

The Lord of the Harvest (Luke 10:1–24)

The Harvest of the Son of Man

There is little in Luke 10 that we haven't covered before, as recently as July 5, when I preached Luke 9:1–9 and Jesus' sending out of the twelve apostles. For that reason, we are going to widen out our lens a bit and tackle a larger section of text than we usually would on a Sunday morning. Luke 10:1–24 describes the mission of the seventy-two disciples (or seventy—the manuscript evidence is equally divided on the number¹) whom Jesus sent on ahead of him during his final trek to Jerusalem. The last geographical locator we have for Jesus' whereabouts is Caesarea Philippi, which Matthew identified as the site of Peter's confession of Christ (Mt 16:13–20; Lk 9:18–20). The transfiguration (9:28–36) probably occurred on Mount Hermon, just northeast of Caesarea Philippi. The distance from Mount Hermon to Jerusalem is about one-hundred thirty miles, and it would appear that Jesus took his time working his way south, for a lot happens between the transfiguration (9:28–36) and the triumphal entry (19:28–40). Jesus was evidently followed by a sizeable crowd of disciples, such that from them He could appoint seventy-two to go on ahead of him “into every town and place where he himself was about to go” (10:1). We ought to think of this final journey to Jerusalem as the last march of the King, the culmination of His ministry in Israel. It would appear, then, that He sent out the seventy-two in order to multiply His ministry, and to issue one final call for people to repent and believe the gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus framed the mission of the seventy-two as a harvest, using a common biblical image for the resurrection unto salvation and judgment at the end of the age. For instance, in Joel 3:1, the prophet warns of impending judgment,

¹ See the discussion of the textual issues in James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 303–4. Edwards writes, “Whether Jesus sent out seventy or seventy-two disciples is a complex question for which only a tentative answer may be given. The manuscript evidence, though slightly favoring ‘seventy-two,’ is too evenly divided between the two figured to be decisive”; *Ibid.*, 303. Edwards finds the OT background of the sending out of the seventy(-two) in the ministry of the seventy(-two) elders in Numbers 11. Garland comments that the two numbers “are interchangeable in Jewish traditions”; David E. Garland, *Luke*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 425. Garland finds the meaning of the number in its missiological and eschatological significance: “What is important is the number’s symbolic quality instead of its quantity. As the number twelve is significant for the disciples’ mission to the tribes of Israel (9:1–6; see 9:17), the number seventy-two is significant (six times twelve) as foreshadowing the mission to all the nations of the world”; *Ibid.*

*Put in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the winepress is full.
The vats overflow,
for their evil is great. (Joel 3:13)*

And in Isaiah 27:12–13, the prophet wrote,

*In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel. And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain.
(Is 27:12–13)*

In Jesus' own Parable of the Weeds, He employed the image of a harvest:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."'" . . .

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Mt 13:24–30, 36–43)

Each of these passages locates the harvest at the end of the age, when Christ returns to complete the salvation of His redeemed and to pour out judgment upon the wicked and unbelieving. Matthew 13:39 is explicit— “The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.” But in Luke 10, the harvest is present, not future; and the reapers are men, not angels. Yet the two harvests are related, and are explained by that already/not yet framework that is descriptive of the kingdom of God. The kingdom has already come spiritually, and the kingdom has not yet come physically. The kingdom has already come in the sense that people are being spiritually harvested out of the kingdom of this world and gathered into the kingdom of God through the sowing and reaping of His disciples. This is the work of evangelism and missions. But the kingdom has not yet come and will not come until Christ returns to establish His kingdom physically upon a renewed earth in the new creation; at that time, He will send forth His angels to gather His elect into the everlasting kingdom, and to gather the wicked into “the fiery furnace” where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The present (already) harvest is still ongoing, and will last until Christ returns at the end of the age to inaugurate the future (not yet), climactic harvest. To the church has been granted the stewardship of the present harvest; to the angels is granted the stewardship of the future harvest. Therefore, as the church, as disciples of Christ, this passage concerns us as much as it concerned these seventy-two disciples. So let’s give our attention to what the Lord of the harvest has to say about how this harvest is to be conducted, what will become of those who refuse to be harvested, and what is the true source of joy in the midst of the harvest.² The main point of this sermon may

