

Mission Multiplication
By Jason Huff
Psalm 2:1-8, Galatians 6:1-10, Luke 10:1-24

Our third Scripture reading for this week comes from Luke 10:1-24. Listen now to God's Word. "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 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. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house." If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The kingdom of God is near you." But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near." I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "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. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "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."

Did you ever hear a story so good you had to hear it twice? The best stories come to life every time we hear them. It's the reason so many movies are made from books. And think about how many remakes we see in a given year! Sometimes, they're just pale imitations made to make a quick buck. But there are times when they match or even exceed the films on which they were based. Sometimes, a retelling can bring out ideas that were missed the first time around. And when two stories are similar but not exactly the same, the differences mean just as much as the similarities. That's what we have in this week's passage. A few weeks ago, we read in Luke 9 how Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Listening to this passage today might bring a feeling of *déjà vu*. In both stories, Jesus sends out his followers with limited provisions and told them to shake the dust off their feet when they leave a town where they weren't welcomed. But that's where the similarities end.

Luke almost never repeats himself, and so we know that he is trying to show us something different in this particular story. And what's clear to me is that this time, Luke is making it clear that sharing the gospel is something that all of us can do, and he shows us the tools that Jesus gave this band of followers – and us – to use. The reason we know that this story is different is because, this time, we have seventy-two followers being sent out into the surrounding area to proclaim the news that the Kingdom of God has come near. This group doesn't even include the twelve disciples that were closest to Jesus. This is a large band of folks that Jesus has commissioned to spread news of His coming. These were not the ones who always tagged along with Jesus or knew His every move or heard even all of His teaching. But these were loyal devotees who had committed themselves to Jesus. And second, the number of disciples is important. In Genesis 10, there is a listing of 72 descendents of Noah, representing the peoples of the entire earth. This thought is continued in extra-biblical Jewish literature. That Jesus sent out 72 disciples means that His message now is meant for the whole world, even if it doesn't yet reach all the nations surrounding Israel. It also begins to show us that this message is based in Christ, not in the Jewish law, because Jesus tells the disciples, "Eat and drink whatever they give you." These followers might have stayed at a Gentile home and been presented with meals that didn't follow Jewish food laws. Doesn't matter...Jesus transcends all the boundaries.

And that leads us to the main point for us out of this passage today: *Jesus is sending us out on His mission field.* Now I'm not saying that everybody's destined to go to Timbuktu or El Salvador or even outside of Michigan. But the job is one that's meant for all of us. The group Jesus sent out wasn't a bunch of professional Christians. They weren't the ones that were closest to Jesus, and they didn't have all the answers. But Jesus sent them out anyway. And by their reactions, they were even more successful than the twelve disciples were on their journey! Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest fields." There are so many people all around us who need to hear about the love of Jesus. They exist everywhere we go. They live right by us. They are the harvest, and it's overflowing! And just like any crop, when the time is ripe, you have to go out and get it. A harvest that's ignored is eventually going to wither and die right there in the ground. We've got to get out and do the job. Jesus makes it very clear with one word...He says, "Go!"

Now He doesn't say the job is going to be easy. He tells this team, "I'm sending you out like lambs in a bunch of wolves." They are going to meet resistance. We've heard about how different villages rejected Jesus when He came. There are people who will actively fight against us if we are really working to do God's will. But the harvest is worth it. Jesus is sending us! The risks are real, but so are the rewards. Jesus says that a worker is worth their wages. Now in a very physical sense that's true – pastors and missionaries and others whose job is centered on tending to the harvest are worth what they are given and far more. But it's also true in a spiritual sense. The rewards of following Christ are huge in a lot of different ways, whether it's the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us like love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness, or the eternal blessings. We don't share Christ to gain salvation; we can't earn it. It's a free gift already given to us. But when the Holy Spirit works within us and restores our ability to make good choices for God, we have the ability to respond to God and do His work out of our desire to say "thank you."

So how do we do this? Most of us think that it would be great to share our faith, but we don't want to be jerks. You know what I mean. There are a lot of well-meaning people who try to share Christ with other people and they somehow become arrogant and condescending and, well, jerks. They don't really represent Christ. It's part of a false idea that we can get someone to become a Christian by saying certain words that get them in the door. Nowhere in the Bible do we see anything like this. Becoming a Christian is a commitment of one's whole life, not a one-minute prayer. So what's the deal?

