

What is the Mission of the Church? Part 4: Marching Orders

Luke 10:1-12 ESV (Pg. 506) 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. **2** 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. **3** Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. **4** Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. **5** Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ **6** And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. **7** 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. **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.’ **12** I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”

- I. We have here Jesus’ instructions to 72 of his followers as he sent them out to proclaim to the people of Israel that the Kingdom of God had arrived, and more importantly that their the long-awaited messiah was walking among among them.
 - A. In Luke chapter 9, Christ had sent his 12 disciples out on a very similar mission to the one we find described here.
 1. We are told that Christ “gave them power and authority over all demons and (authority) to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.” Their mission was three-fold:
 - a) First, they were given authority to **1. Demonstrate Christ’s Power**. This is not something they could have done on their own! The power to cast out demons and heal diseases was delegated to them.
 - b) Second, they were commissioned to **2. Proclaim Christ’s Authority**. Did you notice that their message sounded much different than what is often proclaimed? It wasn’t just “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” They were declaring the arrival of the Kingdom of God.
 - (1) Their message was “There is a new King in charge! All the other kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of our God, and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15).
 - (2) They weren’t inviting followers into their new movement; they were declaring God’s absolute dominion over the whole earth.
 - c) Thirdly, they were empowered to **3. Represent Christ’s Presence**. Luke says they were sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God **and** to heal. This wasn’t just about going out and finding people to drag physically before Jesus, but to take Jesus to them; bringing his power to their door.

2. Now, just one chapter later, Jesus commissions a larger sampling of the masses that followed him, 72 in number, and has given them a very similar set of instructions. What does this teach us?
 - a) We learn that Jesus' intended that the responsibility for advancing His kingdom would apply to more than a handful of clerics, apostles, priests, pastors and elders.
 - (1) I was watching a documentary recently about the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. The major change occurred with an embracing of Shia, a minority sect of Islam, a sect that held vast theological differences from the majority Sunni Muslims.
 - (2) The Shiites believe Allah speaks to a select few clerics, who are subsequently empowered to rule with an iron fist in order to fulfill Allah's wishes (in the case of Iran it was the Ayatollah Khomeini).
 - (a) This is not what Christ commanded for the church, however. Every believer must participate in the demonstration, proclamation and representation that was originally entrusted only to the disciples.
 - (b) We can't tolerate a professionalizing of the ministry! Ephesians 4 teaches that God gave the church pastors, evangelists, etc. in order to "to equip ***the saints*** for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." We're all in this together!
 - B. Last week we talked about how John says "we know we are ***from God***". We pointed out that this means we are commissioned into Kingdom service by God. This morning, we will focus on our responsibility to ***locally*** demonstrate, proclaim, and represent Christ in our immediate surroundings.
- II. Notice that our text today began by saying that Jesus commissioned 72, and "sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go." In this opening sentence, we learn two very important principles about sharing the awesome message of Christ in our circles of influence.
- A. Jesus tells the 72 to go "two by two" there are probably a lot of reasons for this, but let me point out that Jesus seems to be indicating that reaching our friends, neighbors, co-workers and families is a task that becomes both safer and more effective as we bear the burden together.
 1. For example, when I am pursuing an opportunity to share the gospel with someone, I will often share that fact with my prayer partners so that they can pray too. I might invite my unsaved friend to a gathering or event where other believers will be present, like a church service, or small group.
 2. This way I don't feel alone in the work that I am doing. I am not trying to "get an evangelistic notch on my belt"; rather, I'm exposing my lost friend to other like-minded believers who may be used by God to bring understanding to a situation I'm not familiar with, or answer some question that I don't know the answer to. This is a great reason to be vitally connected to a church body!

