

## **The Priority of Going (Luke 10:1-20)**

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The center of the Christian faith is not a code of ethics, a system of doctrine, or a political platform. The essential core of our faith is a person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. It's why Christians are called Christians. We are disciples or followers of Christ. He rules the world, redeems our souls, and commands our loyalty.

Christians and non-Christians alike have all manner of ideas about what it means to follow Jesus. For some, it means living a decent, moral life. Others say it means going to church on Sundays. For some, it means holding repressive views of gender and sexuality. Others say it means accepting Christ as your Savior and Lord. What would you say?

The sheer diversity of views might cause you to wonder if following Jesus is ultimately a choose our own adventure. Your parents had to decide what worked for them. You must decide what works for you. Here's the problem with that perspective, friend. Jesus is not silent about what it means to follow him, and he never releases us to decide what works for us. To the contrary, he tells us exactly what it means to follow him, correcting all manner of errant, man-centered notions along the way.

That's the whole context of Lk 10:1-20. At the end of Ch. 9, a series of people come to Jesus as he's journeying toward Jerusalem to lay down his life for the sins of the world, fueled by holy love. The first one says, "I will follow you wherever you go!" Jesus replies, "It won't be easy or comfortable. It means living as an exile. The world is no longer your home." Are you willing to give that up for my sake?

The second person says he first needs to honor some cultural expectations by burying his dad, a Jewish tradition that often lasted an entire year. To him Jesus replies, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." The final guy says, "I will follow you, Lord, but I first need to say a few goodbyes. What does Jesus say to him? Following me takes priority even over the "good things" in life, family included.

What are all these professing followers doing? They're all trying to integrate Jesus into a life they control instead of handing the reigns over to him. That's not

following Jesus. That's asking Jesus to follow us. Luke perceives the problem, so at the outset of Ch. 10, he records a time when the Lord told a much larger group exactly what it means to follow him. **Following Jesus means being sent out to do his work, in his name, with his authority.** There are no alternatives. There are no exceptions. Following Jesus requires exclusive devotion to his mission.

### **1) WE ARE SENT TO DO HIS WORK (vv. 1-12)**

In v. 1, Luke tells us the Lord appointed "seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two..." They are the "others" because Jesus already sent his original 12 disciples on a similar mission at the beginning of Lk 9. What does that tell us? That if you are a disciple of Jesus, you are a sent one.

There's no category in Scripture for someone who is following Jesus but is not personally engaged in his mission. Neither the original twelve nor the seventy-two are exceptions to the rule. They are the rule. To be a Christian is to be "sent" by Christ himself to do something. It's who we are. It's our identity as his followers. You are someone Jesus has sent.

And notice, even before Jesus clarifies what his followers are sent to do, how they are sent (v. 1) "into every town and place where he himself was about to go." Our labor isn't separated from Jesus' labor. Where we are sent, Jesus goes. Where we are working, he is working. We participate in what Jesus himself is doing.

So what sort of work is needed? Jesus tells us in v. 2. He describes the men, women, and children he has chosen to draw to himself as a spiritual harvest. Picture fields brimming with full ears of grain, waiting to be gathered, waiting for someone to explain how Jesus has made a way for sinners like us to come home to God.

Do you think of the unbelieving world that way, Christian? We tend to assume the harvest is meager, limited, and hard to find. We assume it's not time. They won't listen. They won't understand. They certainly won't repent and believe. Jesus' perspective is the complete opposite! He sees a "plentiful" harvest, the kind of field any reaper would gladly enter, where fruitfulness is assured. It's so plentiful, in fact, that the only obstacle is finding enough laborers to gather it!

By "laborers" Jesus isn't just talking about fulltime missionaries. Every Christian is a laborer. Every disciple is a sent one. When he says the harvest is plentiful, but the

laborers are few, he isn't primarily saying we need more Christians to become missionaries. He's saying the world needs more Christians period because the number of people ready and waiting to be led home to God is vast.

So what does Jesus send the seventy-two (and all of us!) out to do? **First, it's a work of prayer.** V. 2, "Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Remember, every Christian is a laborer. So we pray, "Draw more men and women to yourself, God, that they might labor in your field. As Darrell Bock observes, "One of the results of the mission is that more take responsibility for it."

**Second, it's a work of going.** Notice how the seventy-two Jesus appoints immediately become the answer to their own prayers! "Go your way, behold, I am sending you out..." That might mean going out for coffee with a friend and initiating spiritual conversation. It might mean going down the hallway to talk with your angry child struggling with God's authority in their life. It might mean going across the foyer on Sunday morning to befriend an adult who comes to church but doesn't know Jesus.

