

## **“The Harvest” (Luke 10:1–24)**

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Imagine something with me. Imagine that someone tells you they have developed a new medicine that will cure every major medical problem. In fact, he says it's the only way to cure some diseases. For the sake of this story, let's say it requires a lot of commitment to take the appropriate dosage—you have to take several large, bad-tasting pills at specific times each day. Also, the medicine works slowly. You don't see results immediately. But the promise is that it really works. And here's good news: it's free. You just have to commit to taking it. Suppose you're in bad shape and desperate for a cure, or the person who has developed this medicine has proven himself to be trustworthy, so you take the medicine.

Over time, you start to feel better. You're not 100 hundred percent sure if it's the medicine working. Perhaps it's a placebo effect. But you believe it's working. Then, the person who makes the medicine says, “We have to get word about this drug to others. Go tell others about it.” There's no money in this drug, because it's free. Mass advertising won't work. If big pharma hears that a wonder drug is being given away for free, they'll try to shut this movement down. It's not FDA-approved. The person who makes the drug explains that the best way to get the word out is to do this personally.

He says that if you go out and tell people about his life-saving cure, there will be people who trust that it will work, and they'll take the medicine. And then they'll tell other people, and so on. He says that though you're not selling the medicine, people will be grateful and they'll give you some money. At the least, they'll feed you and, while you're traveling, they'll let you stay in their homes.

But he also promises that there will be opposition. Some people will think you're a fool. They'll want nothing to do with you. And the major drug companies will try to sue you, to get the government to arrest you. However, getting this drug to people who need it is worth the risk. And he promises that, in the end, you will succeed. You'll have helped many people get healthier. And, when you reach retirement age, regardless of how many people took your offer, you will be financially secure. You'll never have to worry about money again.

That may seem too good to be true. Or, it may seem too strange to be true. But Christianity says something similar. It says that God has something for us, a priceless gift that

will fix all our major problems. Though it's priceless, it really is a gift. It's not for sale. But it requires commitment to take it. And since it's so helpful and so valuable—the only way to truly fix what ails us—we must tell others about it. Some will trust us, but many—probably most—will reject us. Nevertheless, we're promised that God will be with us, that no one can ultimately harm us, and that we should rejoice that we will live with God forever.

We're going to see this in the passage that we're studying today. We've been reading carefully through the Gospel of Luke, one of the four biographies of Jesus in the Bible. So far, we have seen that Jesus has taught about the kingdom of God and performed miracles. He also called twelve men to himself to learn from him, to witness who he is and what he has done. They are called disciples, students who follow him. Earlier, he had sent these twelve men out to tell other people about God's kingdom—that the King has come, that people can be right with God if they would turn to the King and trust him, and that this leads to eternal life. Now, Jesus sends a larger group out to tell more people this good news.

We're going to read Luke 10:1–24. We'll start by reading the first twelve verses, which describe this mission and how people will respond to Jesus' message.

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> '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.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus sends a group of seventy-two out to gather "the harvest." These people are to give a message of peace to those they meet. If people receive this message of peace, Jesus instructs them to heal the sick and to tell them that the kingdom of God—or the rule and reign of God—

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

has come near them. But there will be people who want nothing to do with them. Jesus tells them not to waste their time with those people.

Our translation says there were seventy-two people sent out. There are some manuscripts that say seventy were sent out. (Some translations, like the KJV and NRSV, say “seventy.”) Does this number have any significance? Perhaps it does. In the Old Testament, in Genesis 10, we’re given a list of seventy nations that descended from Noah. The Hebrew Bible has seventy names, but when it was translated into Greek, the number became seventy-two. Perhaps the idea here is that this message that Jesus gives the disciples is meant to go out to the whole world. Earlier, Jesus had sent the twelve out (Luke 9:1–6). Matthew’s Gospel says that Jesus told them to go only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6). Twelve was the number of the tribes of Israel. If seventy-two or seventy represents the nations of the world, this larger group, while not going out to all the nations yet, foreshadows a day when the gospel, the good news of Jesus, will be sent to all peoples.

Jesus likens this mission to a harvest. It’s an idea found in both the Old and the New Testaments (Isa. 27:12; Hos. 6:11; Joel 3:13; Matt. 9:37–38; John 4:31–38; Rev. 14:14–20). It’s a metaphor that says that there are people who are ready to be gathered into God’s kingdom, which, according to one author, can be defined as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”<sup>2</sup> The Bible tells us that God is a perfect being who created the universe. He created us to know him, to love him, to worship him and reflect his greatness. We exist for God, not the other way around. But from the beginning, we have acted as if God doesn’t exist, or is there to serve our needs. We act like we’re the kings and queens of the universe. Therefore, there’s a broken relationship between God and humanity. That broken relationship is the reason why anything bad happens in the world: diseases, natural disasters, our seemingly natural ability to screw things up, and death itself.

