

An Honest Portrayal of the Harvest Field

Part 2: Problems and Perspectives

Luke 10:10-24

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Stephen Davey

Jesus commissioned 72 of His disciples to preach the gospel in towns and cities across Israel and God blessed these men with profound spiritual victories. But even in the midst of this “mountaintop experience,” Jesus had some lessons for His followers to learn—lessons about rejection, faithfulness, and pride. Whether times are good or bad, whether we feel useful in God’s service or stagnant in our walk with God, these truths remain unchanged.

Walter Payton was one of the most proficient pro-football running backs of all time. He wasn’t that big either—5-foot 10-inches in height and 200 pounds.

For many years, he held one of pro football’s most impressive records: the all-time rushing record at nearly 17,000 yards.

One author I was reading pointed out that he carried the ball nine miles over the course of his career up and down the football field. But the most impressive part is that he was knocked down every 4 ½ yards. Imagine running nine miles but being tackled by somebody every 4 ½ yards. What makes this record truly remarkable is that he kept getting up and running again.

What if Payton had gone to his coach after his first game and said, “I quit! Every time I try to run, someone’s always chasing me down.”

Of course not, that’s part of the game.

Now, this isn’t a pep talk about being a better football player. We’re involved in the Great Commission, and it isn’t a game. In fact, the gospel is not about winning or losing, it’s about Heaven or hell.

But the principle remains the same: there is no such thing as forward motion without resistance. There is no opportunity without opposition.

Here in Luke 10, the Lord has given us a training manual on what to expect when we enter the harvest field and serve Him.

In our session last Lord's Day, we dealt with the principles and promises the Lord provided them.

They included the promise that God has appointed you for a place, and He's appointed a place for you.

In fact, that's how this chapter opened in **verse 1**, with the Lord **appointing** 72 disciples to take the gospel out on the road, from village to town to city.

We covered the principle that there is more to do than you can ever accomplish.

Which is why the Lord taught them, here in **verse 2**, to pray for laborers, because the potential was greater than the participants.

Another principle unpacked here was the fact that the Lord is just as interested in developing your walk as He is in you delivering His word.

This short-term impact trip for these 72 men would be life changing and faith developing as they learned to trust the Lord for every meal and every single thing.

We pushed the pause button at **verse 9**, where the healing ministry of these disciples would allow them to deliver the message about the kingdom and the coming king.

How exciting this must have been for them all. The opportunities must have been incredible and the reception of these villages so encouraging.

Now for today, we arrive at that little conjunction that changes everything—that little conjunction, "**But.**"

It's about to introduce an entirely different subject in the training session of these 72 disciples.

You can circle the word at the beginning of **verse 10: But.**

I have read that at international meetings of the United Nations, or at other highly important summits of world leaders, the translators are trained to pay special attention to anything that follows the word, "But." Make sure you're listening to everything that follows "But."

You've learned the significance of that little conjunction when: your supervisor calls you and says, "You're doing a great job, but . . ."; or your teacher who tells you, "This is an excellent paper, but . . ."; or that girl you ask out who says, "I really like you, but . . .".

Never mind the "I really like you" part. You're paying close attention to what follows that conjunction.

I'm sure the disciples were paying close attention. Although the Lord doesn't negate the principles and promises He's just delivered, He's about to train them on what we'll call "problems and perspectives." They will need these before and after this ministry tour.

Here's the first one to consider:

There will be times when your gifting and ministry are not appreciated nor desired.

Jesus says to them here in **verse 9**:

“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 ...

Luke 10:9-10a

They probably wondered, is that possible? We’re performing miracles; we’re emptying emergency rooms and cancer clinics; the lame will walk, and the blind will see.

Who won’t want us?

That’s right; get ready for it; you will enter a town and they will not receive you.

Is that possible? Jesus effectively says, “It’s not just possible; it’s predictable. Expect it; anticipate it.”

There will be times when a friendly face will never show up, when your needs will be ignored, when you end up rejected or ignored or maligned, no home is open, and no heart is open either.

There will be times in your ministry when the only friendly face is Jesus and He’s invisible, so that might not seem to help at the time.

This was a reminder to them that no matter what they said or did—even if it was miraculous—they might not be received.



Describe a time when you were rejected from a gospel opportunity because of your faith. How did you respond to that situation? What did you learn from it?

And that’s because the message is so convicting. The gospel is a message of salvation and grace, but also of sin and guilt.

Not everyone is ready to listen!

Which is why this second perspective is something disciples of every generation need to remember:

The message of the gospel not only provides an invitation, it delivers an ultimatum.

Jesus says to them here in verse 10:

“... 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.’”

Luke 10:10b-11

This is a public warning in these days. They were to go into its streets. You could translate that “wide thoroughfares, not just one of them, but several. This would be where the greatest number of people will hear the verdict.

Adapted from R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 573

This word (*plateia*) refers to a well-traveled street.

Don't go to some little side-street and then sneak out of town. No, go out in the middle of Highway 55; stand in the middle of Highway 401, take off your sandals and deliver this prophetic illustration of judgment because of their unbelief and defiance against the King and His messengers.

