

Seventy On A Mission

Luke 10:1-24

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We're going to read just Luke 10:1 to get us started. Luke said, "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go."

We have to keep the context in mind as we study this passage. In Luke 9:51, it says that "Now it came to pass, when the time had come for [Jesus] to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." So from hereon, everything we read in 10 more chapters in Luke will be in the shadow of the Cross. Jesus will be going to the Cross for the purpose for which He came: to die on the Cross for the sins of the world. He came to redeem us from our sins by substituting Himself in our place, taking our punishment, sin, guilt and shame. He came to be the Redeemer of mankind for those who would trust Him and put their faith in Him. So Jesus now knows that He needs to send others on missions, because He is on His way to be crucified.

What we now have in Luke 10:1-24, is the sending out of the 70 disciples. Some manuscripts read in verse 1, "seventy-two." It is either "seventy" or "seventy-two" who were sent out, depending on the manuscript evidence. We don't really know which it was, but that doesn't change the facts and the information that we learn. Nor does it have anything to do with the inerrancy or infallibility of God's Word. The original manuscripts are inerrant and infallible and we have very good, close translations.

My guess is that there are 70 who were sent out. In Genesis 10, there is a table of nations, and there are 70 of them. In the Jewish supreme high court, the Sanhedrin, there were 70 members. So 70 was a significant number in Israel. But we don't really know why there were 70 who were sent out, and who they were, we don't know. But the important point is that they are known to God.

People may not know your name, but God knows your name. You might get to heaven and meet someone who was part of the 70, but his name is not in the Bible. Aren't you glad that God sees and God knows? And He takes our name and writes it down and keeps it in memory.

Now don't confuse verses Luke 10:1-24, where the 70 were sent out on a mission, with Luke 9:1-11, where Jesus commissioned and sent out the 12 apostles. First He sent the apostles, and now He is sending out the disciples, who became ambassadors. The ministry they did was most likely in Samaria and in the area of Judea and some in Trans-Jordan. But it says in verse 1 that He "sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go," so they were lead men, missionaries, who were doing His ministry and His bidding.

I also think the number 70 is significant, because Luke's Gospel is a universal Gospel. And the table of nations in Genesis 10 indicates the universality of Luke's Gospel.

There are three, main sections in our text. The first section is the explanation of the mission, in verses 1-12. "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" This should be underlined in you Bible. "Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road." In other words, don't get slowed down by long salutations, greetings and chit-chat.

Verse 5, "But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you." Now here's the message. "And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.'"

I want you to note in verse 1 again that Jesus sent them out in pairs. The narrative of our text is descriptive and not prescriptive; it is just describing what is taking place and not saying that we should do everything here the same way that Jesus was telling them to do. Whenever you're reading historical narrative, it must be interpreted through the lens of didactic material or the epistles. Was it practiced in the Gospels and in Acts? Was it commanded in the epistles? If so, then it would be something that we, as the church, should do. So it's not a command here for us to do, but there are a lot of principles and lessons we can learn about missions.

This is a sermon about missionaries. They went on missions to share the good news of Christ, that the kingdom of God was at hand and about healing the sick and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ as they lead the way.

It's a good idea, verse 1, to have a ministry partner, to not do ministry alone. The Bible says that "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor, for if they fall, one will lift up his companion" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). So do ministry together; find someone to pray with you, for you and to partner with you in ministry, so you're not alone.

But the point is that "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few," verse 2. The imagery is of a harvest, the laborers are farmers and they are reaping the wheat or other grain. This is a spiritual harvest; it's not talking literally about harvesting the wheat. Jesus is talking about the unbelievers, the lost souls. We need to harvest them into the kingdom of God by preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to them.

In context, our cross must be taken up, we must die to ourselves and we must follow Jesus. But the laborers are few. In Luke 9 we saw half-hearted followers. "Lord, I will follow You wherever

You go.” But Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Luke 9:57-58). Following Jesus will be difficult. So it’s no surprise that “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few.”

There are some lessons we can draw from these first 12 verses in Luke 10. I want to mention five. Number one, we should pray for laborers to reap the harvest. Every one of us can pray. Verse 2 says, “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” And Jesus said this to the 70 who would be going out, so He’s speaking to laborers, not spectators; that as they labored in the harvest, they should pray for more laborers to go into the harvest.

We all may not be able to go on a mission, we all may not be called to preach, we all may not be called to direct evangelism, but we all can pray. It doesn’t take a lot of knowledge or ability to pray that God would send people to the lost souls.

I remember years ago I made three, different trips into China, smuggling Bibles. On my first trip, we went from Hong Kong into Canton with Bibles, and we met people who had never heard the name of Jesus, never seen a Bible and knew nothing about Christianity. It blew my mind! And nothing has changed today; “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few.”