But let me challenge you. The Joshua Project estimates there are over seven-thousand unreached people groups in the world, seven-thousand people groups that do not have a viable Christian witness in their midst enabling them to hear about Jesus. Have you ever prayed, "Lord, are you sending me or my family to them?" Do you want me to go to them? Something's wrong, brothers and sisters, if we never even ask.

And as you pray, if the Spirit stirs a desire for cross-cultural missions in your heart – even if the idea makes you scared to death – tell one of our pastors so we can talk about it. We'll never pressure you to do anything the Spirit isn't giving you faith to do. But let's not make our working assumption at KingsWay "someone else should go."

**Third, it's a work of a dependence.** Imagine the mix of bewilderment and concern that must have filled their hearts when Jesus said in v. 3, "Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." Say what, Lord? Are you saying the spiritual forces arrayed against us are as fierce as a predator at the top of the food chain? Yes. And that we're not better off on our own than a dumb, defenseless sheep?

What kind of offensive strategy is that? It's sending out the Midlothian pee-wee football squad against the LA Rams. It's a strategy that testifies to the singular power of the Great Shepherd. That's what it is. It's a strategy designed to strengthen our dependence on the Lord. V. 4, "Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals..." and greet no one on the road." Don't locate your confidence as you go in the preparation or provision you bring to the table. Trust me to provide for your needs and use my people to do it!

The work of "going" that Jesus calls you to may require laboring as a fulltime missionary like the seventy-two, financially supported by other Christians. That's not an easy thing. But nor is it something to avoid or despise. It will force you to depend on the Lord. And we really can trust him to provide for those who devote themselves to his work, whether your labor is fulltime or not!

**Finally, it's a work of proclamation.** V. 9, "Heal the sick...and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" I'm empowering you to care for their physical bodies, to give them a tangible sign that a new age of God's blessing has dawned, but don't stop there because the peace they most need isn't peace in their bodies. It's peace in their souls, the fruit of a restored relationship with God. So, tell them the kingdom of God is at hand!

Remember, the seventy-two were sent where Jesus himself was "about to go" (v. 1). And what happens when Jesus arrives? He brings the kingdom of God to pass, not just by showing up in a physical sense, but by bringing men, women, and children under his redemptive rule. Living on this side of the cross, we don't say like John the Baptist in Lk 1 or the seventy-two in Lk 10, the kingdom of God has "come near." We say, "The kingdom of God has come!

Jesus has brought it to pass by dying our death so we could receive his life!" The question is whether we are willing to enter it or not, whether we are willing to turn away from sin to trust and obey Jesus. That's the message we proclaim. That's the response we lovingly urge everyone we know to choose.

And yet our response to Christ's kingdom, no matter how ignorant or unbelieving, cannot change the fact that his kingdom will prevail. To those who receive Jesus in v. 8, the seventy-two say, "The kingdom of God has come near *to you*." It's personal and you're part of it! But to those who refuse to listen, Jesus instructs them to say (v. 11), "Know this, that the kingdom of God has *come near*." History continues

marching toward the day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The work Jesus sends us to do is not preach the gospel and if necessary, use words. Proclamation is essential. We are sent to speak – not whatever we feel like saying but what Jesus tells us to say. How he has made a way for us to find life in the kingdom of God! If you're not sure how to succinctly do that, pick up a free copy of the "Two Ways to Live" booklet in the book shop in English or Spanish. It's a fantastic summary of the good news he charges us to proclaim. Through prayer, going, dependence, and proclamation, we are sent to do his work.

## **2) WE ARE SENT IN HIS NAME (vv. 13-16)**

The Lord has stern words for those who reject our message. V. 12, "I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town." Sodom was the epitome of wickedness in the Old Testament. In terms of outward rebellion against God, they were king of the hill. But they never heard the gospel. No one ever proclaimed to them the good news of forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name!

In contrast, the towns the seventy-two visited all heard the gospel. Chorazin heard the gospel. Bethsaida heard the gospel. Capernum heard the gospel. They all witnessed the mighty works of healing and demonic deliverance confirming Jesus' power to save. So why does he say it will be "more bearable" for the residents of Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon on the day of judgment than for the residents of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernum? Because with greater revelation comes greater accountability.

God does not owe anyone a gospel hearing. None of us deserve mercy. But when, in the mystery of his will, the Lord mercifully reveals the truth of the gospel through the ministry of his people, there is a corresponding increase in our moral responsibility to repent. To whom much is given, much is required! If you are growing up in the church, I warn you. The way you respond to what your Christian parents, leaders, and pastors are teaching you is the measure of your response to God.