² “The ‘Lord of the harvest’ would appear to be God, but the fact that Jesus is identified as ‘Lord’ in v. 1 and is identified again in v. 17, suggests that the work of God is so closely identified with the mission of Jesus that he can be taken as ‘Lord of the harvest’”; Edwards, 305.

be stated like this: *The Lord of the harvest has entrusted the present harvest to the church, which is both a great responsibility and a great joy, for His sovereignty ensures our success.*

I. Rules of the Harvest (10:1–12)

We begin with the rules of the harvest. Before the Lord of the harvest sent out His laborers into the harvest, he instructed them as to how they were to conduct His harvest.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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.’ 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.”
(10:1–12)

If this sounds vaguely familiar, it is likely because Jesus’ instructions to the seventy-two closely resemble his instructions to the twelve before He sent them on their mission at the beginning of Luke 9. Nevertheless, despite the similarity, I do I want to skip these verses, and that for two reasons. First, there are a number of instructions in Luke 10 that are not found in Luke 9. And second, while in Luke 9 I argued that we must exercise caution in taking Jesus’ instructions to the twelve as a paradigm for all missions throughout the present age, given that the apostles were extraordinary officers living in an extraordinary time in redemptive history, I think that what we find in Luke 10 represents more of a *normative* paradigm for kingdom missions throughout the

present age. The seventy-two are not apostles; they appear to be ordinary disciples, part of that larger crowd of disciples that attended Jesus' ministry, from which Jesus had chosen the twelve apostles (6:13). In other words, they are far more representative of the ordinary church than were the apostles. Nevertheless, though the seventy-two were ordinary disciples, they still ministered at an extraordinary time in redemptive history, which means we should still exercise caution in taking their mission parameters *absolutely* paradigmatic of all kingdom missions throughout the present age. For example, in v. 9, Jesus instructed the seventy-two to "Heal the sick and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" While I affirm that divine healing still occurs and has not altogether ceased, I would put divine healing in the category of an extraordinary work of the Spirit rather than an ordinary work of grace. Extraordinary things occurred with frequency when the King inaugurated the kingdom of God and launched His assault upon the kingdom of this world. But both the flow of the New Testament and the course of church history testify that such signs and wonders are not an ordinary part of the ministry of the church throughout the present age. There are extraordinary seasons and extraordinary circumstances when such things may still occur, whether in times of revival or in frontier missions, but signs and wonders do not form the sum and substance of the church's ministry or mission in the present age. Yet with that caveat in mind, we may still look at Jesus' instructions to the seventy-two as forming a general pattern for kingdom ministry today. I find within this passage no less than seven "rules of the harvest," seven principles of kingdom ministry.

First, we must regard the harvest as a *cooperative* endeavor. "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" (10:1). This pattern of sending out of missionaries in pairs seems to have continued in the early church, for it is witnessed in the church at Antioch's sending out of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2), the church at Jerusalem's sending out of Judas and Silas (Acts 15:27), the church at Antioch's sending out of Paul and Silas (Acts 15:39) and Barnabas and Mark (Acts 15:40), Paul's leaving Silas and Timothy to minister in Berea (Acts 17:14), and Paul's sending of Timothy and Erastus to minister in Macedonia (Acts 19:22).³ But why? Why is the general pattern of missions and ministry that of teams rather than individuals? I can think of at least four reasons:

³ Garland, 425.

- It is for enhanced *credibility*—the law required that the credibility of a testimony be established by two or three witnesses (Dt 17:6; 19:15).
- It is for mutual *accountability*—a team can hold its members accountable for their doctrine and lives (cf. 2 Cor 8:19–21).
- It is for shared *responsibility*—no one person possesses all the gifts necessary for ministry.
- It is for collective *encouragement*—on your own, it is easy to lose courage or lose heart. As anyone who has done evangelism knows, it is far easier to be bold and courageous in the face of opposition when you have a teammate who is on your side and has your back.

