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Luke 10:1-16

32nd Message

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# SENT!

*SERIES: GOSPEL OF LUKE*

In our text today Jesus *sends* out seventy-two disciples to prepare the way for his arrival into all the towns where he is about to go. The text is a preview for God's mission to the world and becomes the subject of Luke's second volume (The Acts of the Apostles). As Chris Wright explains, "Jesus did not just arrive; he was sent. It is one of the most noticeable dimensions of his self-consciousness—the driving awareness that he had been sent by his Father to do his will."<sup>1</sup> Jesus now *sends* his apostles ("sent ones") and his disciples for his mission for the whole world. Being "sent" as God's messengers to prepare the way for the Messiah is a vital aspect of our DNA as Christians. Following Jesus' pattern of training, it should be the first and most foundational lesson in our discipleship. Without it we lose the excitement and vitality that comes with knowing who we are and what we are called to be. Our world becomes small and routine, our motivation diminishes, and we languish in liturgical boredom and irrelevancy to the world. If that anemic state describes you, then Dr. Luke would like to give you a blood transfusion that will awaken and revitalize your dead soul with an unquenchable passion that will transform life into a thrilling adventure that will never cease to challenge and amaze you.

## I. The Messengers (Luke 10:1)

**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. (Luke 10:1 ESV)**

Jesus' first task is to recruit additional workers to labor alongside the apostles in preparing for his arrival in all the places he is about to go. The large number of recruits is encouraging, especially after Jesus just raised the bar on the demands of discipleship (9:57-62). Apparently these recruits have counted the cost and are still eager to make the sacrifices required to accompany Jesus on his journey. The number seventy-two may also have symbolic significance. As Joel Green points out,

In Genesis 10 in the LXX, the number of the world's nations is seventy-two. Seventy-two is also reckoned in 3 *Enoch* 17:8; 18:2-3; 30:2 as the number of princes and languages in the world. And according to legend, seventy-two elders were commissioned to translate the law from Hebrew to Greek, a project undertaken in order to win renown throughout the whole world for the Jews and their God. Accordingly, the appointment of the seventy-two can be understood as prefiguring the universal mission in Acts.<sup>2</sup>

Going out in pairs was a typical travel mode in the ancient world providing safety and, in the case of the messengers, accountability and a credible testimony from two witnesses (Deut 19:15). To be selected and sent by Jesus to be his advance team and to replicate and extend his ministry to the world is an incredible privilege and responsibility. These disciples are at the forefront of a new era. The promise given to Abraham and the longing of the Father's heart to

bless all nations is about to be realized, and the pattern of instructions for their ministry will serve as the prototype for world missions.

What is surprising is how little training the disciples receive before being thrust out into ministry. Who knows how much they have heard, let alone retained, of Jesus' teaching as he made his way through Galilee. And yet, Jesus has no qualms about sending them off as his authorized representatives with just a few pointed travel instructions (accompanied by the twelve, who have more experience). What this suggests is that learning to be a witness for Christ is better learned on the job than in the classroom. I always say, "Just throw them off the cliff; the parachute always opens."

The second thing that strikes me is that absolutely no one is exempt. Jesus expects every disciple to get out of their comfort zone, go into uncharted territory, whether it's across the street or across the nation on a business trip or overseas to an unreached people group, and prepare the way for him to enter into the homes and hearts of people. This is not something reserved for those who are uniquely gifted with the gift of evangelism. Those gifted with that gift serve as a model for the rest of us how to evangelize.

## II. The Opportunity, the Need and the Danger (Luke 10:2-4)

### A. The opportunity and the need

**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." (Luke 10:2)**

Once the disciples are selected Jesus gives some very brief but pointed instructions for their journey. The first order of business is to understand the urgency and magnitude of the task at hand. They are like farmers entering a fertile field that has already been plowed and planted. Despite the failure of many seeds to grow to maturity, Jesus sees that there is a great harvest at hand. In fact it is so great, there are not near enough workers to gather it all in. An essential part of the work of mission is therefore increasing the number of those laboring in the field. As Darrell Bock observes, "if people receive the message, they will help deliver it...Luke is saying that one of the results of mission is that more take responsibility for it."<sup>3</sup>

Despite the enormity of the task, recruiting laborers is never to be done with coercion or guilt. Rather the disciples are to pray to the Lord of the harvest "to send out" more laborers by moving in the hearts of those who hear the message according to his sovereign will. The term "send out" is a decisive, forceful term used for "casting out" demons, or "expulsion" from the synagogue, and of the Spirit who "drove" Jesus "out" into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). The messengers are to depend on the decisive hand of the sovereign Lord to work in the hearts of those who hear, so that they freely join in the work. As Wright affirms, "ultimately the accomplishment of God's mission did not depend on such human agents, but on the sovereign power of God himself, through his Spirit and his Word."<sup>4</sup>

## B. The danger

**“Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.” (Luke 10:3-4)**

No mission, despite the potential harvest, is without danger or risk. The rejection that the disciples have already experienced in Samaria will continue and the hostility will intensify. Evoking imagery from David’s psalms (Psalm 23), Jesus says that he is sending them out “as lambs in the midst of wolves.” As vulnerable sheep they will have to constantly depend on the great Shepherd to lead them and protect them.