Jesus goes on to say in **verse 12**:

“I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”

Luke 10:12

The reference here to “**that day**” is a reference to the final judgment of the unbelieving world, described in Revelation 20. It's the great white throne judgment that will condemn the unbelieving world to eternal judgment.

Everybody knew about Sodom, that city given over to homosexuality. The apostle Peter referred to this city as being filled with people who were indulging in defiling passion (2 Peter 2:10). They became known as a city of sexual immorality that

faced this unique judgment of fire and brimstone.

But you need to understand that this would have been a shocking message.

Read it again:

“I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”

Luke 10:12

That town who refused the disciple's message.

This clearly indicates degrees of punishment in hell and as far as God is concerned, the sins of sexual immorality evidently aren't the worst sins, so to speak, deserving the greatest judgement.

These cities that refused the messengers of Jesus, these villages that had received greater revelation and miracles as well as the opportunity to believe but rejected it all, will end up facing a more severe judgment on that final day.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 2* (Baker Exegetical, 1996), p. 1002

This would be a staggering message to deliver. Let me put it another way; here's how they would've heard it:

People who lived in Sodom, back in Genesis 19, who are now awaiting their final judgment will end up getting a lighter penalty than people living in these cities who reject the messengers of Jesus.

Let me boil it down even further: people who lived in Sodom will face lighter

judgment than people sitting in their synagogue.

And that's true to this day. The greater the light, the greater your exposure to the truth, the greater your coming judgment if you do not repent and follow Christ.

Delivering the gospel isn't offering options, it's delivering ultimatums.

But the perspective here is one of sadness and sorrow, not anger or hatred.

The word woe here in **verse 13** is a word that conveys a warning, but if you had heard Jesus speaking, you would have heard the tone of sorrow in His voice.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 264

The word refers to a lamenting, sorrowful warning.

Jesus says here in verse 13:

*“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. But it
will be more bearable in the
judgment for Tyre and
Sidon than for you.”*

Luke 10:13-14

Again, every Jewish person in these villages would have been shocked by this warning. It was turning religion on its head.

They knew that Sidon was the hometown of Jezebel, the wicked queen who died a violent death 840 years before the birth of Christ.

John Phillips, [Exploring the Gospel of Luke](#) (Kregel, 2005), p. 156

They knew that the city of Tyre was the ancient city that had worshipped Molech, whose idols were crafted with open bellies in which hot fires were stoked, into which people placed their babies as sacrifices.

Sodom and Sidon and Tyre are going to get off easier in that final judgment.

And what about the city of Capernaum? Jesus adds a special woe to them here in **verse 15:**

*“And you, Capernaum, will
you be exalted to heaven?
You shall be brought down
to Hades.”*

Luke 10:15

Hades is the place of where all unbelievers go, where their spirits are given temporary bodies and suffering begins as they await their final judgment. We will find more on that later from the Gospel of Luke.

Again, this was shocking to the people of Capernaum because Capernaum had been homebase for Jesus for some time. He had taught in their synagogues, healed there, preached there. Peter and Andrew were from this town.

Capernaum should have a head start into the coming kingdom of God?

No, Jesus announces, they are rejecting their Messiah and heading for eternal judgment.



What is the 21st century version of “Capernaum” as Jesus describes it? When Jesus pronounced woe on Capernaum, who would he be speaking about today?

Here’s a third perspective to keep in mind, as Jesus prepares these 72 disciples:

Remember that rejection is not necessarily personal; it is ultimately spiritual.

Verse 16:

“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.”

Luke 10:16

So ultimately, this is the rejection of the kingdom of light by the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus trains His disciples to understand that rejection isn’t to be taken personally, even though we all feel it personally. And it never feels good.

Jesus is giving them—and us—the right perspective; these cities and villages are rejecting the King’s representatives because they are rejecting the King.

We have in our church family a diplomat from South Korea, assigned here to an embassy post for a few years. How our country views her is tantamount to how our country views her nation. She represents her nation.

That’s the idea here. This village has rejected the diplomats of the King which makes them responsible for rejecting the King Himself and His kingdom.

They didn’t like the message; they weren’t about to surrender their lives to the King.

By the way, this was a subtle warning to these 72 disciples; the rejection of their message did not mean they were to change their message.

They’re not to conclude that they need to tailor it better to the needs of their audience or tone it down to make it a little more appealing to the masses.

The truth is our message is becoming more and more unwanted; our morals are becoming more and more offensive; our viewpoints are becoming more and more repulsive.

Jesus told His disciples in **John 15:18**, and here’s your perspective today: **“[The world] has hated me before it hated you.”**

Jesus never trained His disciples to be appreciated or applauded; He prepared them to be rejected.

Now following verse 16, some time elapses and we're not told how long. These men take off in pairs and then sometime later—a few weeks more than likely—they all returned, which indicates that Jesus had given them a specific time to return.

Evidently, despite everything that must have happened, and we're given very little information, we *are* told that they all returned excited.