What this pattern of team-harvesting was not intended to do was to enhance the *efficiency* of the harvest. If Jesus had not commanded that the disciples go out two-by-two, wouldn't they have been able to cover twice as much ground? Perhaps, but efficiency was never Jesus' goal; excellence is... endurance is. And for long-term excellence and endurance in the harvest field, we must work together as a team. This truth has application to our church's evangelism (the first several Sunday evening Gatherings beginning on August 30 will focus on building a culture of evangelism at First Baptist Nixa so that evangelism becomes truly a whole-church effort), as well as to our church's missions. We ought to ensure that we do not send missionaries to the field on their own, but as members of a team and, if possible, to be members of a healthy local church on the field. Remember, the harvest is not about efficiency, it's about excellence and endurance. And for that, we must follow the team paradigm.

Second, we must regard the harvest as an *overwhelming* endeavor. "And he told 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'" (10:2). Edwards writes, "The reminder that the harvest is ripe but the workers are few is a sobering, even discouraging, introduction to the mission of the seventy(-two). The seventy(-two) are called to a task for which they are not adequate."⁴ The task of missions is overwhelming. According to the Joshua Project, 43.9% of the world's population is unreached (3.58 billion people), and 43.6% of the world's people groups are unreached (7,162 groups). Another 9.5% of the world's population are either "minimally

⁴ Edwards, 305.

reached” or “superficially reached.”⁵ What is a church of 350 supposed to do in the face of such overwhelming lostness? My first response is that we are supposed to feel overwhelmed. No amount of energy or ingenuity on our part will gather the harvest in time. Which means that the mission does not rely upon our resources, but Christ’s. He is the Lord of the harvest. And he bids us to beseech Him to send more laborers into the field. The same is true in the task of evangelism. The person with whom we are sharing the gospel is dead in trespasses and sins, a willing slave of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and hostile toward his/her creator. The odds of our being able to persuade him to repent of his sin and trust in Christ is zero. So what do we do in the face of such overwhelming lostness? We pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth the Holy Spirit with life-giving, repentance-granting, faith-awakening power. He is the Lord of the harvest not only because the harvest is his (τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτοῦ), but because the resources for the harvest are his as well.⁶

Third, we must regard the harvest as a *dangerous* endeavor. Jesus said, “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves” (10:3). The people we are attempting to reach do not want to be reached; those we are attempting to harvest do not want to be harvested. On their own, apart from the conviction of the Holy Spirit, they will not be receptive to the gospel; many, in fact, will be hostile. The unregenerate man is hostile toward God (Rom 8:7); why would they not be hostile toward His messengers? And this does not even take account of the danger posed by Satan and his forces. The harvest is not for the timid; it is for the bold. Thus, Paul told Timothy,

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God... (2 Tm 1:8).

But Paul also reminded Timothy that

God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. (2 Tm 1:7)

⁵ https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/dashboard.

⁶ “The disciples are charged to go and pray because it is ultimately the Lord’s harvest, not theirs, and everything depends on the Lord’s unlimited resources”; Garland, 426.

The harvest field is a dangerous place. Do not think that Jesus promised otherwise. He knew what He was doing when He sent us out. But He has not sent us out alone. He has given us the Holy Spirit to make us fearless and bold, and His unshakable promise that all things, even getting torn to pieces by wolves, must work for our good, for His glory, and for the spread of the gospel.

