

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Dr John Nyquist used to teach a class at TEDS called “Personal Evangelism.” Everyone had to take it, and almost everyone dreaded it. Because each week for 10 weeks each student had to go out to some public place and strike up a conversation with a stranger about Jesus. One student from that era told about the experience. *“Walking up to a stranger and getting him to talk to you at all, let alone turning the conversation to Jesus was an incredible challenge. I remember one day my partner and I were at a very high end shopping mall. We knew that if we randomly approached people in the café court, security guards would kick us out. So we placed ourselves near the entrance of the mall and tried to walk alongside patrons as they came in. I remember one middle aged man, who turned out to be Jewish, being particularly hostile.”* (Russell Muilenburg, <http://sermons.spencerhope.com/sermons/spiritual-conversations>)

Heidi Ramer, who works with university students in Perth, wrote us this week about a wrap-up barbecue she’d had with 14 students in her evangelism group. They’d been doing the same thing. She wrote of their debrief, “One of the consistent and amusing stories was people talking about how much they had dreaded doing walk-up evangelism (attested to by colourful stories, descriptions of panic and avoidance, and pained facial expressions). But after they’d had a conversation or two, it really wasn’t that bad...and even, often sheepishly added, ‘pretty encouraging.’ So they’ve decided they’ll keep going with it.”

- B. Can you imagine what would happen if right now I said, “I want you all to get up and we’re going to all go out in this neighborhood and knock on doors and ask people if we can talk to them about our faith in Christ”? Of course, I’d probably have to stay and help out in the nursery. ☺
- C. We get a similar feel in the passage we’re going to look at today. Jesus has set his course for Jerusalem for the last time. Things are coming to a head. **Luke 9:51-10:1...** In the verses that follow, which will be our focus, Jesus gives

instruction to these 72 disciples before he sends them out. There are a lot of details in the story that are unique to that time and place. But there is timeless training here for us.

To be a Christian is to follow Jesus, and we cannot follow Jesus without him pushing us into his harvest field.

The first thing Jesus told them puzzled me. **V.2:** “*He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’*” Then in the next breath he tells them to go. So why pray?

What’s there to pray about? We have our orders. We know what we’re supposed to do. It often seems to me like the workers are *many* and the harvest is *small*.

I was stumped till I simply backed up to those verses just before this—those three conversations Jesus had in **9:57-62**.

People who said they wanted to follow Jesus weren’t so sure when they learned what it costs to “proclaim the kingdom of God.”

When you see the **comforts that must be sacrificed**, when you have **other responsibilities**, when you **aren’t quite ready to leave the life you love**—well, the field might just have to wait.

I’m guessing those 72 were just about as nervous as we would be. But Jesus didn’t really give them a choice. He just pushed them out! **Which is exactly what we are to pray for.**

When Jesus told them to pray that the Lord would “*send out workers into his harvest field,*” the word he uses was stronger than *send*. It means *thrust*. *Shove*. Just like Jesus did with those 72.

Notice that we don’t pray for *more* workers (there are plenty). We pray that God would thrust out those who are reluctant.

I. IF WE’RE SERIOUS ABOUT OUTREACH WE WILL PRAY THAT GOD WOULD THRUST HIS RELUCTANT WORKERS INTO HIS HARVEST FIELD. STARTING WITH OURSELVES.

A. I don’t know if God wants us all to walk up to strangers and initiate conversations about Jesus. I don’t know that God will call you to leave your home to represent him. But I do know that he will require us to leave our comfort zone.

We cannot follow Jesus and live in our comfort zone.

And I know that most of us won’t leave our comfort zone

willingly. So God has to step in and give us a push or it just won't happen.

