

The Mission Begins and Ends with Christ

(Luke 10:1–23)

Last week we talked about discipleship. False discipleship lies in the wrong assumption that we “volunteer” our time, gifts, and lives to God. True discipleship, however, lies in the secret of grace: “I was saved,” therefore I serve Him. “I was called,” therefore I joyfully preach the Gospel.

Last week’s sermon connects with today’s sermon. (vv. 23–24) Jesus tells His disciples that they are blessed beyond measure because many prophets and kings in the Old Testament would have loved to walk with the incarnate God, but they did not. (v. 20) Jesus tells them to rejoice not in their ministry success, but rather in their salvation. In sum, Jesus teaches them to rejoice not in what they can do, but in what He has done for them—saving them.

We want to see this short mission in a Christ-centred manner. We want to see mission, evangelism, and preaching the Gospel as pure grace. In Matthew 10, the evangelist devoted an entire chapter to mission—and that chapter is mission-oriented. In Luke 10, this is a short-term mission, and it is Christ-oriented. Verse 1 says that Jesus sent the disciples ahead of Him because He Himself was about to visit those villages.

The disciples are active in the mission, but the main actor is still Jesus Himself!

1. Christ, the Lord of the Harvest (vv. 1–3)

The mindset of the King:

A. Where we see disaster, He sees opportunity.

“The harvest is plentiful,” He says. Perhaps we see bad news, homicides, robberies, and earthquakes; He sees a desperate world in need of a Saviour.

B. Before He says, “Go,” He says, “Pray.”

Jesus urges His disciples to pray for more workers. Then He says, “Go!” He sends us out like sheep among wolves. The field is ripe, yes, but that does not mean the mission is easy. The lesson could not be clearer: prayer is the foundation of evangelism.

2. Christ, the King of Peace and the Terror of the Wolves (vv. 4–12)

- The bad news: There is a scarcity of workers, but there are plenty of wolves.

- The good news: There are people of peace. Find them!

A. What does Jesus mean by “people of peace”?

He does not mean that these are perfect people, nor even believers. People of peace are those who are receptive to the message the disciples bring—and, above all, those who are willing to host Jesus in their homes when He comes in person.

Dr. Bledsoe, a missionary from the United States serving in Brazil, explains it this way: when you evangelize, you will find all kinds of people. Some do not want to listen to you; some will listen, but that is all you will get; some will listen and join you at church; and some will listen and even open their homes for a small group or Bible study.

These last two are the “people of peace.” By focusing on them, we achieve better results. The King of Peace appreciates people of peace.

DISCLAIMER: By no means is Dr. Bledsoe teaching us to be selective in preaching the Gospel. According to the parable of the sower, the sower scatters the seed everywhere. This simply teaches that you become a better missionary when you know your audience.

B. “It will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment.”

At this point in Jesus’ ministry, everyone knew His name and had heard of His miracles and powerful teaching. It would have been very unusual for someone or an entire village to reject even offering hospitality—or at least hearing His message.

The reasons could vary: unbelief, pride, self-righteousness, indifference, or hatred—but none of them excuse such rejection. Rejecting the Gospel is a grave sin; how much more refusing even to hear it!

The opposite of peace, in this context, is enmity. Keeping with Jesus’ illustration of sheep among wolves, the Good Shepherd is the terror of the wolves. There is judgment for those who reject His message of peace. The Shepherd who welcomes His sheep also drives away the wolves. The same staff that comforts His flock becomes an instrument of judgment against those who reject His peace. The words of His mouth—the Gospel—will judge them.

3. The Woes of the King

On the same note, Jesus now pronounces judgment on the places where He had performed most of His signs. The previous villages would be judged if they refused to hear the Gospel. These cities, however, would be judged for hearing the Gospel without repentance—the message was heard, but it did not produce fruit unto eternal life.

In both Hebrew and Greek, the word translated “woe” carries the tone of both a funeral lament and a prophetic warning. In simple terms, it is an announcement of imminent judgment.

Jesus directs His woes against the cities where He spent most of His ministry. Capernaum, for instance, was the very headquarters of His team. “To whom much is given, much will be required.” Even Uncle Ben from Spider-Man (a secular movie!) echoes a similar principle: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

4. Profound Applications

Since this missionary journey is Christ-centred—that is, it focuses more on the qualities of the Sender (Jesus) than on the qualities of the disciples—it makes more sense to apply the text before concluding the sermon. The conclusion should be reserved for who Jesus is, what He does, and His glory.

In light of His perfection, our imperfections become all the more evident. Luke 10 contains several painful applications and reflections, all of which fall under one word: neglect.

- (vv. 1–3) A. Where is the scarcity—in the field or among the workers? Jesus sees a ripe field, but a neglected one.

May I ask a painful but necessary question? When was the last time we shared Christ with someone?

If the answer is “a long time ago,” or worse, “never,” then serious repentance must take place in our hearts—ASAP!

- (v. 17) B. On a similar note, why do we neglect the power we have in Jesus’ name? The disciples rejoiced that they were able to accomplish so much in His name.

He promised us His power. He promised that He would bear witness as we bear witness. He promised to confirm His message with power. Why are we surprised? Why are we so afraid to evangelize? Why do we act as though we are powerless?

- (v. 21) C. What brings joy to our hearts? Dreams fulfilled? Vacations? A banquet? Jesus rejoices in the Spirit over people’s salvation.

John Piper puts it this way: much of our prayer life revolves around “stuff”—our requests. Rarely do we pray for people’s salvation, the advancement of God’s Kingdom on earth, and Christ’s Second Coming. Piper concludes that many of us treat prayer like an elevator that takes us from the ground floor to the third floor, instead of seeing it as a means by which heaven’s interests are brought to earth.

Conclusion — Divine Joy: From the Seventy to the Trinity

Just as our hearts learn to rejoice in spiritual things, joy and worship become the natural conclusion of this sermon.

- (vv. 17–20) Jesus redirects the seventy's joy.

As we noted in today's introduction, true discipleship is a by-product of God's grace. When the disciples returned rejoicing because the demons submitted to them in Jesus' name, Jesus redirected their joy to the greatest joy of all: salvation.

- (v. 18) Jesus assures them of His active presence.

By no means is He saying that they should not rejoice in their fruitful ministry. He is simply saying that His ministry is greater than theirs—He grants them salvation. Their names are written in heaven because of His cross!

As they shared their mission report with Him, He shared His report with them: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven..." and, "I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions..."

The picture is beautiful and encouraging. The disciples went on the journey thinking they were going ahead of Jesus, but in reality, Jesus was already going ahead of them.

- (vv. 21–24) Jesus—and the Trinity—rejoice.

The mission begins with Him, and it ends with Him. He calls, He sends, He equips, He oversees, He gives power and authority, He saves... and He rejoices!

Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit because of His Father's will. The doctrine of the Trinity is implicit in the Old Testament and explicit in the New Testament. Far from explaining the Trinity with awkward illustrations—such as water existing as solid, liquid, and vapour—the New Testament presents the living relationship within the Godhead: the Son's constant obedience, the Spirit's constant empowerment, and the Father's love poured out upon the Son, publicly displayed at His baptism. Finally, here we see the joy of the Son in His Father's wisdom, in the embrace of the Holy Spirit.

What is God's wisdom? It is simple: "He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." He has hidden the Gospel from the wise and self-sufficient, and He reveals it to little children.