But God sent Jesus into the world to reconcile people to himself, to bring them back into the fold. He is gathering people to himself, into his kingdom, the way a farmer gathers grain. And he does this through people, who bring a message that we can now have peace with God.

So, that’s what Jesus is doing here. Luke tells us that Jesus is Lord. Jesus tells his workers to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send more workers. That’s a subtle way of putting Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> Vaughan Roberts uses this definition, based on one created by Graeme Goldsworthy, in his book, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

on the same level as God the Father, something we'll see again later in this passage. It shows that this harvest will be gathered through prayer and through more people bringing this message of peace to more and more people. The answer to the prayer for more workers will come as more people hear good news from God and decide to work for him.

Jesus tells this larger group that the task won't be easy. They're being sent as lambs in the midst of wolves. (Matt. 10:16 says they should be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" because of the danger.) He also tells them to take no supplies: no moneybag (which was something that traveling philosophers used, because they sold their teaching), no knapsack, and no (extra?) pair of sandals. They should go with a sense of urgency, not pausing to chit-chat with others (cf. 2 Kgs. 4:29). They should trust that God will provide for them.

Jesus says that they should say "peace" to people. This isn't a casual greeting. The idea is that God is offering peace, or wholeness, to others. People can be at peace with God, forgiven for doing wrong, for ignoring God and breaking his commandments. If people receive this message of peace, they will invite Jesus' followers into their homes and feed them. The disciples should then heal their sick. Jesus has given them authority and power to perform miracles. In a sense, Jesus is telling them that there will be people who accept this offer of peace.

But he also says that if people don't receive this peace, then the peace offered doesn't go to them. And Jesus implies that the disciples shouldn't heal those who reject this offer. Healing only comes to those who accept God's offer of peace, who want to come under God's rule and blessing and therefore become part of God's kingdom. Those who reject the King will have no peace and no healing. If a town rejects the disciples, they should "shake the dust from their feet," an act that says something like, "We're done here, we don't even want to take your town's dust with us" (cf. Acts 13:51). The disciples should move on, warning the town that though they have rejected the King, his kingdom has still come. The King won't disappear simply because certain people don't want to hear about him.

Jesus then talks of "that day," when the King comes to call all people to account for how they have lived, to sort people into two categories: those who have entered the kingdom and those who haven't. This is judgment day. Jesus says it will be more bearable for the people of Sodom on that day than it will be for these people who have rejected Jesus' messengers. This is shocking, since Sodom is known as a wicked city, one that wanted to rape two angels sent by

God (Gen. 19:1–28; see also Isa. 13:19; Ezek. 16:48–50). The wicked people of Sodom won't be judged as harshly as these people who reject Jesus' messengers.

Jesus then gives a warning to a few cities. The idea is that these cities are without excuse. They will be judged harshly because they had experienced Jesus' power and yet still rejected him. Let's read verses 13–15:

<sup>13</sup>“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. <sup>14</sup>But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>15</sup>And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were towns in Galilee, Jesus' home region. They had witnessed Jesus' miracles. (Capernaum is mentioned specifically in Luke 4:23, 31–37; 7:1–10.) Jesus had shown them his identity, as the Son of God who also became a human being, who came to bring people into God's kingdom. And they rejected Jesus. Jesus says that on the day of judgment, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon. These were two cities to the northwest, on the Mediterranean coast, cities in Gentile territory. (Sidon is actually one of the seventy-two nations mentioned in Genesis 10.) Tyre and Sidon were known for their pride and wickedness (Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26–28). They'll do better on judgment day than people who rejected Jesus. This would be shocking for Jewish people to hear, because they assumed they were superior to Gentiles.

Why are Jesus' words so harsh? Look at verse 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 listen to Jesus' messengers, who receive their words, are actually receiving Jesus. It's not Jesus' followers that they're believing, but Jesus himself. Likewise, those who reject Jesus' followers aren't rejecting them; they're rejecting Jesus. And Jesus says that those who reject him are rejecting the one who sent him. That is, they're rejecting God. God's message comes through Jesus and through people who talk about Jesus. If people are telling the truth about Jesus and their message is believed, taken to be true and trusted to be what people need, then that person has a relationship with God. If people reject that message, they're not rejecting the messenger;

they're rejecting the one who is the subject of that message. They're rejecting the one who wrote the message.<sup>3</sup>