Here's what the passage shows us. First, *we need backup*. Jesus sends this group of 72 people out two by two. They don't go alone. Every "you" that Jesus says is in the plural. God does this because this is the way that we can actually get the job done. We need backup. We need support. No matter how long we've been Christians or how many times we've read the Bible, when things get rough, we need somebody alongside of us to encourage us. And if that's true in our everyday lives, it's even truer when we're trying to bring Christ's message to our friends and neighbors and co-workers! Make sure you have someone who's got your back, so that you can be accountable to one another, stand up for one another, and give the support we need to make a stand for Christ. If you can, find a person who can be with you when you are sharing your faith. Jesus also sent people two by two because, in an ancient Jewish court, testimony needed to be corroborated by at least two witnesses. Jesus was setting the same standard for the Kingdom of God. When we tell our neighbors or co-workers about the faith, when it's just us talking, we're easier to ignore. But if there's someone else alongside of us who can follow up and share their faith story too, it makes the testimony that much more effective.

Second, *we are called to be Christ's representatives, not His explainers*. Jesus doesn't give the missionaries the barest instructions on what to say. The only thing He tells them is, "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'" He doesn't tell them to defend His actions. He doesn't ask them to explain the mysteries of God. He says to do two things – show God's power and proclaim God's Kingdom. Now to us, that sounds strange. Most of us haven't been given the spiritual gift of healing, so we think, "Hey, He must not be talking to me!" But all of us have a testimony. All of us can share how God's power has worked in our lives. And sometimes, the power is not one we think about very often. If you are a Christian, then you have the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit develops His power in your life. People will see your peace or your patience or your self-control or your joy and wonder, "Where does that come from and how do I get a piece of it?" God may have given you the gift of hospitality to welcome someone into your home or the gift of strong faith that's evident to those around you. If you belong to God, somehow, God's power is evident through you. Look for how God has gifted you so you can display it to others.

Now when we think about giving a testimony or sharing our faith, this is where things get tough. The biggest reason most people don't share their faith is because they don't know what to say. The truth is, you don't have to say much. If you have the understanding and gifting to share the basics of faith with someone, great...and that's something that I can teach you how to do and that we can teach in the church. But if you're not there yet, it's OK. These folks didn't have rigorous training. They did what Christ told them to do and shared the truth as they understood it. They prepared the way for people to know who Christ was. And that's the call on every Christian...to share what God has done and make the invitation to know more.

The biggest fear that we have is, "What if someone asks me a question I can't answer?" This isn't really the problem we think it is. Some of us have the gift to answer the hard questions and defend the faith. The rest of us, our job is to invite people to see what is going on in the Kingdom of God and become a part of it, and to meet the people who can answer their questions. Think of it this way...salvation is God's gift to us. Our job is to let people know! To say, "God's given us a gift! Come see for yourself and receive it too!" Some people might ask, "Why do we need the gift? Why is it free? Do I really want the gift? Is God a good gift-giver? Can I trust a God who gives things away?" We as a church can answer those questions. But that's not what these missionaries did, and that's not what we have to do. We have to prepare the way for God to work in the hearts of people we meet that they would get to know God too.

Finally, *we need to be serious about the task.* When we hear Jesus condemning all these towns, He's not being mean or vindictive. He's judging them on their reaction to Him. Jesus warns Bethsaida and Capernaum because these were the cities where Jesus did a lot of His miracles. The people could see and hear for themselves that Jesus was the real deal; He spent a lot of time with them. But they didn't take Him seriously. Jesus compares them to Tyre and Sidon. Now Tyre and Sidon were infamous Gentile cities known for their sinfulness. But Jesus says that if they had seen and heard Jesus the way that Bethsaida and Capernaum had, they would have gone through the deepest rituals of repentance to get right with God.

