

Sent into the Harvest Field

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[0:00] Why don't we pray before we study the Word? Thank you, Lord, for this morning. Thank you that you have given us the chance again to worship together and to read your Word and to study it and to really enjoy it.

We pray that your Holy Spirit might enable us to understand it and to plant it deep in our hearts as well so that they might be changed more and more to be like Jesus.

In the name of Christ we pray. Amen. I have this Bible leaf. It's a piece of paper from the Geneva Bible printed in the 17th century in Switzerland.

It's really old. You can see some tears if you want to borrow it after the service. That's fine. You can see some tears along the edges and some small holes and dark spots all over the page.

Sometimes when I look at it, I wonder what this small piece of paper has gone through and witnessed from Switzerland to England, perhaps through some persecutions, and then to America with the Puritans, and finally to Australia into my hands.

[1:28] It's been held by so many people, and when I hold it, I feel like I'm a part of that long history as well. I wonder whether we should feel like that when we partake in the work of the Gospel.

This passage tells us about the Gospel mission of Jesus' 72 disciples. In verse 1, in addition to the 12 disciples whom Jesus had sent in the previous chapter, now he sends 72 other disciples.

And the way they are sent is almost the same. They are sent ahead of him, so literally before his face, which is the same phrase that is used in the previous chapter with the 12 disciples.

So they are sent sort of like the messengers of the king to walk ahead of the king to prepare the way for the king.

to proclaim that the king is coming. Now, that job description sounds a bit familiar, because earlier this was the responsibility of John the Baptist as the voice that cries in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord.

[2:56] But after John's death in the previous chapter, this mission is now given to the 12 disciples and then now to the 72 others. But this mission doesn't stop with the 72.

Luke gives us a hint there. The number 72 has a theological meaning that's important to Luke and Acts.

72 is the number of nations in the world as described in Genesis 10. And so the implication is that the sending out of the 72 here is only the beginning of the sending out of Jesus' disciples to all nations, to the ends of the world, which is portrayed later in the book of Acts as more and more people become Christians and they too are sent to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the ends of the world.

We can suspect that the mission did not stop in Acts either. It still continues today. In verse 2, Jesus sends the disciples to harvest the field.

In light of what they're told to do later, that is to preach the message of the kingdom, the harvest here means, well, harvesting people for the kingdom, to join the kingdom.

[4 : 28] But the first thing that Jesus tells them to do is to pray not for the harvest, not for the people to join the kingdom, but for more workers.

I think the two are linked. The harvesting and the hope for more workers are linked. That is, the purpose of their being sent out is to preach the kingdom so that more and more believe and that they too would participate in this mission of being sent out to the harvest field as workers.

So the harvest becomes the workers. And so this verse doesn't only tell us to pray for more full-time ministers or ordained ministers.

That's important too. We should pray for that. But it also tells us to pray for more Christians to participate in this work of the gospel to produce more Christians who would later produce more Christians.

Being a disciple of Jesus means participating in his mission. And so that mission still continues today, doesn't it?

[5 : 48] I suspect that everyone here has become a Christian because someone else has discipled them. their parents, their pastors, their siblings, their friends, their colleagues.

And so all of us are fruit of the harvest and therefore we are called to participate back into the work, into the field as workers.

And so the Christian mission is like this Bible leaf here. It's old. It's been around for ages.

The Christian mission has been here for a long time and it's still being passed down from generation to generation. From the prophets of old to John the Baptist to the 12 disciples to the 72 disciples and to the disciples in Acts and across the history of the church.

And now to us. Our job is to pass the pattern by participating in this work and to disciple more Christians.

[7 : 01] That's our mission. It doesn't mean that all of us are called to go overseas as missionaries. That's good too.

But we are called to do our mission where we are in the mundanes of life day in and day out as we go to the workplace as we go to talk with our friends and family members.

We ought to preach the kingdom of God because we too participate in being sent out if we call ourselves disciples of Christ.