Verse 17 says:

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"

Luke 10:17

Out of everything that had happened, this was the most exciting. With child-like enthusiasm, they're reporting: "***Even the demons obeyed us.***"

That's like an excited child telling you, "I got to go to the beach, and I even saw some dolphins" or "We went to Washington, D.C. and we even saw the oval office." That's the idea here: "Lord, we saw some exciting things, but listen to this, ***even the demons are subject to us in Your name.***"

And you would expect Jesus to say, "Way to go! That's amazing!"

No, and here's the right perspective to keep in mind:

When ministry focuses on accomplishments, pride is hovering nearby.

Now verse 18, here's the Lord's immediate reply:

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Luke 10:18

Don't miss the fact that Jesus has just revealed His preexistent deity; He was there in the beginning days of creation when Satan fell. "You men saw a few demons depart from tormented lives; I saw their leader defeated in his attempt to unseat the Triune God. I was there to watch Satan fall like a streak of lightning in a darkened sky."

Jesus is effectively reminding them that Satan fell because of his pride. In other words, don't fall into the same trap and be ruined by pride.

"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

As accomplished as you are, as fruitful as you are, as effective as you might be, that's when you need to be most careful of the lurking danger of pride.

I like the way John Ryle put it in his notes back in 1879, as he wrote on this text:

“There was self-satisfaction in their achievements and the Lord saw how much they were lifted up by their victory. But we all long for success—we all long to see Satan’s kingdom pulled down and souls converted to God. The desire is right and good. Let it, however, never be forgotten that the time of success is a time of danger to the Christian’s soul. Few people are like Samson who can kill a lion without telling others about it. Most of Christ’s laborers in the harvest field have as much success as their souls can handle. This is the time when we need to be doubly watchful over our own hearts. There are few Christians who can carry a full cup with a steady hand. In the midst of our triumphs let us cry earnestly, ‘Lord, clothe us with humility’” (J. C. Ryle,— 1879).

J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke* (Evangelical Press, originally printed in 1879, reprint, 1985), p. 171

Following this warning, Jesus informs them that they are going to have even greater success in ministry, **verse 19:**

“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.”

Luke 10:19

Scorpions are used to describe demonic forces in Revelation 9; Satan himself is referred to as a wicked serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Clinton E. Arnold, gen. editor; *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 413

They are deadly and dangerous enemies, but Jesus is essentially telling them that they are personally immortal until their task is done. “Nothing can stop you; you will see even more of what you’ve just experienced.”

However, and here’s another perspective to keep in mind:

Your joyful spirit must not depend on ministry perfection or completion, but on your final destination.

Verse 20:

“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Luke 10:20

The word “written” means to inscribe formally and solemnly. It was used in these early centuries for signing a will, a marriage document, a peace treaty, or the registry of citizens in a town or city.

Here’s something to get excited about: not how perfect your ministry is going or how much you seem to be accomplishing; no, the fact that your name has been entered by God as a citizen of Heaven.

You have been enrolled in the registry of Heaven.

And God doesn’t have an eraser. He writes your name in there with a permanent marker.

Don't get so caught up in what you're doing on earth that you forget your reservation in Heaven.

And with that Jesus begins to rejoice here in **verse 21**:

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father ..."

Luke 10:21a

By the way, don't miss the trinity at work here. You have Jesus, God the Son rejoicing; He's accompanied in prayer by the God the Holy Spirit, giving praise and thanksgiving to God the Father.

All three persons of the triune God in joyful concert together.

Which leads me to another perspective here, number 6:

Encouragement in the harvest field depends on the mystery of God at work in the world.

In the end it's all about Him!

Notice verse 21 again:

"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."

Luke 10:21b-22

In other words, we don't understand why some believe who know so little, like little children; and then why are there many who won't believe who should know better.

We leave this to the mystery of the will of God.

But if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in the harvest field and are even rejoicing over people who are saved, that's another way of saying, *you're not working for Him alone.*



Sometimes God works in obvious ways in our lives and sometimes he moves behind the curtains. When in your life have you noticed God working in hindsight, even though you didn't see His direction in the moment?

You're not alone. The Triune God is at work behind the scenes.

There is one more source of encouragement in the final words of Jesus, number 7:

The unique privilege of where we are in redemptive history invites us to give praise to God.

Verse 23:

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."

Luke 10:23-24

And that's true to this day.

Imagine what God has revealed to you in this dispensation—in this church age—that even the prophets didn't know (Isaiah and King David didn't know what you've learned from Jesus).

Imagine what God does through you; you get to introduce the Messiah to the world by name.

Just imagine what God has done for you; He has redeemed you and your name has been entered into the registry of Heaven.

You are a citizen of Heaven.

And that's reason enough, by the way, when you're tackled, knocked down and rejected, to get back up with the gospel in hand and keep pressing on for the goal line; the coming kingdom of Christ is just ahead.

These are the principles and promises and problems and perspectives that keep us heading in the right direction for the right reason as we serve in the harvest field of our world today.

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