- B. But Jesus also sent the 72 “ahead of him...into every town and place where he himself was about to go.” This makes sharing the gospel an act of faith. When I go, I go to where I am believing Jesus to show up, whether that is my school, workplace, neighborhood, social circle, or family. This imbues me with a real sense of mission in all of my activities. I’m preparing the way for Jesus.
1. This was the ministry of John the Baptist. He showed up, baptizing people for repentance, preparing them for when Jesus was revealed, getting Israel ready for the Messiah.
 - a) Isaiah had prophesied that John would prepare the way of the Lord, proclaiming, “Clear the road for him”. Do think that one of the reasons we have so little impact in our jobs and at school for the Lord is that we don’t really expect him to show up where we go?
 - (1) What does this look like practically? It means to **Be Intentional**. Do we show up at work every morning to expand God’s kingdom, or to earn a paycheck? Do we go to school to impact lives for Jesus, or primarily to get a diploma and get out of there. What is our intention?
 - (2) I lived for years being a very good Christian on Sundays, and a decent, moral guy Monday through Saturday. I wasn’t a **shame** to Christ at work, but I was there because I **had** to be. But when I was around 30 or so, the Lord convicted me of this, and I decided to go to work every day with an expectation of what Christ wanted to do through me. It changed my life, and I believe it created all kinds of opportunities for me to bring glory to his name.
 - b) Next it means to **Be Prayerful**. I cannot say that I have faith for that which I do not pray. How often are we found calling out the names of our lost loved ones to the Lord? When we are truly burdened for Christ to show up in their lives, we will be compelled to pray.
 2. This leads us to the next instruction of Jesus to the 72. “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.” Jesus is saying that the great need is obvious, but that there is a critical workforce shortage. So what should the church do? Wring our hands? Strategize? Rush into the fields?
 - a) The answer is first of all, “none of the above”. How often have we **gone** before we were **sent**? I am not suggesting that we need the heavens to part in order to know its time to share the Gospel, but that we need to pray for divine appointments and discerning hearts.
 - (1) Divine appointments speak to seemingly chance meetings arranged by the Spirit! They are when you or others find yourself in the right place at the right time to proclaim Christ’s story.
 - (2) We also long and pray for discerning hearts so that we will be led by the Holy Spirit to speak the right thing at the right time.

- b) We need to acknowledge that God alone is the Lord of the harvest. It is he who draws people to Christ and prepares them to believe and obey. But as his children, we should be praying for the harvest to come in, for his glory, and we should cry out like Isaiah, “Here I am! Send me!”
- III. Next, Jesus tells the 72, “(v. 3) 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.” Jesus says three things in this part:
 - A. First, this is not going to be easy! He uses the highly comforting analogy of sheep walking among wolves. This reminds us that we can anticipate rejection, persecution, and in some cases martyrdom. Wolves don’t bully sheep, they devour them!
 - 1. In other places, the New Testament tells us the basis for this expectation of rough-going, and the reward of it as well.
 - a) **John 15:20b ESV** “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” This is the basis for our expectation of persecution.
 - b) **Acts 14:22b ESV** “...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God...” The is the promise of reward to the persecuted.
 - 2. If you obey Jesus, you will be persecuted on some level or another, but you will be fellowshiping with the sufferings of Christ and gaining for yourself a glorious entrance to the kingdom!
 - B. Secondly, Jesus tells the 72 to leave all of their provisions at home (moneybags, knapsacks, sandals). Why would he tell them this? Because he wanted those sheep who would be sent among wolves not to depend on themselves, but upon the protection and provision of another. More on this in a moment...
 - C. Last he says, “greet no one on the road.” This is not to be rude, or dismissive of those chance encounters, rather it is an admonition to stay on mission.
 - 1. I can’t tell you how many mission trips I’ve been on where someone on the team gets distracted by the sights, or the cultural experience, and forgets that they are there to engage in God’s work of rescuing the perishing.
 - 2. But we also do it when we walk along the road of life, but our attention is constantly demanded by things we want or see, or the approval of others. Christ wants us to stay focused as we prepare our friends for his revelation.
- IV. Jesus next instruction is very helpful to successfully seeing people converted into obedient disciples. “(v. 5) 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.”
 - A. Jesus tells the 72 to identify “persons of peace”. This simply means to locate, by the Spirit’s leading, those who have been divinely prepared to

give you a hearing. Jesus is encouraging us to be evangelistic “snipers” by locating a target persons or families, and concentrating our efforts on them relationally.