But doing this mission is not easy. Jesus is very clear in warning them that it's costly.

The passage starts with the phrase after this which makes this chapter a continuation from the previous chapter where we are told about all the challenges that we must face if we want to be disciples of Christ.

[8 : 08] Remember last week? Sometimes we don't have a home. Sometimes people reject us because we tell the gospel. Sometimes we might even be killed for the gospel just like John the Baptist in the previous chapter.

And so Jesus says in verses 3 to 4 go. Go, I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals and do not greet anyone on the road.

At any time the disciples must be ready to run. If they are in danger, there's no time to pack. It's a dangerous and costly mission.

but precisely because this mission is so dangerous that they are called to depend wholly on God throughout their mission.

I think the command to travel light here also alludes to that. The disciples are told to depend solely on the hospitality of other people instead of on their own planning.

[9:19] In verses 5 to 8, they don't even have any plans about where to go, with whom to stay, or what to eat.

They are told to wait for their wages, that is, for the provision of a place to stay and food to eat. And who is paying for their wages?

Well, God is. Because they are the workers of the field, and God is the Lord of the harvest. The implication here is that God is the one who will provide for them people to welcome them, to give them a place to rest and food to eat.

So why is this mission so dangerous? us? I think because the work of the gospel is a spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

us. I have this painting here in my house. It's not hung yet, so it's not on the wall, but it's there somewhere.

[10:31] We're still unpacking. It's a scene from Revelation 12, the woman and the dragon. On the left-hand side there, it's pretty dark, but I think you can see it.

On the left-hand side, you can see a battle going on between Michael and his angels against the dragon, the devil. It's in Revelation 12.

Now in our passage, Jesus depicts the mission, the mission journey here in a similar way, as some kind of us versus them battle.

So for example, in verse 5, the disciples are told to first greet a house by saying, peace to this house. It's some kind of a code for the kingdom of God, really.

Very early in the gospel of Luke, when Jesus the king is born, the angels sing glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

[11:40] The reign of King Jesus is characterized by peace. So the greeting of peace that the disciples shall do here, shall say, is the greeting of the kingdom.

And in verse 6, if someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them. Literally it says, if a child of peace is there, your peace will rest on them.

peace will be a child of peace. But it means someone who already belongs in the kingdom of peace, someone on whom God's favor rests. So if the disciples say the greeting of the kingdom and someone who belongs to the kingdom is there, they are welcomed.

But if not, in verses 10 to 12, they are told to wipe the dust off their feet, which means that they are declaring the town as ripe for judgment later.

I hope you can see the us versus them there. It's like in a spy movie where an agent is sent into the enemy's territory and they're told to go to that house and then say that password or that code.

[12:56] And if the other person understands the code, then that person belongs to us. If not, then they're in trouble. You see, there's some kind of spiritual battle going on in the mission of the disciples.

And the mission, and their mission, is to penetrate the kingdom of darkness and spread the power of the kingdom of God. How?

Well, in verse 9, they are called to preach about the coming of the kingdom of God and they are told to show how the kingdom looks like by healing people because the kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace and life.

So really, it's like Tom Cruise being told, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to penetrate the Kremlin or something like that. In the midst of a spiritual battle, the disciples' task is to penetrate the kingdom of darkness like spies and spread the message and the power and the influence of the kingdom of God.

I think that sounds like a dangerous and costly mission. Now, because we continue the same mission, we also are in the same spiritual battle.

[14:25] Every single time we do the work of the gospel, we are fighting a spiritual battle. people. That's why being a Christian, following Jesus, is scary sometimes.

It's costly. Because if we know that in our daily lives, we are actually sent out to reach the world with the gospel, when we work, when we talk to our friends, then we know that we are fighting a spiritual battle every single day.

It's scary. there's that fear that you might lose your job because you say something Christian in the workplace. There's that fear that you might offend your friends or break your relationships with them if you talk about the gospel with them.

