

Laborers Into His Harvest
Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-24
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Read Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-24

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4b)

Introduction

I don't know how many of you have ever gone on a short-term mission trip, but I've gone on a whole bunch. Usually they are week-long trips for either disaster-relief help (like cleaning up and rebuilding houses after Hurricane Katrina) or trips to areas to help groups working with those in poverty, where we'll do a mix of work projects, relational ministry, and kids programs. Giving up a week of your summer can be tough sometimes, but I've seen so many adults and teens go on those trips and have wonderful experiences. I highly recommend them. A week is one thing, but can you imagine spending 11 months in 11 different countries doing missions work? If you can, then a group called Adventures in Missions has just the program for you: the World Race.

The World Race was started in 2006 and around 1,000 people between the ages of 21 and 35 participate in it each year. Racers choose which countries they want to visit, where they will work with various ministries, churches, and businesses. So they may work at a school in Ecuador one month, live in an orphanage in Peru the next, live on a campsite in Romania the next, followed by working at an eyeglass clinic in the Ukraine, then teaching English in Cambodia, then working on a farm in South Africa. Though no two adventures look the same, the Racers are promised a raw adventure in faith that shows them how many different forms mission work takes, as well as calling them out of their comfort zone as they face dire poverty, dicey weather, difficult relationships, hunger, and deprivations in degrees that they've most likely never experienced before. The director of discipleship, Clint Bokelman, says, “We really believe that Jesus used short-term missions as His model. For three years Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick and cast out demons. He even sent His disciples on short-term missions of their own.”¹

As Christians, we can learn a lot from books, from sermons, and from talking with other believers. But at some point, we have to exercise our faith and stop talking about it. We have to learn how to treat people like Jesus did, to walk with godly integrity, to explain the Gospel to people, and to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world. That's going to look a little different for everyone, but today's passage is what that World Race director was referring to – short-term missions that Jesus sent His disciples on. They had been travelling with Jesus, watching Him heal and teach. But they were going to be entrusted with the ministry after Jesus left the world, so they needed to get in some practice, they needed to get their hands dirty, to try out their ministry skills without Jesus around. So He sent them in two waves of mission trips. As we study His' instructions and His comments when they returned, we'll get a good sense of what was important for Jesus and how we can still be obedient to His call today.

I. Jesus Sent Twelve (9:1-6)

¹ *And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³ And he said to*

¹ <https://www.worldrace.org> and <https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/evangelism-missions/24645-the-world-race>

them, *“Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.*

Jesus’ ministry has had the dual elements of preaching and healing, so when He sent the twelve apostles out to minister in different areas, He also equipped them for both of those things. The healings and the exorcisms accompanied the preaching of the gospel because they validated the preaching. They were signs that proved the workers of them were sent from God. It was important to accompany the proclamations of God’s word with displays of compassion, that assured the people that God cared about their pain. But the real work was the proclaiming of the kingdom of God, as it has always been for the followers of Jesus. Yes, we meet people’s physical, tangible needs when we can, but that is not the end goal. It is a means to the end of honoring God and pointing to the Gospel.

It’s a good thing that Jesus equipped the twelve with power and authority, because He forbid them from having the more practical equipment of food, money, even a bag. These missions would be true adventures in trusting God to provide at every step. They would need people to open their homes to them, to feed them, to provide whatever practical, material thing they needed. If one family agrees to host you, stay there and minister from there. Don’t insult your host by holding out for a nicer house. If you find no welcome, simply shake the dust from your feet as you leave town, which was the symbolic way of communicating God’s displeasure, even judgment on that town.

Now, clearly this is a historical event and the instructions Jesus gave meant to apply only for that trip. Please don’t read this as though it’s a plan that we would send people on the mission field with today. As though if we send a summer missions team to inner-city Baltimore for instance, just to show up with one pair of clothes and hope that someone lets them stay at their house. Or when a couple signs up with MTW to go to the Ukraine for a month, that we tell them not to pack any bags or take money or food. No, this is not a template, a pattern to be duplicated, it was situational. Jesus was teaching His disciples absolute dependence on Him to provide for them. Richard Lenski notes that, *“After this lesson had once been thoroughly learned, they would be ready for their world-wide mission so that whether they had something with them or not, their dependence on their Lord would always be the same.”²* Additionally (and this is a much longer conversation that we won’t have now), we should not expect to perform miracles of healings and exorcisms because we have something greater that authenticates our message: the complete canon of Scripture. We don’t need the “sign gifts”/the “miraculous gifts” that the church did before it had the completed NT.

Fast-forward through the rest of chapter 9 that we’ll explore over the next few weeks and see the second trip where Jesus expanded and sent seventy-two.

II. Jesus Sent Seventy-Two (10:1-11)

¹After 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. ²And 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. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the

² Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis:Fortress Press, 1946), p. 497.

laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say,¹¹ '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.'