V. 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." Jesus said as much to

embolden us as his followers. "You are my representatives. I'm sending you in my name. And people will answer to me for the way they respond to you.

So don't hold back. Don't be timid. Remember their battle is with the Lord and don't be surprised or take it personally if you get caught in the crossfire. You will be rejected and scorned for my sake. But know this. The gospel you proclaim is not a take-it-or-leave-it kind of message. It's not one option among many in the marketplace of religious ideas. I am the only way. I am the only truth. And a day is surely coming when you will be vindicated before the eyes of the entire world, a day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ IS Lord.

Don't try to win every argument. Say what Jesus has told us to say and leave the results to him. He has your back, Christian. Rest in that. We are sent to do his work. We are sent in his name.

### **3) WE ARE SENT WITH HIS AUTHORITY (vv. 17-20)**

When the seventy-two come back to Jesus in v. 17, they rejoice! "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" As they healed the sick and proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom in Jesus, they discovered the Lord had also given them power to deliver his people by casting out evil spirits. V. 18, "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy..."

Brothers and sisters, when Jesus sends us to do his work we are engaging in spiritual warfare. And when I say "spiritual warfare" I do not mean the periodic experience of encountering someone who is demon-possessed. Whenever we proclaim the truth about Jesus, we are contending with the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Behind all human opposition to Jesus there lurks another face, the face of Satan himself. Throughout Scripture, his power and reign are represented by creatures like serpents and scorpions. Think of the serpent who tempted the first man and woman to sin in Gen 3. But the Lord also promised in Gen 3 that one day the offspring of the woman would rise up and crush the head of the serpent.

1 Jn 3:8, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." How did Jesus do it? Through the saving power of his life, death, and

resurrection. He shattered Satan's power to accuse and condemn us, both in our own conscience and before the throne of God. Where Satan once whispered, "Guilty," Christ now shouts, "Forgiven!" And because Jesus also fills us with the Spirit, the Apostle John assures us in 1 Jn 4:4, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

So yes, Christian, if you are sent one, you are engaged in the cosmic struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Evil One. But you are not an underdog! Your opponent has been resoundingly defeated through the power of the gospel. And you need not fear he will find a way to score in the last 13 seconds of world history. As the hymn declares, "His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure."

When Jesus declares in v. 18, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," he's picking up on the language the prophets used in places like Isa 14:12 to describe the destruction of the Evil One. In Rev 12:9-11, the Apostle John uses the same imagery to describe what happened to Satan when the Son of God died and rose again.

"And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...'"

Brothers and sisters, we share in the authority of the Serpent Crusher. Through the "blood of the Lamb" we silence his voice of condemnation. And through "the word" of our testimony, our declaration of the gospel, we conquer the kingdom of darkness. The Lord uses us to rescue men, women, and children from slavery to Satan and lead them into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

Are we sorely oppressed by Satan along the way? Absolutely. But shall we be eternally harmed? It is not possible. Those who take refuge in Christ and devote themselves to his mission could not be more secure. V. 19, in the final analysis, "Nothing shall hurt you."

## CONCLUSION

**Following Jesus means being sent out to do his work, in his name, with his authority.** Yet the Lord knows our hearts. He knows our temptations. He knows how quickly we can make the work we do for God the essence of our identity and the ground of our joy instead of the work God has done for us. So Jesus says in v. 20, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Is he saying it's wrong to love the thrill of doing his work, in his name, with his authority? No. He's saying our greatest joy shouldn't come from the authority Jesus has granted us but rather from the overwhelming mercy he has shown us. We do not deserve to share in his victory, participate in his mission, or speak on his behalf, brothers and sisters. It's a gift of grace.

We must take care, especially when we diligently embrace his mission for our lives, that our focus remains on his work, not ours. I love how Darrell Bock says it. "The greatest blessing is not their power but their position. They are securely related to God." To be securely related to God means despairing of finding life by keeping all the rules or breaking all the rules. It means holding fast to Jesus as the only one who can forgive your sins and give you a heart that is both willing and able to follow the Lord. Embracing Christ's mission begins with embracing Christ!

So trust him to save you. Trust him to empower you. Trust him to use you in ways you never dreamed possible as you choose to follow him. No adventure in this world is harder or better than the adventure of following King Jesus. Don't waste your life on endless hours of streaming video that numb your soul to the things of God! Jesus offers you the joy of knowing him and the unspeakable privilege of being used by him to bring sinners home.

Let's ask for his help to fulfill the mission he has entrusted to us.