So far, we've seen that Jesus has sent his followers out into a hostile world to offer peace to other people. There will be those who receive this message of peace, who welcome good news from the King. Others won't. There will be "wolves" that are hostile to this message. Jesus tells his followers not to worry about them, but to shake the dust from their feet and move on. In the next paragraph, we see that the disciples come back from their mission. They have had some measure of success. They are full of joy. Jesus assures them of ultimate victory. Let's read verses 17–20:

<sup>17</sup> The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The seventy-two return with joy. They claim that even demons, evil spirits, are subject to them—that is, in Jesus' name. That means that because of who Jesus is and the authority he gave his followers, even demons were subject to them. They probably drove out demons from people, something that Jesus himself did. This causes Jesus to say something stunning: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Some people believe this happened long before Jesus came to Earth. But in the Old Testament, Satan, the devil, is pictured as being in heaven (Job 1–2; Zech. 3:1–5). Other places in the New Testament say he was thrown down from heaven at the time of Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave (John 12:31; Rev. 12:7–12). I think what Jesus is saying is that as demons are driven away by the work of his followers, he can already foresee the time when Satan is cast out of heaven. He is anticipating Satan's defeat. Satan will be thrown down because Jesus, though killed by evil people under the influence of Satan, triumphed in his resurrection. And one day, when King Jesus comes back to Earth on "that day" of judgment, Satan will be cast out forever. Jesus knows Satan will lose.

His point is that neither Satan and his demons, nor anyone else, can ultimately harm his disciples. He has given them "authority to tread on serpents and scorpions." I think this is symbolic. I don't think Jesus means we should go around stepping on poisonous snakes with our

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<sup>3</sup> Jesus' words in Luke 10:16 sound like things he says in John 13:20; 15:23.

bare feet. Serpents and scorpions often represent evil in the Bible (Deut. 8:15; Ps. 91:13; Rev. 9:10, 19). The forces of evil can harm Jesus' followers in the short-run. Some people who have been missionaries have been killed. But no one can harm Jesus' followers in the long-run.

And Jesus tells his followers that they should rejoice, though perhaps not for the reasons they're rejoicing. They might have let their success go to their heads: "Look at us, we did great things!" Jesus tells them not to rejoice in that. After all, some Christians won't experience that kind of success in this life. He tells them to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. The Bible often talks about a book of life, or a list of names that are registered in the divine census. These are the names of people God chose to save, to reconcile to himself.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is saying that they should rejoice that they have been chosen to receive this message of good news. They should rejoice that they will live with God forever. The reward for a Christian life isn't success in this world. The reward is being part of God's kingdom forever, living under the rule and blessing of the King. That is what should bring us the greatest joy. No one can take that away from you if you know Jesus. If you have that gift, praise God that he chose to give it to you.

And this leads to the final words of Luke 10 that we'll look at today. Jesus began his teaching with a word about prayer, and now we see that he prays to his Father, thanking him that he chose to reveal this message of salvation to the disciples. Let's look at verses 21–24:

<sup>21</sup> In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>22</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

<sup>23</sup> Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! <sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Here, we see that God chooses to reveal himself to certain people. The Bible says that all of us know there's a God because we live in the world he created (Rom. 1:18–20). But we have hard hearts and darkened minds, so we tune out that truth. And creation's general message that there is a God is not specific enough to tell us how to be forgiven of our sins and reconciled to God. God has given us his word, written down in the form of the Bible, which tells us a lot of

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<sup>4</sup> A list of passages that deal with this topic is quite long: Exod. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.

specific information about him and what he expects of us. Anyone can read it. But not everyone will understand it and believe it to be true. Only those to whom God has chosen to reveal this message will receive it.

Jesus says that God the Father has given him all authority (John 3:35). He says that only God the Father truly knows who God the Son is. And only Jesus, the Son of God, truly knows who God the Father is. How can anyone else understand the Father and the Son? Jesus says that those to whom he chose to reveal this information will know. In John's Gospel, Jesus says that the Father has drawn people to the Son (John 6:44, 65; 17:2, 25). Here, he says that he has given understanding to people. What the Father does, the Son does. What the Son does, the Father does. They are not the same person, but they are the same God. They do everything in perfect unity.

God has not chosen the wisest, or the richest or the most powerful, to receive the gift of salvation. He has chosen "children," or quite literally, "babies." It's true that people who are wise and rich and powerful do come to faith in Christ. But they don't come to Jesus because they're smart and powerful. They come because they know they need Jesus. They rely on him the way that a baby relies on a parent. If we realize our complete dependency on God, we'll receive his message of salvation. If we think we can fix ourselves, we won't.