Fourth, we must regard the harvest as a *dependent* endeavor. That is, missions and evangelism is a work of faith from first to last. “Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals” (10:4). As with the similar instruction to the apostles (9:3), I don’t think we are to take this as an absolute paradigm for all mission throughout the present age for the simple reason that the apostle Paul did not regard this as an absolute paradigm for all missions. As noted in the sermon on Jesus’ sending of the twelve, Paul frequently received support and provision from existing churches in order to reach new people and plant new churches in new regions (cf. Phil 4:15–18). But while missionaries need not go out with only the clothes on their back and the sandals on their feet (I think Jesus’ prohibition against bringing sandals [“no sandals” (μὴ ὑποδήματα)] means no *extra* sandals, as with Jesus’ prohibition against bringing two tunics [9:3; I doubt Jesus told them to attempt to traverse Judea barefoot⁷]), they must go out dependent upon the Lord’s provision. I mentioned in the previous sermon that I think this is one benefit of missionaries receiving support directly from local churches rather than receiving a salary from a mission board; this form of support inculcates dependence.

Fifth, we must regard the harvest as an *urgent* endeavor. “... and greet no one on the road” (10:4). This prohibition is obviously not a command for the disciples to be rude, but rather to instill within them a sense of urgency.⁸ Missionaries must possess this sense of urgency, or they will find any excuse to avoid the dangers and difficulties that attend the mission field and remain within the comforts of home. The same holds true for evangelists; we must be driven by an urgency to tell the gospel or we will find any excuse not to speak up. J. C. Ryle had apposite comments on this phrase:

⁷ “Anyone familiar with the rocky and thorny terrain of Palestine will find the prohibition against wearing sandals a painful deprivation. This prohibition was not made of the Twelve (9:3; Matt 10:9; Mark 6:8). Is it an example of Jewish hyperbole, or perhaps a prohibition of a *second* pair of sandals?”; Edwards, 306. See also Philip Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1: Luke 1–12*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), 515.

⁸ “*Salute no one on the road* is not an exhortation to impoliteness: it is a reminder that their business is urgent and that they are not to delay it by dallying with wayside acquaintances. Eastern salutations can be elaborate and time-consuming”; Leon Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), 201.

Let us strive to show the men of the world that we have no time for their mode of living. Let us show them that we find life too precious to be spent in perpetual feasting, and visiting, and calling, and the like, as if there were no death, or judgment, or life to come. —By all means let us be courteous. But let us not make the courtesies of life an idol, before which everything else must bow down. Let us declare plainly that we seek a country beyond the grave, and that we have no time for that incessant round of eating, and drinking, and dressing, and civility, and exchange of compliments, in which so many try to find their happiness, but evidently try in vain.⁹

Sixth, we must regard the harvest as a *relational* endeavor. “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there [pause—a “son of peace” is one who is ready and willing, having been prepared by the Holy Spirit, to receive the peace (Hebrew *shalom*—the state of being at peace with God) that comes to those who receive the gospel of the King and enter His kingdom by faith], your peace will rest upon him.¹⁰ But if not, it will return to you.¹¹ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer is worthy of his wages [pause—there is something to be said here for the church’s responsibility to fund ministers and missionaries (1 Tm 5:18), but that is not my purpose today]. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.¹² Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (10:5–9). This

⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke, Volume 1* (1858; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012), 265.

¹⁰ Ryken provides a good explanation for the benediction of peace: “Understand what was at stake when these evangelists preached the gospel, and indeed, what is at stake whenever anyone preaches the gospel. Their message was the King’s message, and therefore the way that people responded would indicate what kind of relationship they wanted to have with the King. There would be peace for those who welcomed the kingdom, but peril for those who rejected it. . . . The seventy-two evangelists may not have seemed very impressive. All they had was the gospel. Yet that gospel came from the King himself, offering the true way of salvation in Christ. These messengers were there in the name of the King. Therefore, the way people responded to them would determine their eternal destiny. . . . What Jesus calls a ‘son of peace’ is someone who welcomes the gospel message. They welcome both the good news of God’s kingdom and the people who preach it; it is virtually one and the same. People who gave the gospel this kind of welcome would enjoy the blessing of God’s peace”; Ryken, 518.

¹¹ “This figurative language assures the disciples that they will not be trying to convey a blessing to someone who does not wish to receive it. God’s good gifts are not given by magic”; Morris, 201.

