

Week 1: The Harvest Is Plentiful

Passage: Luke 10:1-3

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 labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go your way; behold I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."**

Introduction:

As Jesus commissions His followers to take the Kingdom of God to the towns and villages in the region He begins by explaining what is before them. They are few, but those who need to hear this message are many. Jesus himself will follow the labourers but these labourers are an important part of the Kingdom of God. They are people sent by Jesus himself.

Sermon notes:

Mission is about Jesus

So Jesus sends the 72. Many scholars believe the number 72 (or 70) is symbolically significant just as the number 12 is significant in choosing the disciples. Some associate the number with events recounted in Numbers 11:16, 24 where Moses appoints 70 elders whom he gives a share of the Spirit so that they may share the burden of leading the people of God through the exodus experience. The likes of Tom Wright and Leon Morris suggest this says something profound about the identity of Jesus himself. Jesus in His life, ministry, suffering, rejection, crucifixion and resurrection is leading the new exodus, rescuing people to which the ministry of the disciples point to. (See Luke 9:31 for the interesting use of exodus language in Jesus' understanding of His vocation). Jesus Christ, his uniqueness, His identity as Messiah, Lord and Saviour needs to be lifted high as we champion and take part in mission. Jesus is sending assistants to help in leading the new exodus. **The implication being that our mission will be inviting people to join the new exodus found in the Kingdom of God.**

Mission is to all the world

Some, like Leon Morris and Joel Green, suggest the 70/72 reference maybe an echo of the table of the nations in Genesis. The point being that the choosing of the 72 anticipates the mission to the nations of the world and highlights the Gospel is for the whole world.

Mission is for all believers

Others, it must be said, see no symbolism at all. Darrell Bock believes that the significance of the choosing of the 72 lies simply in the fact that Jesus expands his ministry beyond the 12. The point being that mission is not confined to a select few. **There is always a need for more people to take up their cross (Luke 9:21-27, 9:57-62) and become harvesters for the Lord.**

Mission is best done in community

Another thing worth noting is that the workers were sent out two by two. This was no doubt for support, fellowship and mutual encouragement. It's reported here but also seems to be part of the practice of mission of the apostles moving forward through Acts. Wherever we hear of mission ventures we hear of small Gospel teams; Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Timothy, Barnabas and John Mark and on it goes. **The point is, mission is one of the richest expressions of Christian community. It seems that God uses community not only to send out workers (Acts 13) but mini Gospel communities help sustain us in mission.**

Mission proclaims God's salvation

Next we note that Jesus uses the farming imagery of a harvest. Often in the Old Testament (OT) harvesting is a metaphor for judgement (Isaiah 17:4-6; 24:12-13; Jeremiah 51:33; Hosea 6:11; Joel 3:13) but here it seems people are to be harvested for their own good, for the purposes of salvation. Like the fishing imagery of Luke 5:10, more and more people are to be brought into the Kingdom of God. As a further note Matthew records this same saying emerging from Jesus' compassion as he looks at a large, helpless crowd.

The need for more workers

Whilst the harvest is large the workers are few. Being a harvester is difficult. In several places in Luke chapter 9, Jesus often talks about the difficulty of following Him, it involves a cross (9:21-27) and putting Him above all other loyalties (9:57-62). There are great joys in living for Jesus and His Kingdom but also great costs and responsibilities. So much so, we are left wondering at the end of chapter 9 whether there will in fact be anybody left following Jesus. Happily in 10:1 we find out that there is not just 12, but in fact 72. **The reality of a huge harvest and so few workers remains a sad and challenging reality for the church's mission today.**

Pray for more workers

The reality of such a large harvest and such few workers could lead to the manic activity of the few trying desperately to overcome their limited resources by sheer effort of will. But manic activity is not the call for response. Prayer is. Look for God's sovereignty here. God is the 'Lord of the Harvest.' It is He who 'sends'. It is His 'harvest field.' The Gospel message expansion is in God's control. He is the one who 'thrusts out' labourers. **So in humble dependence on God's provision we are to pray. As we pray however we must be aware that we might just be the answer to our own prayers as the 12 and 72 were.**

Mission is costly

Linked to this cost of following Jesus is the reality in which the workers find themselves. Those who come to work for the Lord and seek to be harvesters will be walking into difficulty. This time Jesus uses the imagery of lambs being among wolves. Lambs are creatures without much protection; they can't protect themselves but need a shepherd to take care of them. They are followers yet can't look after themselves when danger is around. Wolves on the other hand search and are on the look out to catch a lamb and devour it. **A follower of Jesus sent into the harvest is like a lamb, protected by Jesus the True Shepherd, being chased and harassed by those who seek to have them devoured. They are in a vulnerable position and will be relying on the protection of the Lord as they seek to share the message of the Kingdom.**

Insider Story:

Ask someone in your congregation that has experience in being a worker for the Lord to share their story. What was their experience in being sent out into the harvest? What were the challenges for them as they served God in this way?

Watch DVD clip - Global Interaction cross-cultural worker Dave provides insight from his setting.

Conclusion:

- Jesus sends believers into their wider community to witness to the Kingdom of God.

In what areas of your community are you being a witness?

- There is a desperate need for people to commit to being a worker in the harvest.

Take time to discern whether the Lord is calling you to be a full-time worker?

- God wants us to pray for people to take up the task of working for the Kingdom.
Can you pray for more workers?

[Join the prayer campaign]

- Those already in the harvest working are in a vulnerable position.
Pray for those you know who are currently working at sharing the Gospel. They are in need of our prayers.

Take Home:

1. Spend some time in prayer; ask God what part of the harvest you are called to be part of?
2. Find out what cross-cultural workers your church supports; spend 10 minutes this coming week praying for them as they work in the harvest.