So we can all pray for God to send forth laborers into the harvest. James 5:16 says, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

And when we pray, we should also pray that God would use us to be the answer to our prayer. Sometimes we pray about things that we can take care of ourselves. When we pray, we always need to be willing to be the answer. Isaiah said, “Here am I! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). Instead we pray, “Lord, here am I, but send my neighbor, send someone else. Lord, I’m just praying that more evangelists and missionaries would be raised up.”

Then the Lord says, “Why don’t you go?”

You say, “No, no!” So we don’t obey the Lord.

So when you pray, the principle is to be willing to be the answer to your prayer. Someone said, “Put feet to your prayers.”

Years ago when I was a young pastor, I didn’t get a lot of money for pastoring at that time, so if I ever had cash in my wallet, it was like a miracle of God. And \$20 came to me unexpectedly. With great delight, I put it in my wallet, put it in my pocket and went to preach that Sunday. I thought, Wow! I’ve got \$20 in my wallet! I was so stoked. Then after service, someone came up to me and asked, “Pastor John, would you pray for me?”

“What can I pray for?”

He said, “I need \$20.”

I felt like saying, "I rebuke you, Satan! I bind you right now!" And I actually started to pray, "Lord, I just pray that you would provide this...."

Then He said, "You've got it right now in your wallet." Clearly the Lord said, "You have the money. You're the answer to his prayer. Quit praying and give him the money!"

"No, Lord, no! Don't do this to me!"

But I stopped and said, "I don't need to pray. I've got \$20. Here's the answer to your prayer."

He said, "Oh, praise the Lord! Thank you, Pastor John."

(Don't get any ideas from this illustration; I'm not the bank!) But we should be willing. We need to say, "Here am I! Send me." But also pray.

Number two, we need to realize that there is danger and hardships in missions. Verse 3 says, "Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves." Who wants to sign up for that?! It's going to be difficult and hard. Jesus said, "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13). "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

Number three, when we go on missions, we need to trust God's provision, verses 4-8. "Carry neither money bag..." or "wallet" "...knapsack..." or "provision bag" "...nor sandals..." or "extra shoes" "...and greet no one along the road." They had these long greetings. They were to rather have a sense of dependency and urgency. When you do ministry, you should go forth with urgency and in dependency on the Lord when you do ministry.

Verse 5, "But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And if a son of peace..." or "a righteous man" "...is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you." So stay with believers. "And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house."

Be content with God's provision. Don't stay at someone's house as a missionary but then leave because the cooking is bad or the bed's hard. Don't go running from house to house.

Verse 8, "Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you." That's a tough one. I remember my first trip to the Philippines. I was introduced to balut. It is a hardboiled egg with a baby chicken inside it with its feathers and bones. It crunches when you eat it. It's considered a delicacy. It was crazy! And I saw this verse in the Bible. I thought, Oh, Lord, have mercy on my soul!

Lesson number four, the ministry and message of the mission is in verse 9: "And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Again, this is descriptive and not prescriptive. In our dispensation, we have the great commission. We are to, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). He didn't say, "Go into all

the world and heal people.”

We should pray for the sick, but there is no guarantee that God will heal everyone. When you watch a pastor on TV say, “God wants to heal you,” how does he know that? Paul had a thorn in his flesh, “a messenger of Satan to buffet” him (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). It was a gift given to him by God to keep him humble and useful. He prayed three times for God to take it away, but it didn’t get taken away. Many times God will allow sickness or weaknesses in our bodies, so we will be dependent and rely upon Him. We won’t be perfectly healthy until we go to heaven, and we will be with the Lord face to face.

But these disciples were given the ability and power to go out and heal the sick, and they were given the commission to preach, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” So when you are on mission, always keep first things first—the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Number five, notice the rejection of the missionaries. Some will not receive you, verses 10-11. “But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you...” that will happen, so don’t be surprised “...go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’”

Now notice verse 12: “But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day...” that is, “the Day of Judgment” “...for Sodom than for that city.” This verse will introduce us to the second section, but it lays down a principle, which is, “To whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). Light and knowledge brings responsibility. So what He is saying here is that it will be more tolerable on the Judgment Day for Sodom than for the city that rejects you, your ministry and your mission.

Jesus believes there was a city called Sodom. In another place, He also mentions Gomorrah. He mentions the judgment of God. He mentions Lot and Lot’s wife. So Jesus believed in the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and Lot’s wife. And Sodom and Gomorrah didn’t have the witness that the 70 disciples were bringing to the cities they went to. So woe unto the cities that didn’t believe the 70 messengers.