1. Often times we are more prone to “carpet bomb” witnessing. We do this by delegating our witnessing to a t-shirt we wear, the bumper sticker on our car, or by having a big church direct-mailing campaign.
 2. But Jesus told us to be much more frontline and relational. He speaks of “entering houses” and “declaring peace”. You can’t do that with a t-shirt or a postcard. You must be face-to-face, one-to-one. It is oftentimes messy and awkward, but always reaps better results, even if it takes longer.
- B. But if it’s “messy” and “awkward”, how can you tell if you’ve found a person of peace? By that person’s willingness to hear, not by their immediate demeanor.
1. I have patiently shared the gospel with people who were very kind, and outwardly welcoming, who clearly had no desire whatsoever to believe and obey Christ. They weren’t persons of peace.
 2. I’ve also had outwardly hostile people, with well-rehearsed arguments about why the Bible wasn’t true, God didn’t exist, etc., who ended our talks with a direct or subtle “...but I’d like to hear more”. These were persons of peace.
- C. Furthering this point, when Christ says, “(v.7) 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”, he is speaking of pursuing conversion through genuine relationships; ones that take time and effort, faith and patience.
1. He’s saying to stick it out with people by “remaining in their house”. Because he’s speaking to Jews with strict dietary laws, he tells them to “eat what is set before them”. To us, He saying to come into where they live culturally. Engage in meaningful dialogue in order to better understand who they are.
 2. When you find them in the throes of immorality, don’t wag your finger and condescend to them for their naughtiness! Use that opportunity to demonstrate how the gospel provides a much or satisfying answer to life’s problems, demands and temptations. Be patient and considerate.
- D. Christ’s next instruction is where the rubber meets the road. “(v.9) Heal the sick in (the town) and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ When was the last time you dared to pray for someone that you knew was not yet a Christ follower?
1. And I don’t mean just at night, kneeling by your bed, but courageously looking someone in the eyes in their sickness, their despair, their lack and saying, “May I pray for you **right now**? I really believe God wants to do something miraculous to help you!”
 2. And then doing more than “saying grace”! I mean praying “Sunday-morning-in-front-of-all-your-Christian-friends” types of prayer, believing

that God was going to move heaven and earth to demonstrate his love for your friend.

- a) Jesus is telling us here not just to talk about the kingdom of God coming among the lost, but to put it on display!
 - b) If God began to rescue and heal your friends and loved ones, don't you think they would be a little more willing to listen to him?
3. For some of you, this may take more courage than anything else, but what would God do if we took him at his word? Would Lubbock be impacted?
- V. (v. 10) "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."
- A. Jesus now tells us how to respond when we are completely rejected as we proclaim his message. It involves a discernment, an affirmation and a vindication. **The Discernment** speaks of our Spirit-guided determination that the rejection of Christ has been made; that judgement has been preferred to salvation. Matthew 7:6 "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."
1. It is at this point we must make clear what we feel and why: 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.'
 - a) This doesn't have to be done in a hateful way, or in a way that makes us sound like a "holier than thou", self-appointed prophet. But it must be clear. This is so the person will have no delusions about their spiritual state. In the final analysis, it is an act of love.
 - b) Many times I have had to say, "I think it would be better for you if we didn't talk about these things anymore. You are obviously not hearing what I am trying to share. Let me know if you ever want to talk again."
 2. Sometimes we feel like we're failing God if we move on from someone who is clearly not hearing what we're saying, but even the Apostles did this in the book of Acts.
 - a) We are often told that Paul would be preaching in a certain city and that many would hear him gladly and repent. But in almost every instance, we are also told that there were those who did not believe, who persecuted Paul and his team, and caused them all sorts of trouble.
 - b) But did Paul stay in that city until everyone agreed with him? No. He moved on to search for more fruitful fields in which to Labor.
 3. The reason we feel guilty is because we feel that it is our job to convince the lost. We must conclude that we cannot convince anyone. The Holy Spirit's job is to convince people. Our responsibility lies in **proclamation** and nothing more. We are not God's salesmen, but his ambassadors.

- B. **The Affirmation** is when Jesus says that we are to disengage from our evangelistic efforts with these words on our lips: “know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.”
 - 1. People need to know that they have been offered life, hope, and healing...that today is the day of salvation and a new king is in charge.
 - 2. This takes the democratic mindset away as an option. It’s no longer a matter of them making a decision for Christ; on the contrary, Christ has come to them and they have rejected him. They will bear responsibility.
- C. And that brings us to **The Vindication**. Let’s acknowledge the fact that none of us likes to be rejected, but when lost people reject you they are actually rejecting God because you are his representative. Therefore, Jesus reminds us, “it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”
 - 1. **Hebrews 10:29 ESV (Pg. ???)** How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
 - 2. You cant reject God and get away with it. He is not a party planner, or a door-to-door peddler, he is God! It is his great name that will be vindicated.
- VI. But we must remember that all of us who claim to be believers have a responsibility to proclaim this message, to demonstrate his power, proclaim his authority, and to represent his presence.
 - A. We may do so feebly, making many mistakes, but what you’ll find is that if you’ll just determine to obey, soaking your efforts with fully dependent prayer, Jesus will abundantly supply you with his strength.
 - B. Can you imagine what joy there will be in heaven as you are surrounded by many whom you were privileged to share the saving message of life, those who you saw make Jesus their Lord.
 - C. There are a lot of nuances to how to share the Gospel effectively, so keep praying, learning, and reading. But determine to get started today! Our time is short and our task is great.