Another point is that true knowledge of God only comes through Jesus. You can't have a right relationship with God if you reject Jesus. That's why Jesus says, in John's Gospel, "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:23), and, "Whoever hates me hates my Father also" (John 15:23). I've been studying Darrell Bock's commentary on Luke, and he says, "No one can really understand the Father or what God is about without listening to the Son and his revelation."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus says that his followers are blessed because God has given them eyes to see what they are seeing. Many in the past, both prophets and kings, looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, God's anointed servant, but they died before that day arrived. To know Jesus is a tremendous privilege. It's a gift that comes from God. And if you have it, you are blessed.

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<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1012.

Now that we have looked at this passage, what does it have to do with us? It may seem that some of this doesn't relate to us. Are we really called to go out into the world and take part in this harvest?

I don't think all of Jesus' instructions here are normative. We're not told in the New Testament that all of Jesus' followers must travel, and that they must do so without supplies, in order to reach those who don't know Jesus yet. But we're all called to be ambassadors of Christ, witnesses who represent him, who tell other people the good news of how to be reconciled to God. Some people will be missionaries, traveling to foreign lands. Some people will be pastors and evangelists. But all are called to take part in God's mission. Are you part of that mission?

I think that many people who call themselves Christians are not part of that mission in any way. And I think the reason we are not is because we don't truly believe the gospel. If we believed that the only way to be made right with God was to trust Jesus, and that without that relationship, people were going to hell, we would do more to tell other people the good news. If you knew that by consuming a certain pill each day, people would be made well, you would tell them about it. Why don't we tell people about Jesus? Why don't we view this with a sense of urgency?

I suppose because we either don't think it's that important or we're afraid of rejection. Perhaps it's both. But if we don't take it upon ourselves to tell others about Jesus, who will?

If we care about souls, if we care about God and his glory, we should want other people to know Jesus. We should view ourselves as part of God's mission. We should pray that God would send more workers into the field. Pray that God would raise up more evangelists and pastors and missionaries. But we shouldn't just pray. We need to act. The way that God raises up more workers is by using people like us to tell others about Jesus.

That's one thing to keep in mind. Another thing is that when we tell others about Jesus, some will receive us and others will reject us. Jesus is quite clear about that. He acknowledges that people will be hostile. The world is full of "wolves." But we need to keep in mind that when people reject our words, they are not rejecting us. They are rejecting Jesus. They are rejecting God. We're just messengers. But some will receive our message, which means they are received by Jesus and by God.

And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us

Those words were written by Martin Luther about five hundred years ago.<sup>6</sup> Another point we should see is that though there is evil in the world, and though we may be persecuted because we dare to speak about Jesus, nothing can ultimately harm us. The worst that someone can do to us is cause us physical pain and kill us. But even that can't separate us from God (Rom. 8:31–39). Jesus said that nothing would harm his disciples. He didn't mean they couldn't feel pain and die. Jesus felt pain, both emotional pain and physical pain. Jesus died. But pain and death were not the last word for him, and they are not the last word for his followers. We are never told to fear death or other people, or even Satan himself. We are told to fear God, who has the power to give us life or to condemn us (Luke 12:4–5). And if we are united to Jesus by faith, we will never face condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

That's an important point related to our message about Jesus. We can warn people about God's judgment, but we don't condemn people. We can say certain things are right and wrong, but we don't sit on God's throne, judging others in that final, decisive way that he can. We simply tell people the truth and leave the results to God. And God is in control.

Jesus says that God is the one who chooses to reveal the truth to certain people. God opens up the eyes of the spiritually blind to help them to see. We don't know who will receive the message. In faith and in obedience to Jesus, we tell others about him. From our perspective, it doesn't seem likely that many people will believe. But God is in control. He has chosen certain people to believe. He will bring his word into their hearts and minds and use it to bring them to spiritual life. But we must cooperate with God. The fact that God will bring people to faith doesn't mean we don't have to act.

If we realize that we are blessed because we know Jesus, because our names are written in heaven, we will tell others. If you know who Jesus is, you have been given a priceless gift. If you have a Bible, you have been given something that people in other parts of the world wish that they could have. If you have faith in Jesus, you are blessed beyond measure. You are more blessed than the rich. Billionaires have a lot of money, but that doesn't fix their biggest problems. And I'm not sure any of us would want to trade places with Bob Kraft this morning. But if you're a Christian, you have been given the greatest treasure. Share it with others.

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<sup>6</sup> They come from his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

If you don't know Jesus yet, I urge you to do everything you can to learn about him, to put his teachings into practice, and to trust him. Jesus makes this harvest possible. In John's Gospel, he says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Jesus died to give us eternal life. No one else can offer that to you. Receive Jesus and you receive all of God's blessings.