- B. It is easy to forget that with the Lord it is all about the harvest. Jesus said he came *“to seek and to save the lost.”* I don't think that every field—every place where Christians find themselves—is ready to be harvested. People aren't just waiting to trust Christ. Paul said that some plant, some water and some reap. **But everywhere God sends us is a field with a harvest in view.** Where I grew up we have pastures and we have fields. Pastures are for grazing. Fields are for growing and harvesting. **God has no pastures; only fields.** And we're all expected in the field.
- C. But because we're so reluctant to follow Jesus this way we need to pray for God's strong hand in our backs. To *thrust* us out. To point us in the right direction. To give us courage to obey him.
- D. God uses unsettling circumstances to put us among lost people. In Acts, the church spread because of persecution in Rome. I've got friends who found their field among others going for chemotherapy several times a week. God thrusts Christian students into dark, ungodly schools. Is there somewhere in your life where you're in the uncomfortable company of unbelievers? There you go! I wonder if those 72 disciples got up that morning thinking they were going to listen to Jesus teach and instead found themselves thrust out to prepare people for Jesus?
- E. If we share Jesus' love for the lost—if we care about the harvest—then this is how we'll pray. I'm asking: **will you pray this way? Will you pray that God will thrust you into his harvest field?** I'm serious. I'm asking.

Vv.3-4... If you weren't reluctant before you might be after hearing that! Lambs among wolves?! And don't pack a thing?! Those were especially dangerous days. Jesus was on his way to *die!* At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples that in the future things would be so hostile that they'd need to take supplies with them. The situation was different here's a principle when Jesus sends us out to prepare people for him:

II. OUR WEAKNESS AND LACK ARE NOT LIABILITIES

- A. We are very vulnerable in serving Jesus. There are still wolves ready to eat God's people for lunch. The 72 were sent out like *lambs among wolves* but they all came back, and they came back rejoicing!
- B. And God's field work always seems under-resourced. Part of serving Jesus is not knowing how we'll get what we need. Remember the Israelites in the wilderness. Remember the Feeding of the 5000. God builds our faith but sending us out empty-handed. "*Don't worry about what you'll say,*" Jesus told us. "*The Holy Spirit will give you words.*" At the Last Supper Jesus asked his disciples, "*When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?*" "*Nothing*" they answered."
- C. So when you set out to serve Jesus, facing wolves and empty pockets, **do not be afraid of the wolves. And do not worry about what you don't have. We are on a journey to discover the greatness and grace of God!**

Vv.5-8... I picture two of these guys stopping at the first little house on the edge of town, peering in the door and shouting out, *Shalom! Ah, I'm Matthias and this is Simeon and, uh, well, Jesus is coming here soon and he sent us ahead to prepare your town for him.* And someone inside says, *Shalom! Welcome. Come in. Sure, you can stay here. Have you eaten?* Other times, it was, *Leave us alone! Beat it. And don't let the door hit you on the way out!* It may not happen like that today but it is still true that, whether welcomed or rejected, ...

III. GOD'S PEACE IS OUR PASSPORT

- A. *Shalom* was how people greeted one another in that day. But, at least from these disciple teams, *shalom* was more than a common greeting. **It was their passport stamped with the insignia of God's kingdom.** It was as if their passport was checked at the door; welcomed or rejected.
- B. There was power in that greeting. God's peace and blessing was actually conveyed. **V.6** says literally, "*If a son of peace is there...*" If someone is there born for peace "*your peace will rest on them.*" If they were welcomed, God's peace

actually rested on that household. God's blessing and delight, his rest and help. And other times God's peace was rejected. It wasn't that people didn't want peace, of course, but that they didn't want it from anyone associated with Jesus.

- C. I don't know just what the equivalent of that would be today in our setting but I know this: when we knock on the door of people's lives we are living benedictions to them: *Peace to you.* We carry the peace of the **God-blessed life**, the peace of **sins forgiven** and **guilt gone**, the peace of **God's comforting company**, the peace of our **hope** of heaven. We bring the peace of **living in the love of our heavenly Father**. Some people welcome that peace, even if we never say the word, and some—loving darkness rather than light—want us to leave.
- D. Many of you tell me that when I sing the benediction for you you sense the peace of God. Benedictions—these blessings—are not only for partings. They make great greetings as well. Imagine when you are with unbelievers that you are a living song of God's peace to them, just as if you were singing a benediction to them.