So why is it there is such hostility to the message of love, and grace and peace? The reason is that Jesus is on a rescue mission “to proclaim liberty to the captives” and “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). You can’t liberate someone who is oppressed without first confronting and neutralizing their oppressor. As Jesus said, “no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Mark 3:27). The driving force behind all human oppression is the devil and his minions, whose grip and control over humans is threatened every time the gospel is preached. Never forget that Jesus has given his disciples power and authority over them. But they must be confronted.

Because of the danger and urgency of the task, the disciples are told to travel light. They are to live in dependence of God, giving no hint that they are self-sufficient or, above all, rich. Therefore they are prohibited from carrying an extra pair of sandals, a moneybag or a knapsack. The knapsack or “traveler’s bag” (*pēra*) would be equivalent to a backpack that has a large capacity to carry enough supplies to make a camper self-sufficient. The fact that they are to “greet no one” is not an indication that they are to be rude, but that they must not be tempted to turn aside from their mission to enjoy the hospitality of extended family, friends, or acquaintances along the way. They must not mix socializing or vacation with their mission. They must maintain a singular focus until their mission is complete.

## III. The Rules of Engagement (Luke 10:5-12)

### A. The approach

**“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.” (Luke 10:5-6)**

Once the disciples enter a town they must seek a place to stay. In the Middle East hospitality was and still is considered a supreme privilege and honor for those who extend it. When a foreigner came into the village town square, they would often be prevailed upon by the townspeople and welcomed into their homes. When the disciples were received into a home they were to offer a blessing to the entire household. The offer of “peace” (*shalom*) was more than a polite greeting. For Jews who had returned from exile, the term *shalom* was a term laden with all the hopes and dreams that would characterize the Messianic age. For faithful Jews, the greeting was designed to draw those hopes to the surface. The disciples can anticipate that in every town God already has “sons of peace” who are predisposed to welcome their message and extend hospitality to them. For them the blessing of peace offered by the disciples will, in a very real sense, rest upon them and enhance the life that is in the home.

The image of “peace” looking for a place of “rest” and “returning” if none is found is reminiscent of the story of Noah. After the Lord stopped the rain, Noah waited forty days and “sent out a dove from him to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; but the dove found *no resting place* for the sole of her foot, so she *returned to him*” (Gen 8:8-9 NASB). After another seven days, Noah sent the dove out again, and this time the dove returned and “behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf” (Gen 8:11). When Noah stepped out of the ark, he stepped into a new age of shalom.

### B. Blessing those who are receptive

**“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. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” (Luke 10:7-9)**

Next Jesus gives instructions on how to bless those who receive them. Being the guest in someone’s home, no matter how humble, is a supreme honor and privilege. To show their appreciation the disciples are to remain in the home that receives them and not run from house to house. To move from house to house seeking better accommodations would not only be an insult to the homeowner, but would also cast a dark shadow on the disciples’ message. By contrast, remaining in one home strengthens the relationship between the host and his guests, and gives the host the opportunity to strengthen his faith by working alongside his guests in their mission.

They are to eat whatever is put before them, as if the generosity of their host is the direct provision of God himself. The rationale behind Jesus’ instructions is that a laborer is worthy of his wages. This creates equality in the relationship, so that the one who receives spiritual blessings is also given the privilege of contributing to the kingdom with his gifts of food and lodging.

Imagine what it must have been like if you had been a young adult in one of the homes visited by Jesus’ advance team. It’s late afternoon and you’re sitting at home doing your tedious Hebrew studies, when your father bursts through the door and shouts to your mother, “Golda, Golda, we have company!” You look up and see two strangers, humbly dressed, who seem hungry and tired after walking for miles. As you sit down and listen to their dinner conversation, you are reminded of the story in which Abraham entertained three visitors who, while they were eating, announced that Sarah, Abraham’s wife, would bear a son the following year. In similar fashion, these messengers speak about the things they have seen and heard in Galilee.