Perhaps the biggest problem with being Christians in the modern world is that we don't take God seriously enough. I don't mean that we can't laugh and play and have fun together as people of faith. The church's confessions say that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. But we don't take God seriously when we are willing to let our neighbors and our friends go without ever hearing about God's good news. Being a Christian isn't about feeling better about ourselves; it's not about playing around with being good people and coming to church. Christianity is about life and death and life after death and how we're going to spend it. We're either a part of the Kingdom of God or we're not. Sadly, a lot of people think they're right with God, but they'll find out in the end they never knew Him at all. They'll realize that they never actually turned to God, and they'll spend eternity apart from Him by their own choice because their selfish hearts won't have changed.

Unless we share God's goodness with them now, how are they ever going to turn to Him? Paul put it this way in Romans 10:13-15: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" We are given a great job by God, and we have to take it seriously. We need to make it clear that this gift, salvation through Jesus, is the one and only real deal. The Kingdom of God is here now and it's going to come in its fullness one day, and we need to be ready. Because if we're not, there are eternal consequences. Now when we get this serious, will we be rejected? Sure. Jesus Himself was rejected over and over. And Jesus told His followers straightforwardly, when somebody rejects you, they reject me and the Father who sent me. And when they listen to you and accept you, they accept me! We have to let our egos go because it's not about us. It's about proclaiming Jesus simply, honestly, going out to collect God's harvest and bringing in those we find in His fields.

And here's the awesome thing...when we do this, when we become a part of God's family and a part of His work, we get to see and experience things that people all over the world have wondered about since the beginning of time. And Jesus thanks the Father for giving us the wisdom of the Kingdom. You don't have to be smart to get it. You don't have to be wise by worldly standards. In fact, Jesus says that the wisdom of the Kingdom has been given to little children. That means that the only real gateway to having God's wisdom is accepting it like little children who believe and follow even though they doesn't understand it all. There are plenty of brilliant people out there, and sometimes we feel like, "How can we teach them anything?" But the truth of Jesus Christ is not something that can be learned...it's revealed. Jesus says that everything has been given to Him by the Father, and that the Father is known by the Son and by those to whom the Son has chosen to reveal Him. People throughout the history of the world have wondered about God and about the problem of sin and how to be right with God, and the answers have been given to common, ordinary people like you and me. Many waited to see how God might save us, and many around the world are still waiting to know the truth that God loves them and has provided salvation for them. And we're part of God's street team. We're the ones who are called to be out there making Him known to the world.

The other awesome thing is that not only do we have authority in Jesus' name, but we have eternal life. When these groups returned, they were amazed that not only could they heal, they could drive out demons! They had real honest-to-goodness power. It wasn't from themselves, but God had given it to them. Now oftentimes we don't think we have power because we think of something superhuman, like somebody from an episode of **Heroes**. But we do. We pray here every week for healing, and as much as it's in God's will, it happens. We pray for guidance and wisdom and it's granted. When we pray on a regular basis for God's will to be done, it's done in our lives! When we are in touch with God's heart through regular prayer and seeking His will, God's power works through us to do amazing things.

But most important, Jesus says, is our salvation. Having our names written in heaven, being saved through our Lord Jesus Christ, that's what matters far more than any earthly accomplishments. It's more important than the power we are given as Christ's followers. It's more important than any job we have, any amount of money we make, anything. Jesus came that we might have the salvation that He provides, and knowing that our lives will be spent with Him throughout eternity is power enough to get us through the bleakest times.

You might be sitting here today thinking, "You know, all of this sounds great, but I don't even really know that I have faith to be sharing in the first place. I don't know where to start." That's an honest answer that God understands. And if you want to know what this is all about, if you are ready to learn who God is and accept the gift of salvation that He gives through Jesus Christ, then don't wait. Talk to me after the service or sometime this week. Make the effort. It will be worth it. Because God has a job for you and me and for everyone here today, the job of bringing good news to other people. Good news! Between the lines in all the headlines and sad stories and wrecks and everything else is the desire to have good news...and that good news is that a new life in Jesus Christ awaits us. And if it seems too difficult, if it seems out of reach, remember that God will never ask you to do anything He doesn't empower you to do. You can be a missionary for Him to the world today, and there's a special section of God's field waiting just for you to harvest if you'll turn to Him today. Let's pray.