Though we know a lot about the twelve apostles, we don't know a lot about the other followers of Jesus who were loyal and true enough for Him to appoint them to go out on this second missionary journey on His behalf. Jesus was clearly ready to entrust this bigger group with a mission after the earlier sending out of the twelve. This is significant, because whereas the twelve apostles were the official, anointed, ordained men, these seventy-two were the lay people. The ones without the titles, the ones in the pews who were the faithful followers. It's a reminder that we're all called to participate, to use our gifts in ministry; to share the workload with the entire church, not just the professional church leaders.

The instructions are similar to the earlier instructions that the Twelve received before their journey. The first time around, there was no indication that Jesus would be visiting the areas where the Twelve went, but this time, the workers are going to the towns before Jesus Himself would visit; they are acting as the advance team discerning where they would be welcome. The command to pack light are similar. The instructions of staying with people are expanded, as is the explanation about shaking the dust off of their feet. Sending them two-by-two, of course, is the smartest way to ensure that they keep one another motivated, encouraged, honest, and protected. Since they were going out as sheep among wolves, they needed one another's presence and encouragement to carry on through the dangerous, lonely, and hard times.

So now that the workers have been sent, our final verses show Jesus' reflections on many areas:

III. Judgment, Rejection, Subjection, and Blessed Revelation (10:12-24)

¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.¹³ "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."¹⁴ But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.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."¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"¹⁸ And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."²¹ 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.²² 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."²³ Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!"²⁴ 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."

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were all towns in Galilee where Jesus had performed miracles. The residents of those towns had seen divine power with their own eyes and heard Jesus' words of salvation with their own ears. Yet, they remained unmoved, unrepentant, and unwilling to believe. Jesus commented that Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, which were cities that had been destroyed by God in

the Old Testament, would have it easier than them in the judgment day. What city could be worse off than Sodom, which was so bad that God destroyed it by fire? Any city that rejected Jesus.³

Speaking of rejection, what's the number one reason that Christians don't share their faith in Christ with others? That's right, fear of rejection. I own that, I'm right there with you, I hate the thought of having a conversation with someone and finding a natural way to bring up Jesus and have them just ream me out, or walk away. But when we are rejected because of our faith and message, is that rejection directed at you? Maybe – if you're rude, obnoxious, and get in someone's face. But verse 16 says that "*the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*" When someone rejects you when you've been faithful to represent Jesus, they are rejecting Jesus.

Verse 17 says that the seventy-two returned and their only report was that they were filled with joy because the demons were subject to them. Now, I'm sure there was a lot more that they talked about, as they shared stories of their travels, of the people they met who hosted them, and various miracles and people responding to their preaching (I wish Luke had recorded those). But what left the biggest impact on them was the fact that evil spirits had to obey them. Which is exactly what Jesus said would happen when He gave them the power and the authority to command demons. In verses 18-19 Jesus said, "I was there when Satan first rebelled and was cast out of heaven. God has always had power over evil spirits, and His authority extends to me and to those I give authority to."

The final four verses of this section remind us that responding to Jesus and the message of the Kingdom is a gift that the Lord gives. No one just figures out who Jesus is on their own, it always has to be revealed to them by God. Faith is a gift and those who receive it are blessed by God. Jesus' prayer in verses 21-24 sees Him thanking the Father for hiding spiritual truth from some and revealing it to others, anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal it. What a great reminder that Jesus sends us out with the message of the Gospel to tell other people, but the ultimate results are not up to us. They're up to Him. He will bring the ones that He chooses into His kingdom. That should never be an excuse for us not to share the message, but an encouragement that our job is just to plant seeds, not to force growth and conversion.

Conclusion

I skipped past a key verse earlier to come back to it (10:2): "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" The world is a field of souls that need people laboring for spiritual results. God has planted seeds of faith that need to be tended to by His workers. I'm going to emphasize again that laborers certainly refers to people who are called to full-time ministry and missions. But any Christian who is willing to share her faith, love people with Jesus' love, and help people in Jesus' name is a laborer. Jesus acknowledges, though, that not many are willing to do the hard work needed to bring in the harvest.

There was a Christian singer in the 1970s and 80s who used to tell his audience that since the Great Commission said, "Go into all the world," that meant that the vast majority of the American church needed to go to foreign missions unless they felt they were definitely called to stay. That's extreme to say the least, I'm not sure we want to leave America with a small handful of Christians. Not to mention that other countries now send their missionaries here. I like the idea that we can be faithful "as we go," with whatever we're called to, whether it's being teachers, contractors, salespeople, students, and all manner of careers and callings. I don't want to let anyone off the hook – if you are feeling called to missions, pursue that call! Our denomination has challenged its

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), p. 520.

churches to think about how we can send 1% of our congregation to the mission field.⁴ Maybe you're that 1 person in our church who will pursue overseas missions. If that happened for every church in our denomination, they estimate that we would have over 3,800 new missionaries! One church took this challenge and backed up a little to first challenge their congregation to have 10% of them go on short-term missions and 100% of them to support global missions through finances and prayer. I love that, because people who become full-time missionaries almost always invest in other missionaries and go on short-term trips first.