With a mysterious conviction they announce that God has fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and to king David. David’s greater son is here! Your father is overcome with joy and begins to dance around the table. Your mother, who is more discerning, is a bit skeptical. She’s heard these claims many times before. As you shift between wonder and doubt, your father escorts the messengers to the upper room where uncle Mordecai is bedridden suffering with a broken hip, and has not been able to walk for last two years. At first he was able to maintain his once jovial outlook, but as time has dragged on he has been overcome by depression and now he hardly speaks and never comes out of his room. It’s just too painful. As your mother is clearing the table, you hear a scream followed by riotous laughter. Mordecai comes running down the stairs shouting, “It’s a miracle, a miracle!” The entire house erupts with joy, music

and song. Uncle Mordecai and your father start dancing like teenage boys who have just been betrothed to the rabbi's daughter.

Neighbors hear the commotion and come to investigate. It doesn't take long for the news to spread. The next night a throng of sick and elderly people gathers outside your home. For hours you stand in awe watching these two messengers speak to each one about the coming kingdom. Then they lay their hands upon them and heal them in the name of Jesus. When people offer them money, the messengers reply, "We've already received our wages."

For a brief moment in time your entire village is filled with tears of love, appreciation and praise. But sadly, it's over almost as soon as it has begun. The messengers must press on to complete their journey. You follow them out to the edge of town and wave goodbye. Then you hear your father shouting in the distance, "Wait for me!" He wants to join in the harvest. Before they are out of sight, your father turns back and yells, "Don't be sad *Ya'aqov*, the best is yet to be, the king is coming!"

### C. Walking away from those who reject

**"But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, '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.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."** (Luke 10:10-12)

If the disciples face rejection, and Jesus assures them that they will, they must not argue, coerce or curse. Admission to the kingdom will not be compelled. When God created mankind, he gave us the freedom of choice, and he honors those choices and never violates our dignity. Rather than enjoying the table fellowship with their host and healing the sick of the town, the disciples must simply walk away. Carroll observes, "The peace offered to the inhabitants will leave with the seventy-two, but the dust of the town's streets will remain behind."<sup>5</sup> It was a radical symbol. To shake the dust from one's feet meant to cleanse oneself of defilement, which the Jews normally did after they had traversed Gentile lands. As Green notes, "Jesus performed no such act of self-purification upon his return from the land of the Gentiles and the domain of the unclean in 8:40, for he had found responsive faith even in the midst of impurity and rejection" (8:26-39).<sup>6</sup>

But now in the refusal to receive the envoys of Jesus, these towns are declaring that they are outside the community of God's people. To refuse the herald's of the coming king is to refuse the kingdom itself. The final word of the seventy-two reminds them of the eternal significance of their choice. The kingdom has come near, and they have closed the door. The terror that awaits that town in the final judgment is unspeakable. It will fare worse than Sodom, whose sin was a violation of hospitality in the most despicable form, and is one of the rare occasions in Scripture that heaven was provoked to employ spontaneous combustion. Jesus words, as terrifying as they are, point to the greatness and privilege of current era.

## IV. Prophetic Tears (Luke 10:13-16)

### A. The severity of judgment

**"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. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for**

**you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades."** (Luke 10:13-15)

In a surprising move, Jesus launches into prophetic woes (the opposite of *blessing* Luke 6:22-26), against Chorazin and Bethsaida in Galilee. His attack seems to us unwarranted because, apart of what Luke records in Nazareth, Jesus seems to have been well received. Large crowds came from great distances to hear him teach. Countless multitudes were nourished with bread from heaven, healed of sicknesses and delivered from demons. We might have called that a revival if that had happened in Cupertino. But with a prophet's penetrating vision, Jesus sees right through the initial enthusiasm to the very end, when it counts. Bottom line, those privileged towns of Galilee simply refused to embrace the message. It is a stinging rebuke.

The oracle of woe, though shocking, is designed to help the disciples (and us) understand the seriousness of rejecting Jesus' free gift of eternal life. To grasp its significance, "Jesus locates the rejection of his mission on the map of Israel's history."<sup>7</sup>

Both Isaiah and Ezekiel railed against the wickedness of the proud and materialist cities of Tyre and Sidon (Isa 23; Ezek 26:15-21; 28:1-24). Their tenacious grip on the seafaring trade of the Mediterranean adorned their cities with the wealth of nations. Isaiah prophesied that God would turn the tables on Tyre and, in order to survive, she would be forced to "prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world" (Isa 23:17). However, though they are accountable for their sins, had they been privileged to see the mighty works Jesus had done in Galilee, those pagan cities would have repented with their whole hearts (symbolized by "sitting in sackcloth and ashes").