And the pressure, the pressure to just conform and be like the unbelievers instead of being like the children of peace, the pressure is immense because the mission is costly.

Thankfully, what Jesus tells the disciples here is completely irrelevant for us too, and I think it's helpful. On the one hand, in this spiritual battle, the disciples are called to prepare themselves.

[15:49] They have to know what to say. They have to know what greeting to use. They have to know the message of the kingdom of God.

They have to know that they have to heal the sick and so on. So knowing that we too are sent into the same battle, we ought to prepare ourselves as well.

We need to know what to say when someone asks us why we believe what we believe. We need to know the message of the kingdom, the gospel.

And also, as the disciples are sent first with a prayer, that's also what we should do every time we prepare going into battle.

when we are talking to our non-Christian friends, we should pray, Lord, tell me what to say. When we are working, perhaps as a banker, we should pray, Lord, show me how to work as a Christian in this bank so that those who see me might smell the scent of Christ.

[17:13] Christ. On the other hand, despite all the preparation that they should make, the disciples are called to completely depend on God.

We are like that too. We must remember that God is the sovereign king. We are just his messengers. believers. So we depend on him for provision of power, to know what to say in the moment, to know what to do when someone asks us why we believe what we believe.

We completely depend on him. And when things get tough, when our friends reject us, when we face the threat of losing our job, we still depend on God.

It's not easy, I know. I have failed so many times to depend on God when things are tough, especially when things are tough. A couple of years ago, when I was working as a high school teacher, this was back in Indonesia, I was teaching business and management at a high school.

school, and I had lots of opportunities to share about the gospel to my students. So after school ended, I usually hung out with some students at the gate to talk about their lives and occasionally about Christianity and the gospel and theology, and we enjoyed it immensely.

[18:57] Praise be to God, a couple of students became Christians during that time. But there was this one student that I was particularly close to because he was really interested in business and management, and he would come and see me after class to ask questions.

So we had a good relationship, perhaps even a friendship. when I asked him about what he thought about Christianity, he just said, I think all religions are the same.

They all teach people to be good people. And my first and only response was to affirm that.

I said, yeah, fair enough. You see, I did not want to risk my good friendship with him. And so I failed to share the gospel and seize the opportunity.

I failed to just trust and depend on God in that moment. Doing this mission is scary and can be costly. And to depend on God is not an easy thing to do.

[20:12] And that's why it goes back to the need for prayers, I think. We pray because we depend on God. And we pray so that God might help us to depend on him.

Now, what Jesus says afterwards would have been both encouraging and surprising to the disciples back then.

verses 13 to 19. I'll read the passage to you. Woe to you, Chorazin, 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, Eponaeum or Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens?

Now you will go down to, no, you will go down to Hades. Whoever listens to you listens to me. And whoever rejects you rejects me, but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.

[21:31] And then the 72 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. Just a little bit of a background so we can understand.

This verse is used a lot of Isaiah 14, which is our first reading, our Old Testament passage, which depicts some kind of a battle too, where the nation Israel, the kingdom of God in the Old Testament, are oppressed by a foreign nation, Babylon.

And God rescues them by bringing the oppressor down. So it's supposed to be good news for the people of Israel, right?

Because they thought that they were the kingdom of God and God was coming to help them. But the way Jesus uses the Isaiah passage in our passage revises the identity of the people of God.

[22:45] For example, in Isaiah 14, 12, it says, how you have fallen from heaven, morning stars, son of the dawn.

it depicts, it talks about the Babylonian king being brought down. But in our passage, in verse 18, Jesus uses the same expression, not to refer to a foreign political power, but to the devil, Satan.

And in verse 15 of our Isaiah passage, it says, you, the same political power, Babylon, Babylonian king, you are brought down to the realm of the dead, Sheol, or in Greek, it's Hades.

But in verse 15 of our Luke passage, Jesus uses the same expression to refer to Capernaum, which is a Jewish town.

In fact, in this speech, all the towns that Jesus curses are Jewish towns, Torezin, Tersida, and Capernaum.