The second division of our text is in verses 13-16. It is the denunciation for the rejection of the missionaries. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!” Jesus starts with woes. This is a word of deep regret and pain. He is regretting painfully in His heart.

We don’t know where the city of Chorazin is. Some believe that it was northwest of the city of Capernaum by the sea of Galilee, but it is uninhabited and laid waste today. The city of Bethsaida is on the northeastern side of the sea of Galilee.

“For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon...” the Syrophoenician towns “...they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”

It's interesting that the Bible doesn't record the Lord's ministry in these places. The Apostle John said that "There are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). But there were mighty works that were done in these cities. So we don't have everything that Jesus did or all the miracles that He performed.

These woes are also found in Matthew 11 but in a different context and given in a different light and with a different emphasis. But the thought there also is that knowledge brings responsibility. "Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). The miracles were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida, but if they had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. But Chorazin and Bethsaida didn't repent. Tyre and Sidon are Phoenician cities on the northern coast of the Mediterranean in modern-day Lebanon. So it would have been more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, because they didn't have the witness and ministry of the 70.

Apply this to the United States of America. Has there ever been a nation with a greater Christian influence than the United States? I don't think so. We even have "In God We Trust" on our money. But we don't trust in God despite all the Bibles, all the churches, all the preaching, all the witnessing and all the evangelism. The great evangelist Billy Graham and his crusades and Franklin Graham's crusades that he is doing today—what great light America has had, but we've shunned that light. And based on Romans 1, I think right now that we're seeing the wrath of God poured out on America.

"But Pastor John, Donald Trump's the President!" That's not the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I am glad he got elected. But he's not my hope. There needs to be a spiritual awakening, a revival and a turning back to God in America. And I'm praying for that to take place. But the laborers are few. Our only hope is for a spiritual revival in America. We are the salt and light of the world. "Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required."

And notice the importance of listening to His messengers, verse 16. "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." So if you listen to the messenger, you're hearing Jesus. If you reject the messenger, you're rejecting Jesus and God the Father, who sent Jesus. So this shows the importance of God's messengers sharing Christ.

You can't be right with God and wrong about Jesus. If you're wrong about Jesus, you're wrong about God the Father. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). There is no other way to God. There is no other way to know God. If you want to know God the Father, He's found through God the Son. And God the Father is revealed through God the Son. So if you reject the messenger, you reject Jesus, and if you reject Jesus, you reject God the Father.

Billy Graham said years ago that "God owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology, if He doesn't judge America." Pretty radical. So I believe we are seeing the wrath of God being poured out

on our nation right now.

The third and last division of our text is the jubilation after the mission, verses 17-24. "Then the seventy returned..." after the mission "...with joy..." which is the theme of this section "...saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'" So what they were doing was done in Jesus' name and for His glory. "And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits...' or 'demons' '...are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'"

Verse 21, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.'" Here we see all three members of the Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is now talking to God the Father, and He is rejoicing in the Spirit's work.

"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." You can only find God the Father through the revelation of God the Son.

So in verse 17, they returned with joy; in verse 20, Jesus rejoices; and in verse 21, Jesus rejoices in the Spirit.

Verse 23, "Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, 'Blessed...' this is a Beatitude "...are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

There is a threefold joy in this section that I want to look at. The first joy is in verses 17-19, the joy of service. There is joy in serving Jesus. When God uses you in ministry, it brings great joy. "Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'" These guys are jazzed. They're all pumped up. "Lord, this is awesome! You should have been there! It was amazing what we were doing!" They were elated and excited about what they saw God do.

Verse 18, "And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" That's an amazing statement at that point. They're on cloud nine when Jesus said He beheld Satan fall from heaven.

There are two good ways to interpret this statement. The first way is that Jesus is saying that through His first Advent, His first coming, His sending of the apostles, His sending of the 70, the kingdom of Satan is being pushed back, he is being dethroned as the god of this world, he is being destroyed. The powers of darkness are being pushed back as a result of Jesus' first coming and His missionaries' work.

Put Jesus' saying alongside Isaiah 14, where it says that Satan wanted to be exalted above God, so he was kicked out of heaven. It's called "the fall of Satan." It indicates Christ's preexistence and His eternality. He actually saw Satan fall from heaven. Pre-Genesis 1:1, He was there. So it could be that Jesus was actually rejoicing in the fact that His first coming was the beginning of the destruction of Satan's power.

You say, "When will it be finished?" When Jesus comes back in His Second Coming, His second Advent, and finishes what He began in His first Advent. He will bind Satan for 1,000 years. That will be awesome! Can you imagine a world with no devil and Jesus Christ reigning on planet earth?! It will be heaven on earth. And then Satan is loosed for a short season but is rebound, thrown into the lake of fire and will be in hell for all eternity.