But just because we don't become full-time missionaries doesn't mean that we get to just pursue our own things – we all need to “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). There are so many ways that those who don't go on the mission field or into full-time ministry can be involved in harvest work. As Jesus said, the first thing to do is pray. Pray for pastors, for ministry leaders like Daryl, Joey, Tyler, and Rick our local campus ministers at UD and DSU. Support missionaries with your money, with your prayers and with encouraging emails or notes. Pray for God to raise up future leaders in our churches and seminaries. Before you take any actions to further God's kingdom, pray about it; everything must begin with prayer because God is the One who makes spiritual things happen.

And then be constantly aware that your neighborhood and your town is a harvest field. Find ways to engage the unchurched that are natural to your life. Let me suggest a few areas:

1) Invite people over for a meal. Let's use our homes for the Lord. There's something about inviting someone into your house that says, “I care about you, I'm inviting you into a deeper friendship.” Hospitality can be really intimidating, but it can be as easy as: “We're making a meal for our family anyways, let's double the recipe and just set an extra 3 or 4 places and invite another family to join us?” My family is having a neighborhood get-together on our deck next weekend, you can pray for that. If there are neighbors you've been wanting to connect with, set a date this summer to have them over.

2) Your hobbies – find a way to do your hobbies where it puts you into contact with unbelievers. What happens with Christians often is that you have a hobby you like to do, so you find a group at your church, with your Christian friends and you enjoy it together. So you've got Christian sewing circles and church softball leagues, that kind of thing. And, listen, nobody loves a church picnic volleyball game more than me, there's nothing wrong with enjoying activities with other believers, strengthening the bonds of fellowship. But what if we used those activities as a way to befriend unbelievers? Looking for a community softball league. Finding the local pickup basketball game. Joining a tennis ladder, a women's sewing group or book club, or a boardgame night at the local game shop. Now the trick, of course, is that as you're enjoying that activity, remembering to make connections with the unchurched so that you can maybe follow-up with them to have a spiritual conversation, pray for them, be available for them when life knocks them down, which may eventually win you the right to be heard to invite them to church or share Christ.

3) For parents: our kids' activities like sports, school, extra-curricular activities are a great way to get to know the unchurched. Make friends as you're cheering on your kids' teams and naturally invite them for dinner and to church. You may have the chance to have deep conversations about life and spiritual values.

4) Students, many of you are surrounded by the unchurched in your classes and you have a better chance to influence more people than most adults do. I remember realizing in High School and college that Jesus had called me to be salt and light there, to invite people to youth group, to look for ways to love and share Christ.

⁴ <https://www.mtw.org/1>

5) Befriend and pray for your co-workers. I know this is dicey, I don't know what the rules are in your workplace; I've worked at churches for most of my adult life, so I'm not the person to ask about how to do this. But I've known plenty of people who have had gospel conversations with co-workers that have brought them to faith in Christ. Start by just taking an interest in them, being their friend through the ups and downs of life, and praying for them, encouraging them.

6) Sometimes gospel conversations happen by just being aware of the people around you. Starting up a conversation with someone in line at the post office or seated next to you on an airplane. (Optional story about guy standing outside the church this week.) The most important thing is being intentional and obedient.

One more verse that I skipped that I want to go back to, verse 20: *"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* This teaches us something that every Christian needs to hear: *your identity is not bound up in your efforts or in your ministry but in your salvation.*⁵ How well we minister to others, how clear we are when we speak about Christ, how many people respond to our ministry efforts, that's all important stuff; we should strive to serve God with our full strength. But Jesus basically said even if you have authority over evil spirits, even if you have great success in ministry, it's way more important that your name is written in heaven, in the Lamb's book of life. Your efforts may bring great immediate results, your efforts may feel like they're failing – it doesn't matter, leave the results to God. Root your identity in being His child, saved by His grace.

Additionally, please don't take away from this sermon that you are in danger of not having your name written in heaven if you do not participate in evangelistic ministry. Keep in mind that Judas went on one of these mission trips and he ended up betraying Jesus and killing himself! No, our obedience to Jesus' call to share our faith is a result of being saved, not part of the reason that we're saved. Our salvation rests on Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross that paid the penalty for our sins and made us righteous in God's sight. -> Transition to communion

Benediction

Philemon 6, 25 – *"I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."*

⁵ D.A. Carson, Kathleen Neilson, *His Mission: Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015)