¹² Morris notes, “In the area beyond Jordan to which they were apparently going there were many Gentiles and the food offered might not always satisfy the rigorist for ceremonial purity. They were not to be sidetracked into fussiness about food and food laws”; Morris, 201. Edwards sees the command of love behind this instruction: “Refusing what people offer insults them, but receiving with gratitude what they offer honors them, and honoring people is a fulfillment of the commandment of *agapē*. The concomitant command to ‘stay put’ and not move from house to house is likewise given with hosts in mind: moving from one house to another insults the first host, imputing inadequacy to his or her (Acts 16:15) hospitality”; Edwards, 307.

is a harvest of *people*, and people ought (ordinarily) to be reached relationally. The setting of these five verses is the home—the disciples enter the house of a son of peace, they bless the house with peace, and they enjoy the hospitality of the family, sharing table fellowship with them. They do not move from house to house, but remain in one house, which only strengthens the relationship. And their ministry takes place within that home—they heal the sick in *it* (the house) and say to *them* (the family), “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” Edwards says:

The mission of the seventy(-two) is not a mission to streets and marketplaces, but to homes. The instruction to greet homes in peace (vv. 5–6), sit at table, eating and drinking what is offered by hosts, and not move from place to place (v. 7) depicts a mission of relationships rather than programs. The Jewish home, and particularly the Jewish *table*, was the most cherished and protected sector of Jewish communal life. To enter that space was to be granted access to a most intimate space. The mission of the seventy(-two) is thus not a crusade, a strategy, or program, but an interpersonal encounter in which the gospel is proclaimed within the context of trusting relationships.¹³

The harvest is primarily relational. If when you hear the word “evangelism,” you immediately think of knocking on a stranger’s door, may I suggest that your view of evangelism is skewed? Make friends, get into their lives, invite them over to your home, serve them in Christ’s name, and proclaim to them the gospel of the kingdom. That is the means of the harvest.

Seventh, we must regard the harvest as a *serious* endeavor. Eternal destinies are at stake. “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” (10:10–12). In the sermon from Luke 9 on the sending out of the twelve, I explained that in Jesus’ day, when observant Jews would pass through Gentile territory, upon their return they would stop at the border and knock the dust from their feet, lest the holy land become defiled with heathen dirt.¹⁴ Thus, for the disciples to shake the dust from their feet

¹³ Edwards, 307.

¹⁴ “When Jews traveled outside Palestine, they were commanded to shake themselves free of dust when returning to Israel, lest they pollute the Holy Land”; Edwards, 262, citing Str-B 1:571 [*Kommentar zum Neuen*

upon leaving a village *in Israel* was to declare that village to be heathen, no different than a pagan, Gentile village.¹⁵ This is because the kingdom of God is now the only holy land, and the citizens of the kingdom are the only holy people. Furthermore, to reject the gospel of the kingdom does not invalidate the gospel of the kingdom. Christ is King and Jesus is Lord whether a person believes it or not. To reject the gospel of the kingdom is serious business.¹⁶ Jesus then punctuated this warning with a stunning reference to Sodom. It will be more tolerable on the day of Sodom than for those who reject the gospel of the kingdom.¹⁷ And God rained fire and brimstone down upon Sodom, such was His wrath against their wickedness! Why will Sodom's punishment be less? Because their sin was less. This truth is staggering... The sexual perversion and sexual violence that marked Sodom merits less punishment than rejecting Christ. There is no greater evil than refusing the King and His kingdom. Take care how you hear this sermon...

II. Rejection of the Harvest

Having set forth the rules of the harvest, Jesus briefly elaborated upon the consequences for those who reject the harvest, a theme begun in v. 12.

“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.”¹⁸ 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. 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.” (10:13–16)

Testament aus dem Talmud und Midrasch, ed. H. Strack and P. Billerback, 6 vols. (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1926)]; Morris, 183.

¹⁵ “The commandment to shake the dust off your feet’ is thus a sharp judgment, declaring an inhospitable Jewish village *heathen*”; Edwards, 262–63. “Wherever this message is spurned, Jesus orders them to warn the town (collective guilt) that they are inviting God’s judgment; they are to punctuate this warning with a vivid prophetic action of shaking the dust from their feet on a broad avenue so that many will see it. The offer of peace (v. 5) is withdrawn and replaced with a pronouncement of perdition”; Garland, 427.