So it's not over yet; Satan is still roaming around tempting people, but when Christ comes back, He will put an end to the devil. This is one way to interpret it, which could be the meaning of His statement.

The other meaning of the statement could be that in verse 17, Jesus detected, when the 70 were overjoyed that demons were subject to the 70 through His name, that He was subtly warning them of the danger of pride. I like this thought. Why did Satan fall from heaven? Because of pride. One of the greatest dangers in being used by God is pride, thinking, Aren't I special! God's using me, because I'm so wonderful! The Bible says that "God has chosen the foolish things of the world...the weak things...and the base things...to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). The Bible also say, "Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar" (Psalm 138:6).

If you are being used by God wonderfully, God must humble you completely. Paul had a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble, so that he would be useable. Paul said, "Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me" (2 Corinthians 12:7). God knows how to balance our lives. If it were all sunshine and all blessing, we could be lifted up with pride, thinking that we're something special. If God is using you today to minister to others, stay humble and dependent on God.

So it could be, verse 18, that Jesus was just warning the 70 of the sin of pride. Don't be too puffed up by your own success. Don't be enamored by your victories in the mission field. Rather give glory to God.

But verse 19 says, "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Jesus is not literally talking about snakes and scorpions. Don't say, "I'm going to step on some snakes tonight!"

I was in Phoenix, Arizona years ago for my first time to minister there. After church that night some guy came up to me and said, "You want to go into the desert tonight and find some scorpions?"

I said, "No!"

He said, "Aw, come on man, it's cool! We've got this special light that makes them light up. We'll find some scorpions!"

"Okay, let's go." So I went out into the desert with him. I didn't tell him, but I was praying, "Please, Lord; no scorpions!" And we didn't find any.

He said, "I don't know what went wrong. We always find scorpions!"

I thought, Thank you, Lord! It's an answer to prayer! And every time I read verse 19 I think of that night out in the desert. That was insane! Thank God He answered my prayer.

Notice at the end of verse 19, it says, "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." So we see the joy of serving the Lord: we have His protection. When you are serving the Lord, when you are doing the Lord's will in the Lord's way, you have the Lord's protection.

There also is joy in salvation. I like verse 20. "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you..." they're rejoicing over their mighty works over the demons "...but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

How does your name get written in heaven? God writes it there. Why does He write it there? Because "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). If you are a Christian, a child of God, your name was written in heaven. Your sins are forgiven, you'll see Jesus face to face, you'll have a new body and spend eternity with Him.

In the Greek, the statement "your names are written in heaven" is in the perfect tense. That means your names have been written, your names are written and they will always be written in heaven. Praise God for that blessing of salvation!

So we see joy in service and joy in salvation. And no matter how wonderful it might be that you are being used by God, keep this in perspective in missions, in ministry: the greatest blessing and greatest joy is knowing my sins are forgiven and my name is written in heaven.

And we also see the joy of God's sovereignty in reveling Himself to the humble, verses 21-24. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...' so you have the Father, the Son and the Spirit "...that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent..." most likely referring to the scribes and Pharisees, the self-religious elite of Jesus' day "and revealed them..." the "apokalypsis" or "unveiling" "...to babes. These are the humble, the repentant, those who see their sin and their need of a Savior.

"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight." So God sovereignly chooses to reveal Himself to the humble. "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." So if you want to know the Father, He is discovered through God

the Son.

Verse 23, “Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see...’” this is the beatitude of blessing their life “...for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.”

When I mentioned Jesus’ first Advent and seeing the destruction of the devil, that was like D-Day in World War II. And when Jesus comes back in His Second Coming, that will be V-Day, when Christ will come back in power and glory and victory to vanquish Satan forever. And all the prophets in the Old Testament wanted to see the Messiah, wanted to see the kingdom of God initiated on the earth, but Jesus was saying that these 70 were blessed to see what they saw and hear what they heard.

Do you know how blessed we are to have the Bible? Do you know how blessed we are to be living at this time and age in the church’s history? As I look around the world today, I see the stage is set for the coming again of Jesus Christ, and I’m convinced that the church will be raptured before the tribulation and the revelation of the Antichrist on earth. We’ll come back with Christ in power and glory at His Second Coming. So blessed are our eyes to see and blessed are our ears to hear the things that we have been shown.

Thus there is joy in service—let’s get busy serving the Lord; there is joy in salvation—let’s rejoice in the blessing of God saving us by His grace; and there is joy in God’s sovereign plan—He has revealed Himself to the humble and meek and the lowly.

What brings you joy? Do you have joy today knowing that your name is written down in heaven; that it has been written, it is written and it will forever be written?