[24:02] In doing so, Jesus implies that these Jewish towns are no longer counted as a part of the kingdom of God, because they have rejected Jesus. We're not told in the story what those towns have done.

But it seems that the implication is clear here. Jesus has visited these towns before, and he has done miracles there. The people are amazed, but they're not ready to live their lives to follow the king.

Whereas Tyre and Sidon, which are traditionally thought of as sinful, non-Jewish cities, Jesus says, would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, which is a symbol of mourning for their sins, and the readiness, readiness to leave their comfort.

This is good news for us who are not Jewish, because that means anyone can join the kingdom of God, anyone, as long as we are ready to live everything, including our own lives, and comfort to follow King Jesus.

And again, it sort of anticipates the sending out of the disciples to the ends of the earth. Kingdom of God is not exclusively Jewish anymore.

[25 : 30] It's good news for the rest of the world. But this must have been surprising to the disciples who were Jewish. but it must also have been encouraging, because from the same speech of Jesus, they found out that following Jesus comes with all these great benefits.

In verse 19, they are given power over evil, symbolized there as snakes and scorpions. They are given the assurance that nothing will harm them.

They are given the assurance of the success of the mission. In verse 18, Satan, the great enemy, is guaranteed to fall. So, even though it's a dangerous and costly mission, and they can expect rejection, they also know that ultimately, at the end, their mission will succeed.

success is guaranteed. That's why in verse 11, even to those who reject them, they are still to preach that the kingdom is coming.

Success is guaranteed. The kingdom of God is coming in power, whether they like it or not, whether they reject it or not. Satan will be defeated, and we, the disciples of Christ, will be sharing the glory and the peace and the joy of the king in his kingdom.

[27 : 07] Results is guaranteed. What a cause to rejoice. I mean, how many times in this life can we say that we are working for something, a job, a project, a business, and success is guaranteed?

I suspect not that many times. And yet, in our ultimate mission, at the end, we will be victorious. This kind of assurance should make us work even more enthusiastically for the kingdom of God, even though, as we have explored earlier, this mission is costly.

Now, despite all these benefits, great benefits, Jesus makes it clear that the real benefit of doing the mission is knowing that we are not just workers of the kingdom, we are citizens of the kingdom.

We belong to the kingdom of God. In verse 20, A church thrives because of our ministry, that's a good reason to rejoice.

A soul repents and is saved because of our ministry, that's a very good reason to rejoice. But we should rejoice even more because our names are written in heaven.

[28 : 46] God knows our names because we sinners belong to his kingdom. And we should rejoice even more because we don't deserve to belong to his kingdom.

That's what Jesus makes clear in verses 21 to 24. Even the wise and the learned and the powerful don't belong to the kingdom because they don't understand it.

It's not revealed to them and therefore they don't accept it. How many people do you know who are smarter than you or reacher than you or even more, even kinder than you, but don't get the message of the gospel?

They can't buy their way into the kingdom. We do not get accepted into the kingdom because of our merits but because Jesus, the king of the kingdom, chooses us even though we are children who can do nothing.

That's a great cause to rejoice. And that should humble us too. We are called infants who know nothing but we are given the kingdom of God.

[30:19] And that should make us depend on him even more. Again, going back to dependence. Because we are not the king, we are just the messengers. We don't choose who belong to the kingdom.

kingdom, the king does as Jesus makes clear in verse 22. 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.

When we talk to our friends about the gospel, we depend completely on God because we don't choose who will get kingdom citizenship. The king does. We depend on him.

So friends, Jesus sent us, his disciples and followers, to go into the world. In fact, that's a part of our vision, to go.

To fight this spiritual battle using the message of the kingdom, the gospel. This mission is scary, it's costly. It requires us to carry our cross.

[31:28] But it also offers a crown. assurance is given us that we will succeed and that our names are written in heaven.

So rejoice and go. Amen. Let's pray. Thank you.

Joy. El E Father,