¹⁶ “In rejecting the preachers they were not simply rejecting a couple of poor itinerants, but the very kingdom of God, and that has serious consequences”; Morris, 202.

¹⁷ “The reference to the Sodom saga means that any sons of peace who reside in that town should flee it (17:28–30; 21:21)”; Garland, 427,

¹⁸ Note the omniscience of the divine Son of God, who knows “all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act”; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 225. Jesus knows what *would have happened*, if Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His mighty works.

Each of these cities—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—were in northern Galilee, and each were the recipients of the bulk of Jesus’ Galilean ministry.¹⁹ There was also, evidently, a certain religious arrogance to be found there, for they thought they would be exalted to heaven (v. 15). These Jewish cities represent those who imagine they are God’s people because of their external adherence to the covenant, their orthodox theology, and their strict morality. These were the “church people” of the day. On the other end of the religious and moral spectrum lay Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, pagan Gentile cities infamous for their immorality. And yet, Jesus pronounces a stronger condemnation upon the former than upon the latter. I find in these verses three truths deserving of comment.

First, take note of Jesus’ clear affirmation of the coming judgment. There is coming a day when God will judge all peoples—idolatrous and immoral Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, as well as orthodox and moral Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. You will stand before God in judgment. Are you prepared?

Second, the coming judgment will evaluate your response to the King, including your your response to the King’s messengers (v. 16). Yes, the judgment will evaluate the works of every man, and yes, every sin will receive its due punishment (Rom 2:6–11; 2 Cor 5:10). Jesus does *not* say that Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon will not be judged and condemned for their false worship and evils deeds. They will. But when all is said and done, their punishment will be “more bearable” (ἀνεκτότερον) than the punishment meted out upon the Jewish cities of Galilee. Why? Because the gospel of the kingdom came to the cities of Galilee, complete with signs and wonders, and they rejected it. Therefore, rejecting the King is a greater sin deserving of greater punishment than pagan idolatry and grotesque immorality. Contrary to popular opinion, not all sins are equal in the eyes of God. As the Baptist Catechism states, “Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.”²⁰ And, evidently, rejecting Christ is the most heinous, aggravating sin of all, far more heinous than the sins of Sodom.

Third, the coming judgment will take into account the revelation received. Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon never had the gospel preached to them, at least not at the time Jesus spoke these words. Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 15:24), and His ministry

¹⁹ Edwards, 309.

²⁰ The Baptist Catechism (1693), Question 88.

was largely confined to the borders of Israel. Therefore, while they had committed all manner of abominations, they had never committed the most abominable sin of all—they had never rejected Christ and His kingdom. Let that sink in a moment, because everyone in this room is in the position of the cities of Galilee. Christ has been presented to you; the gospel has been preached. You can no longer plead ignorance; you are now accountable for the revelation you have received. Therefore, only two destinies lay before you—either you will swear allegiance to the King, submit to His rule and reign, and receive all the blessings of His everlasting kingdom, or you will face a fate worse than Sodom. Again, take heed how you hear.

III. Rejoicing in the Harvest

Finally, upon the return of the seventy-two, Jesus provided His disciples with both instruction and illustration in the proper way to rejoice in the harvest.

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 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. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

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. 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.”

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! 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.” (10:17–24)

The dominant theme of these final verses is joy. The noun and its corresponding verb occur four times. The seventy-two returned to Jesus rejoicing, and Jesus gently redirected their joy to its proper source. Then Jesus, overwhelmed by joy, began to rejoice Himself.