Carroll aptly observes that "For the first time Luke introduces the verb "repent" (*metanoō*), expressing the reorientation and reordering of life—springing from conversion of the imagination, from transformed (*meta*) understanding (*nous*)—that Jesus' message aims to elicit, and the narrative is cultivating among its readers."<sup>8</sup> So have we repented? When I consider how much I have seen and heard, the question strikes like a hammer to the heart.

Before we can recover, Capernaum, the town Jesus focused so much of his energy on, is singled out and called to the stand to be cross-examined. In the entire history of Israel there has been no town more privileged to witness the saving works of the Creator God than Capernaum. But as often is the case, privilege turned to pride—"Will you be lifted up to heaven?" Her pride is identical to the king of Babylon, who aspired to set his throne in heaven and make himself "like the Most High" (Isa 14:13-14), and to the king of Tyre who proclaimed, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods" (Ezek 28:2). The destiny for those who exalt themselves is not heaven but *hades*, the abode of the dead. As a father, I cannot fathom the pain that Capernaum's rejection would have brought to the Father's heart.

### B. The reason for its severity

**"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."** (Luke 10:16)

The reason God's judgment is so severe is that "the person who is *sent* embodies the presence and authority of the one who *sends*."<sup>9</sup> This has been true all through the history of Israel. To reject the authority of Moses was equivalent to rejecting the Lord (Num 12:8) and to be cut off from God's people. To reject the word of a prophet was an invitation to a death sentence. Given Israel's proclivity to

rejection, it shouldn't surprise the disciples that the pattern would continue when David's greater Son, Israel's Messiah, appears. Like all God's messengers before them, they too must experience the pain of rejection.

But rejection is not the last word, and rather than creating hard hearts and cynical minds, it is designed by God to give us hearts like our Father's heart that keeps on loving no matter how painful or how great the cost. For now, through the redemptive work of the Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's children respond miraculously with whole hearts in great numbers. The initial rejection serves to increase our capacity for JOY, a joy so overwhelming it is all the disciples can talk about when they return home from their mission (10:17), and a joy made full that never subsides—"And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52).

The call to share God's blessing with others is the greatest vocation one can possess. It does more for us in our experience of God's presence and power and love than perhaps anything else. Wright sums it up with his typical clarity:

The God of the Bible is the sending God—even within the relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit...The mission of God's people, then, is not some external structure built by the church itself—a program or a strategy devised by an institution. Sending in mission is a participation in the life of God. The mission of God's people, in this dimension of sending and being sent, is to be caught up within the dynamic sending and being sent that God the Holy Trinity has done and continues to do for the salvation of the world and the revelation of his truth.<sup>10</sup>

As it is Father's Day, I thought it appropriate to end my message with a tribute to a father who lived on the radical edge of "being sent" and whose constant, contagious joy touched more people than anyone I know. On June 4, after serving as a pastor among us for forty years, Walt McCuiston simply closed his eyes, went to sleep and went home to be with the Lord. I wrote this tribute for his retirement (though he never retired) from PBC Palo Alto in 1991.

### **Blessed is the Man**

Blessed is the man  
whom the LORD has given the tongue of disciples,  
so that he knows how to sustain  
the weary one with a word.

Who does not turn his heart  
away from the poor,  
but lends freely,  
expecting nothing in return.

Who assembles the lame,  
gathers the outcast,  
lights the way for the blind,  
and considers the leper clean.

Who compels the foreigner  
to enter his house to eat with him,  
remembering that he also was once in exile.

Blessed is the man  
who does not lay up treasures on earth,  
but in heaven.

Who proclaims his name among the nations,  
and brings all his brethren to my holy hill.

Who has a contrite and lowly spirit,  
thus feels compassion on his brother;  
and when he is in his debt,  
forgives him seventy times seven.

All this he has done in secret,  
knowing that his Father, who sees in secret,  
will repay him on the last day.

*"Come, you who are blessed by my Father,  
inherit the kingdom prepared for you,  
from the foundation of the world."*

In Appreciation for the life of Walt McCuiston  
*Our shepherd, servant, brother and friend*

1. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People, A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 211. Chris' book is an outstanding work on this theme, not only for its clarity and comprehensive view on the subject, but also by his life's example. Chris, just like his mentor John Stott, has devoted his life to the mission of God for the whole world.

2. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 412.

3. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2:9:51-24:53* (ECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 995.

4. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 209.

5. John T. Carroll, *Luke, A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 237.

6. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 360.

7. Carroll, *Luke*, 237.

8. Carroll, *Luke*, 238. "Jesus has already declared this programmatically at Levi's banquet, with the noun *metanoia* (5:32; the verb returns in 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3-4; Acts 2:38; 3:19; cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31; 11:18)."

9. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 209.

10. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 211, 220.

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