

DCF:

Who gets the credit when an army wins a war? Or when a company makes a profit? Or when a sports team wins a game? Well, most of us understand that leaders give directions, but the soldiers, the workers, the athletes get the job done. They’re the ones who do the fighting on the battlefield. They’re the ones who run the machines, package the product and deliver it to the stores. They’re the ones who hit the ball, catch the pass or score the winning goal. Who gets the credit for success? In this world, it’s the workers.

In our study for today, Jesus flips this idea upside down when it comes to success in spiritual matters. When people believe in Jesus, that’s success! But, who gets the credit? **“WHO’S DOING THE WORK HERE?”** Let’s dig into God’s Word today, and see that Jesus is in command and that it’s His power that brings success.

Part One: Jesus is in command

So often we get the mistaken idea that Jesus had only a handful of followers. We talk about the 12 disciples and we know their names. We can name a few of the ladies that believed Him. Mary and Martha immediately pop into our heads. But Jesus had more than just these who believed in Him. Even after He called the 12 apostles to serve with Him, He still sought out more. Today, we meet 72 of those who answered Jesus’ call to “follow me.” We don’t know their names, but we see that they were willing to do the work of the kingdom.

Jesus appointed them to be His advance team. He ***“sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.”*** Jesus wanted them to prepare the people to receive His message of forgiveness and grace. He also gave them some instructions on how to go about this. He doesn’t want them to worry about food, sandals, or a place to stay. He doesn’t want them to be distracted by conversations with strangers as they traveled. They’ve got one job - prepare the way for Jesus. Keep your focus on that. And, as you’re doing the job, don’t look around for a better place to stay, or a family that can feed you better. Go! Focus on the mission.

Best of all, He gave them what they needed to complete this preparation mission. Most importantly, He gave them the news of the Gospel. Jesus is the Christ, the One chosen and appointed by God the Father to save people from the terrors of hell. Jesus also gave them power to cast out demons. That amazing ability was further proof that the words of Jesus were true. It was evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be. He is truly God.

Notice the urgency of this mission. ***“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”*** Jesus sees a whole world of lost sheep, and only a few workers to show them the way to eternal safety. He commands them to pray this prayer. ***“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”***

Now, I gotta say something about this prayer. We often use this passage when a full-time called worker is installed. That’s appropriate, isn’t it? But please notice something. This prayer is not for someone to replace you, but to join you in spreading the facts about Jesus. And what Jesus commanded the 72 to pray is our prayer today. We ask the Lord of the harvest to send us help as we tell others the Gospel news.

“Go!” He tells us. But where are we to go? Does Jesus want us to leave our families, our jobs to travel to Mozambique or Albania? Oh, a few are led by the Holy Spirit to do just that. For most of us, our destination where we prepare people for the Gospel news is where we are right now. Our destination is where we live and the circle of friends and associates that we have right now.

So, how are you doing when it comes to telling others about the Lord? So often we think that we’ve done all we can with the people we know, and think we could do a better job somewhere else if only God would move us there. Are we being honest with ourselves?

He was a young man working in the oil fields. His co-workers were an atheist, two Mormons and a lapsed Catholic. He talked about Jesus a few times, and was met with indifference or outright hostility. So, he gave up talking about Jesus. “Ah, I’ve done all I can” he thought. “I’ll just wait until God moves me to a better situation. Then I can really do the Lord’s work.” He gave up too soon. God wants

us to go and tell, and when we've done everything the Lord wants us to do, why, then He'll move us. And don't worry about the results of your witness. Remember, it is Jesus' power that brings success when and where He wills it.

Part Two: Jesus' power brings success

Our sinful nature tempts us to believe that it's our personality, our abilities or our persistence that really matter in spreading the Gospel message. We often focus on what we can see, don't we? You get a little bit of that attitude when you hear the 72 say to Jesus ***"Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."*** The 72 marveled at the power that they wielded. "Look what we did!" Jesus combats that thought by reminding them of what is more important. Your names are written in heaven.

How often don't we forget that it is God who causes faith to grow? How often do we forget that it is the power of the Gospel, not our personalities or abilities that does this? It is God alone who deserves the credit for creating faith. He chose us. He brought us into His family. He strengthens us. He is the One who gives us opportunities to serve Him and the desire to serve Him. Don't take credit for what He is doing in you and through you. Give Him the glory!

Oh, our new man, our faith nature does participate with the Holy Spirit when we serve Him. Christians choose to tell others about Jesus, read the Word, worship Him in church, be kind to those who persecute them, be honest, hard-working and forgiving. Christians do choose to do those things in response to being saved. But remember, every desire to do God-pleasing things come from the Lord. And when we decide to do those things and serve God, He delights in what we have decided to do.

And when God crowns our efforts with success? Realize we are simply His witnesses, His ambassadors, simply relaying what He has told us to say. It's his message that is the real power, the real reason for someone when they come to faith. It reminds me of two brothers who were fighting over a toy. One of them went to mom and complained that his brother was hogging the toy truck in the sandbox. His mom said to him "Tell your brother to share." So, he went back to his brother and said, "Mom said you gotta share that truck with me." And, he did. Now, what made that happen? Was it the brother, or mom's authority that caused sharing? Mom's authority, mom's message.

When we meet success, give the credit to the Lord's message for it. That's where the power lies. But will our delivery of the Gospel message always bring success? No. Jesus ***says "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."*** Don't take rejection personally. God is working through you, and simply asks you to tell others what you know and believe.

He knows what we are experiencing and delights in working through us. This is hinted at when Jesus says in verse 18 ***"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."*** Now, this can refer to Jesus' presence in heaven before the fall into sin when Satan rebelled against God and was thrown out. But could this also describe what happened when these 72 spoke the message of Christ and people believed? Could it be Jesus' way of picturing what happens when the power of Satan in a person's heart is broken by faith in Jesus? Or could it be both?

Either way, rejoice that God is working through you and that His power gives success. We are simply His ambassadors, His witnesses. We're like children planting seeds in Grandpa's garden. Grandpa was a fantastic gardener. His crops were always wonderful. One spring his grandkids came over, and he asked them to help plant his sweet corn crop. He had tilled and fertilized the garden, picking out the best seeds to plant. He gave each one seeds and directions on how to plant. Over the summer grandpa weeded and watered those corn seeds. Come harvest, the grandkids came over and helped grandpa pick the corn. Grandma prepared the corn for supper, and as they ate, the grandkids said "Boy, the corn we grew tastes great!" And grandpa just beamed with delight! He did all the work, but He absolutely relished sharing the success with his grandkids.

Jesus' power alone brings success in His kingdom, but He absolutely delights in sharing the results of that power with us. May we enjoy the success of the kingdom that His power brings!

AMEN