Let's begin with the disciples' joy. Their joy is focused upon the fact that the demonic spirits they encountered on their mission were subject to them in Jesus' name. And who can blame them? That is exciting stuff. This was a people familiar with demonic oppression. Clearly, given the frequency of exorcisms in the Gospel narratives, Galilee and its surrounding environs had no shortage of evil spirits. And yet, at their command in the name of Christ, the demons had fled. And Jesus did not quench their excitement, but rather redirected it to a more appropriate source. First, He affirmed that He had indeed given them authority over demonic forces—"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" (v. 19). The reference to treading upon serpents and scorpions calls to mind the promise of Genesis 3:15 (with an echo of Ps 91:13), serpents and scorpions here being used as a symbol of evil spirits (cf. Rom 16:20; Rv 9:3, 5, 10). In fact, Jesus said that while the seventy-two were out proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, healing diseases, and casting out demons, He was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven (v. 18). Verse 18, by the way, is not a reference to the primordial fall of Satan; if it were, "saw" would be in the either the aorist or the perfect tense, indicating a distinct, discreet historic fall at a particular point in time. Instead, "saw" (ἑθεώρουν) is in the imperfect tense, and would be better translated "I was seeing" Satan fall like lightning from heaven—i.e., while the seventy-two were out ministering the gospel of the kingdom.²¹ The language of falling like lightning calls to mind Isaiah 14:12–14 and the apocalyptic downfall of the king of Babylon (a biblical figure for Satan).²² The point is that at the first advent of Christ, through His own ministry and that of His appointed emissaries, Satan's kingdom was crumbling before Jesus' very eyes, his throne was being torn down, and His captives were being liberated. There are amillennial overtones throughout this passage, for those of you who are eschatologically-oriented. At Christ's first advent, Satan was bound, and through the ministry of the gospel during this present age, His kingdom is being dismantled and plundered (cf. Mt 12:28–29; Jn 12:31; Rv 20:1–3). All of this was true, and was a cause for great joy.

But Jesus did not want the disciples' joy to be rooted in the authority they wielded, which could all too easily lead to arrogance and boasting, as we saw last week (Lk 9:46–56). So He

²¹ "The Greek tense of ["saw"] is imperfect, connoting something that Jesus saw happening over a period of time, presumably during the mission of the seventy(-two)"; Edwards, 312. See also Morris, 203–4; Garland, 428–29.

²² Edwards, 311.

redirected their joy from the authority that they wielded to the grace they have been given. “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20). “Are written” (ἐγγέγραπται) is in the perfect tense, and would be better translated “have been written,” pointing to the past act of God in inscribing their names in the book of life. When did God write the names of His saints in the book of life? Revelation 13:8 provides the answer— “before the foundation of the world” (cf. Rv 17:8). That is, God inscribed the names of His saints in the book of life, the immutable record of who will be redeemed by the blood of Christ, before any of us ever existed, before even the worlds began. Therefore, our inclusion in this book can have no reference to our willing or our doing, but is entirely owing to God’s sovereign grace.

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. (Rom 9:16)

That is grounds for great assurance; that is cause for great joy. Beloved, let us be a people who rejoice in sovereign grace.

For that is what our Lord Jesus rejoices in. After instructing the seventy-two disciples not to rejoice in their authority, but rather in their election, Jesus Himself “rejoiced exceedingly” (ἠγαλλιάσατο, a word meaning “exuberant ecstasy”²³) in sovereign grace. The tight connection between v. 20 and v. 21 implies that in redirecting His disciples’ focus to the fact that their names have been written in heaven, the remembrance of sovereign grace overwhelmed Jesus’ own heart and erupted in joy and praise to God.²⁴ Just look in awe at what transpires in vv. 21–22: Jesus the incarnate Son of God rejoices in God the Spirit to the praise of God the Father. Concerning what? What is the epicenter of this overflow of trinitarian joy? It is election; it is sovereign grace.

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. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the

²³ Ryken, 530. “The Greek *agallian*, meaning ‘exceedingly joyful,’ is the most exultant description of Jesus in all of Scripture”; Edwards, 313.

²⁴ Lagrange calls it an “explosion of praise”; M.-J. *Évangile selon Saint Luc.*, 2nd ed. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1921), 306; cited in Edwards, 314n88.

Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (10:21–22)

God the Son incarnate thanked God the Father in God the Spirit for hiding these things from the wise and understanding (the scribes, the Pharisees, the majority of the citizens of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, etc.), and revealing them to little children (fisherman and farmers, tax-collectors and prostitutes, etc.). Why did God the Father do this? Because “such was your gracious will” (ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου—“for such was your good pleasure”). Election magnifies God’s grace, for those who are saved cannot boast in anything, cannot glory in anything, but God alone. Then, God the Son incarnate praises God the Father for having delivered this sovereignty over to Him. Jesus Christ holds the keys to His kingdom, admitting those whom He chooses.

Jesus then turned to His disciples, that He might sweep them into His joy.²⁵ They are blessed, because the Son has chosen to reveal the kingdom to them. Furthermore, they are blessed because they are privileged to actually see the kingdom arrive, a privilege not granted to the many prophets and kings before them, who could only look ahead into the hazy prophetic future and discern the vaguest of outlines of the coming kingdom and its coming King. But here they were, seeing the kingdom come in real-time. And yet, we are even more privileged than they, for we see with the greatest clarity of all, standing as we do on the other side of the death and resurrection of Christ, of His ascent to the throne of God and the descent of the Spirit of God. Think, then, of how great should be our rejoicing in the sovereign grace of God!

The Message of the Harvest—The Gospel of the Kingdom

The Lord of the harvest has entrusted the present harvest to his church, which is both a great responsibility and a great joy, for His sovereignty ensures our success. First Baptist Nixa, let us be faithful with in this stewardship. Let us reap according to the rules of the harvest. Let us remember with sober hearts the penalty for those who reject the harvest. And let us rejoice in the sovereign grace of God that ensures the harvest.

²⁵ “The reference to ‘his disciples’ probably refers to the Twelve (and perhaps their auxiliaries, so 6:17, 20) rather than to the seventy(-two), for the seventy(-two) are not expressly referred to as disciples in Luke 10, and the use of ‘privately’ (v. 23; Gk. *kat’ idian*) often accompanies intimate fellowship with the Twelve alone in the Gospels”; Edwards, 317. On the other hand, vv. 23–24 reinforces what Jesus said to the seventy-two in v. 20.

And before I close, let me speak a word to those of you who remain unharvested and outside the kingdom. The message of the harvest is the gospel, and the means of the harvest is the Holy Spirit working through human messengers. Could it be that God desires you to be harvested today? I do not want to conclude this sermon before sending my scythe through the field in order to see if any wheat may be ripe for the harvest.

There is one eternal and triune God, who created all things for His glory. The pinnacle of His creation was man, created in His own image to glorify and enjoy Him forever. But from the beginning, all men have sinned and turned away from God in unbelief and rebellion. All men inherit from that first man a condemned state and a corrupted soul, and we add to our guilt every moment of every day. We enter this world spiritually stillborn—dead in our trespasses and sins and under His wrath. But in His great mercy, God sent His eternal Son into this world, to take on a full and complete human nature, and to be come our representative in His life, death, and resurrection. This, Jesus Christ did in perfect righteousness. And now, the crucified and risen and ascended Christ reigns at the right hand of the Father as Lord of all. And in the gospel He offers full and everlasting salvation to all who will repent of their sins and trust completely in Him. To those who call upon Him in repentance and faith, God will credit Christ's perfect righteousness and Christ's perfect atonement, such they will stand before Him, now and on the day of judgment and for all eternity, justified.

But you will not, you cannot, respond in repentance and faith, unless or until God imparts to you spiritual life by His Spirit. Has that happened to you this morning? Are you experiencing the conviction of your sin, the burden of your guilt, and a deep and gnawing hunger to be forgiven of your sin and reconciled to your God? Then call upon His name this morning. Cry out to God for the forgiveness of sins and for a new heart, on the basis of Christ's redemptive merits alone. Then, at the conclusion of this service, come tell one of our elders, and we will instruct you on what to do next. May the Lord of the harvest gather His wheat this morning.