. Jesus directed his workers to do two things: First, heal the sick. This is miraculous healing and includes the removal of demons (10:17). God has not been pleased to give anyone today the same authority, so we cannot exactly replicate their mission. The newness of the message of Christ and the fact that there were no New Testament Scriptures necessitated some more “oomph” to substantiate their message and make it more credible to the people.
- B. Second, they were to preach the kingdom of God. This means also calling for a response of repentance just like John the Baptist and Jesus. That was an essential part of their preaching the kingdom of God and still is today as we share the message of Christ—not only of individual cleansing from sin and justification, but also that Christ’s kingdom is coming, although not necessarily immediately.
- C. Giving this message is an essential service to humanity—one that society needs whether it wants it or not.

V. Judgment for Rejection, v. 10-16

- A. If the city would not receive them, they were to wipe the dust off their feet, just like Luke recorded in chapter 9. With that symbolic testimony, Jesus also told them to pronounce judgment against that place. Although the kingdom of God had drawn near to them in the persons of its messengers and its message, they had rejected it.
- B. Because of their rejection, they could expect a heavy price to fall on their heads, worse than even Sodom and Gomorrah which are rightly categorized among the evil cities of history, like Babylon and Nineveh.

The Lord alludes to “levels of punishment” where one group of people could expect more tolerable treatment and another group worse treatment, based on their offenses. John 19:11 says that the

one who delivered Jesus over to Pilate has the greater sin. Luke 12:47-48 differentiates between those who deserve many stripes and those who deserve few. Isaiah 14:15 may be a reference a similar notion—the lowest depths of Hell. This does not solve the “problem of Hell” entirely, but it does give us who are challenged with that problem a minor bit of relief.

We can trust that God, the judge of all the earth, always does what is precisely right in terms of morality and proportionality. This is where trust does come into the equation: if you do not trust God in those things that you can better understand, you will likely resist Him in those areas that are harder to understand. He has given us good cause to believe in Him if we will be honest with ourselves. But yes, there are some things that are hard to understand. For these, we bow in humble and trusting submission to Him.

- C. The cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida had experienced a visitation of the Son of God. Sodom and Gomorrah “only” saw a couple of angels (Genesis 19). The Israelite cities had experienced mighty miracles at the hand of Jesus. Almost no miracles were done at Sodom prior to the fire and brimstone (except for protecting Lot’s family by blinding the attackers).
- D. Jesus knows that the counterfactual is true that if He had done His miracles in Tyre and Sidon, those people would have repented. But the cities where He *did* the miracles did not repent. How did He know the historical counterfactual? The answer is that God knows everything, even hypotheticals that would have come about had other circumstances occurred. *How* He knows this is harder to explain, but has to do with how He designed the universe including the nature of its people, all the circumstances, and most of all, His decreed will for them on those myriad of circumstances.

If you are in a particularly contrary mood, you might ask then why did *not* Jesus do those miracles in Sodom those centuries ago? If they would have repented, would it not have been worth Him doing that? That is another hypothetical, but what we know is that Lot *was* there, but they would not listen to him (Gen. 19:6-9). If someone does not receive God’s messenger, it is unrealistic to assume they will receive another messenger or even God Himself.

The Pharisees “killed the heir” and wanted to take God’s vineyard for themselves.

- E. Capernaum was in similar shoes. It was exalted as high as Heaven because the Son of God made His home there. He *lived* there for a great deal of time, and they did not receive Him! We do not read that they ran Him out of town or anything drastic, but they did not care about Him. Indeed, a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown. He might be honored in other places, but by reason of familiarity He was not esteemed in Capernaum. From that height of glory, the city would pass the same distance down to punishment.
- F. Principle: if you have been given much, much is expected of you. And if you reject much, by that much you will be debased. Exalt yourself? You will be humbled. You might think that you are a pretty decent person. So did these Jews. They were probably not the worst sinners. They went to synagogue and had a moral code. And they were close to the revelation of God, and from them came Jesus. Far from exempting them from accountability, it made their accountability more strict.

Just because you are not immoral like those of other nations or cultures, or just because you go to church or have grown up with some association to the Christian faith is not going to do you any good. In fact, the closer you have been, the “higher” you have been privileged, the more strict will be your judgment.

- G. The Lord may have used his messengers’ reception reports to direct his future visits and the use of His limited time.

Conclusion

Previously, He had told the disciples that if someone receives them, they will receive the Lord, and if they receive the Lord, they will receive the Father as well (Matt. 10:40).

So, if the city were favorable to his messengers, then Jesus could expect something of a favorable response to His further ministry in the city. But if the city had already rejected the disciples, it was not going to receive Him and He may have skipped a stop and spent more time on fertile ground.

You might say, “If only Jesus were here, He would get them to believe.” Not necessarily, dear evangelist. For if they do not receive you, they will not receive Him either. In fact, when you are sharing His word, Jesus *is* there by His Spirit. He can do everything that He could do if He were physically present. So, trust Him, and share His message with people.

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