The essence of these disciples' mission is in **v.9**, "*Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*"

IV. WE GIVE PEOPLE A TASTE AND VIEW OF GOD'S KINGDOM IN ORDER TO PREPARE THEM FOR CHRIST

- A. Healing people was one of the signals God had promised would announce the coming of the Messiah. Healing the sick did more than alleviate their suffering. Since it was always done in Jesus' name, it validated Jesus as the promised Messiah. Then they'd say, "*The kingdom of God has come near you.*" Meaning, the reign of the Messiah is coming to town. You'd think every town would become like Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. People waiting with palm branches and shouts of *Hosanna! God saves!* You'd think!
- B. We Christians talk often of wanting to see people converted to Christ but the language most common in the Gospels is

to see people *enter the kingdom of heaven*. To enter the realm where God rules and blesses and saves. And Jesus is the way to God's kingdom, the life in God's kingdom, the truth of God's kingdom.

- C. When we go out to prepare people for Jesus they're not likely so clued in. But God is no less interested in persuading them to trust him, no less interested in welcoming them into his kingdom of peace. So he entrusts to us great authority in Jesus' name. You and I can confront what blinds them, what cripples them, what kills them—all in the name of Jesus. We do it by praying for them. We do so by stepping into their mess with the love and grace of Christ. God *wants* them to know he is near; that he loves them; that Jesus' name is mighty to save. He wants them to enter his everlasting kingdom of blessing and peace.
- D. Be confident in God when you are with unbelievers. Be confident that God is not reluctant to bless their lives. Jesus ate with sinful people because he was eager to find the lost sheep, the lost treasure, the runaway and rebellious sons.

There was one more important instruction: **vv.10-16...** Again, this situation was different than what we face in that these were the cities of God's chosen people who had centuries of God's promises and prophets, and now Jesus was coming to them in person. No community could be more wicked than that which rejected Jesus then. Our cities, for all their sin, are not like those. But there is a lesson here for us:

V. WE REPRESENT GOD'S LINE IN THE SAND. DON'T BE SURPRISED BY REJECTION.

- A. Let's focus on **v.16**, "*Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.*" Can you imagine being such a pivotal person in the lives of others?!
- B. Even when we feel like our witness is halting and inadequate we speak for Jesus. We speak for the Almighty God. When we tell someone that Jesus welcomes them into his kingdom, it is as if Jesus himself said so, as if a voice came from heaven. You may feel like a pretty inadequate

spokesman, but God authorizes and empowers your witness, and he holds people responsible eternally for their response to Jesus and your invitation to God's kingdom.

- C. *Illus.*: I've told you before about my visit years ago with a woman I'll call Sandy over at Einsteins. She's a charming and friendly woman, well-read and curious about others. She's not a Christian but freely talks of her Christian friends and even the Bible studies she's attended. She'd come to our 9/11 prayer service. One day, several years ago, we were visiting. She asked what I was preaching about and I told her, including the gospel aspects. Then I said, "*You know, Sandy, one of these days you have to make a decision about Jesus.*"

To my astonishment, she suddenly became upset and tears came to her eyes. I don't remember her saying another thing, but she gathered her stuff and just walked out. I was stunned. Bewildered. *What just happened?!* It took some time before I realized that was what Jesus talked about. That was the offense of the gospel. It was the line in the sand for the woman who thought herself so open-minded. It was a moment, I think, when eternity hung in the balance.

Conclusion:

So out they went. 36 teams, "*to every town and place where Jesus was about to go.*" Doing what all of Jesus' disciples must do. Because **to be a Christian is to follow Jesus, and we cannot follow Jesus without him pushing us into his harvest field.**

Well, I wonder what happened... out there among the wolves... out there with not so much as a sandwich in their pockets. I wonder what happened. I wonder what will happen to us.