



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Sent Out Like Lambs Among Wolves (Luke 10:1-16)

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Jeff Whitebread / 484-680-4260 / Jeff.Whitebread@capitolcom.org

The Seventy-two are sent out immediately after the expectations of discipleship are laid out by Jesus for three individuals who considered following him. In the previous account, Jesus challenged these would-be disciples to count the cost that following would have upon their comfort, security, and relationships. While many followers of Jesus were motivated by self-interest, it is encouraging to see these first kingdom missionaries who are committed to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and by losing their lives for Jesus's sake are able to engage in ministry. Their individual names are never mentioned, but the sending out of seventy-two stress the fact that kingdom work is not limited to a few. For example, not only Jesus and the apostles, but every believer is expected to be an active participant. And so, the following instructions which Luke records for his audience are deeply interesting, and deserve close attention for all those who claim Christ. The task then, as now, requires even more workers to be sent into the fields because of the bountiful harvest promised by Jesus.

Beginning in Luke 10:1 with the sending of the Seventy-two all the way through the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:14 is a section of Luke's travel narrative that yields little to no chronological information. In fact the Lord is no closer to Jerusalem in Luke 17:11 as he passed "along between Samaria and Galilee", than when this journey was first mentioned in Luke 9:51. This poses some difficulties when the author has stated his intention was to write an orderly and logical account (Luke 1:1-4). One might be left somewhat puzzled because there appears to be no discernable order or arrangement in this section. Either Luke has failed in this attempt, or one must view this order and arrangement of material presented through a different lens. One such viewpoint forwarded by scholars for Luke's arrangement of this section is how it parallels the first and second sermons taught my Moses to Israel in Deuteronomy (Chapters 1-26). And the purpose for Luke to make this connection was to show that Jesus was that promised prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18).

Luke's travel journal begins in Luke 9:51, but also contained within this verse lies the purpose behind this journey, namely the days had drawn near for him to be "taken up". This reference to Jesus' ascension is viewed by scholars as an allusion to the tradition of Moses' own departure. Because of the mystery surrounding Moses' death, along with the uncertain location of his burial, many rabbinic writings and even early church fathers believed that Moses, like Elijah, had been taken to heaven. In uncovering the parallelism found between Deuteronomy and Luke, Moses is portrayed as giving his final teaching on the law while journeying to the place where he could view Israel's inheritance before they enter the land. Just as Moses, the great Law-giver, after giving the law a second time to the people, was taken up by God; so Jesus, after giving his "law" (Luke 10:1-18:14), in like manner is to be "taken up." Luke, then, sees this journey to Jerusalem as a necessary aspect of God's plan that climaxes at Jerusalem through Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. Moses is seen leading Israel away from the mountain toward

the promised land (Deuteronomy 1:1-46). In like manner, Jesus also descended a mountain toward a promised land, a land where there will be an abundant harvest (Luke 10:1-3). With this "land" in mind, Jesus sends out those who followed to proclaim the good news of the kingdom, announces the consequences of rejecting this message, and disclose the honor upon those who partner with him in ministry.

Luke 10:1-16 - (1) After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. (2) And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (3) Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. (4) Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. (5) Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' (6) And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. (7) And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. (8) Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. (9) Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' (10) But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, (11) 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' (12) I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

(13) "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. (14) But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. (15) And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. (16) "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

THOSE WHO FOLLOWED

Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest – In this statement about the harvest, Jesus pulls back the curtain to reveal the elevated level of commitment necessary for his disciples. Following Jesus is not task oriented, but heart driven. Jesus promises a plentiful harvest, in light of this fact, the immediate need is for additional workers to be sent into the harvest field. Jesus lays this responsibility upon those sent out and

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solicits their help by engaging in active and consistent prayer to the Lord to send out more workers. This is a foundational component of ministry, there is always more work to be done and the job is larger than any one individual. Let us heed the Lord's instruction, what is needed is not a dynamic leader who will influence the masses. What Jesus reveals is that an abundant harvest requires an abundant amount of workers. The first step is to believe this truth - additional workers are always needed, then earnestly pray to the Lord to multiply the workers sent into the harvest. For those who received this instruction, as they went through the towns and villages proclaiming the proximity of God's kingdom, they would also be praying for the Lord to raise up additional workers from among those to whom they are ministering.

I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves – Jesus does not keep anything back from these workers, the nature of the ministry they were about to engage in was perilous. Why is the call to discipleship so challenging, because the dangers and trials that Jesus and his followers are to endure are real. He does not enlist them under false pretenses, declare they will travel an easy road, or promise them unvarying success. These words certainly had special meaning to the life and times of those to whom they were spoken. But we must not think this teaching is only applicable to this 1st century audience. So long as the Church stands, believers must expect to be like lambs among wolves, to be hated, and ill-treated by those whom the cross of Jesus appears as foolishness. We must remember the words of Paul to his protégé Timothy: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). However, into this reality, his lambs must remember they are sent out by their Shepherd and trust in him for their provision and protection, because despite appearances, they do not face a hopeless situation. They follow the one who “gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (Isaiah 40:11).

Say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' – One of the things that should stand out is the simplicity of the message which our Lord commanded these disciples to proclaim. Undoubtedly, this single sentence was not all these seventy-two disciples said to those they encountered, but it was the central theme of their message. To a well instructed Israelite, this would have sounded like an announcement, a proclamation that the time of the Christ had come. The long promised King was about to be revealed, and as said in Habakkuk 2:7: the “desire of all the nations” was about to appear. What Jesus reveals about the message they are to announce is the power of simple plain statements, made boldly, and in such a manner they are felt and believed by those who make them. They are the arrows from God's own quiver which have the power to pierce the heart, and speak truth into one's life.

CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING THIS MESSAGE

I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town – What is Jesus' view of those who reject the offer of the gospel? In this statement we learn that rejection of the message is a greater offense than the wickedness of Sodom upon whom God brought judgment and destruction. But Jesus continues and does not stop there, but announces the guilt of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, cities in Galilee, privileged places which had witnessed Jesus' miracles and heard him preach. In spite of this, the people had not repented; and in Jesus' view, were guilty of a greater offense than that of Tyre and Sidon. These were cities which according to the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel were proud, money-mad, and cruel. Declarations like this often unsettle the heart; yet they expose some truths that are easily forgotten. They teach us that all will be judged according to the truth they received, those who have enjoyed greater privilege will be held to a higher standard. It also teaches us the incredible hardness and unbelief of the human heart. It was possible to have heard Jesus preach, to have seen him perform miracles and still not respond. And finally it teaches us, that man is responsible for the state of his own soul. Those who reject the Gospel, and fail to repent and believe, are not merely objects of pity and compassion, but deeply guilty and blameworthy in God's sight. It is not simply open sin which ruins the soul; one must only sit still and do nothing, when the Gospel is pressing upon one's heart for a response.

HONOR GIVEN TO MINISTRY PARTNERS

The one who bears you bears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me – The language used by the Lord is striking, and more so when we remember that it was addressed to the Seventy-two disciples, not the twelve apostles. From this statement we learn that all those who herald the message of the gospel are to be regarded as Christ's messengers and ambassadors to a sinful world. Those who despise them, are not despising them as much as their master. Those who reject the terms of salvation which they have been commissioned to proclaim, are doing an injury not so much to them as to their King. To Jesus' followers who declare the full counsel of God, and keep nothing back that is profitable for salvation, their words cannot be disregarded without great sin. He is on the King's business and bears a flag of truce and terms of peace. To those who pursue this goal in life, the Lord's words bring great comfort, because the one the world despises is not us, but Christ who lives within us.