

✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

Three More Disciples?

Last week, we heard about three men, on whom Jesus made demands. One man was concerned with comforts—would he have somewhere to lay his head?; another with responsibilities—would he be able to bury his father?; and another with relationships—would he be able to say farewell to his family? Each had legitimate, reasonable concerns. But none of these three concerns is more worthy than being in the presence of God in Jesus Christ. None of these concerns is more urgent than Jesus' journey to the cross, and his mission to prepare his people for his ultimate sacrifice. He was inviting these men to share in his ministry and to bear witness to his death on the cross.

What became of these three men? Did any of these three men become Jesus' disciples? Or, did they become the very men who yelled, "Crucify him!"? We don't know what became of them. We shall have to wait for the Day of Judgment to find out what became of these three men.

The Seventy-Two

Our passage this week confirms that Jesus was not using hyperbole when he invited these men to follow him and demanded that they cast aside their comforts, their responsibilities, and their relationships. Did you notice how Jesus sent out his seventy-two disciples? Did you notice what they were allowed to bring with them and what their mission was?

What preparations did Jesus allow these men? They were to carry no moneybag, no traveler's bag, no sandals, and make no greetings. They had no hotel reservations. They were to enter cities with a message, and if there was a son of peace, they would be welcomed into the home. There they would stay, heal, and preach. Otherwise, when they found themselves to be unwelcome in a city, they were to leave the city, shake the dust off their feet, and declare God's judgment:

[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. (Luke 10:11–12, ESV)*

What was their mission? These men were preparing the towns along the way to Jerusalem to receive Jesus. And the towns were to receive these men, as if God himself had come to them. Woe to those who reject God!

[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, ESV)

The seventy-two men were sent out into the towns ahead of Jesus to prepare his way, bringing nothing other than themselves, the message of the kingdom, and the authority of Jesus. But they were not sent alone. Each man was paired with another; so there were thirty-six groups, two men per group. We do not know all of the towns which these men went to, only that these towns were on the way to Jerusalem, as Jesus made his way to the cross.

Now we see that the demands Jesus made on the three men from last week (end of Luke 9) were critical to this mission. Our three men from last week would not have done well if they had ignored the warnings of Jesus. They were given no hotel accommodations. Each of the pairs were to continue, town after town, until they found a son of peace who would host them, giving them food and a bed. There they were to remain—however good or bad, clean or unclean the food is—until they were finished healing and preaching. But there very well may have been nights on their journey when they found no one to take them in, where towns rejected them and they would have had no place to stay. Our man from last week who sought the comfort of a bed would not have been ready or suited for this mission.

The seventy-two were sent out into the towns, greeting no one on the way. This does not make the men unfriendly; it makes the mission *urgent* and *focused*. Perhaps the most appropriate way to think of this mission is as military orders. The Lord Jesus has given these men orders, and just as men making their way to the battlefield would not stop for greetings or small chat, neither will these men whom Jesus has sent out stop for greetings. It would be inappropriate for them to stop along the way for conversation. It would go against their mission.

With this urgency and focus in mind, we can dismiss the other two men from last week — the man who wished to bury his father, and the man who wished to bid farewell to his family. Both are good things to do. But the urgency and focus of this mission leaves no time or place for such things.

The orders come. The men are sent. The men go.

Mission Report

How did the mission go? Were these men successful in their mission?

The seventy-two are extraordinarily successful. They were commissioned to heal the sick, but they find that, just as when the twelve disciples were sent out, so too even the demons submit to them. Jesus, *as the Lord*, gave them this authority; they exercised this authority; and they rejoiced in carrying out his mission. They do not return discouraged because of those who rejected them; they do not return disgruntled from having to go without sleep or food. They are thrilled to share in the ministry that Jesus has allotted them. Still, even their joy, Jesus reorients.

What should be their source of joy? Not their success in ministry! Not the power over sickness and demons Jesus granted them! Their source of joy is that their names are recorded in heaven. Their names are recorded in the great book, the *Book of Life*, which is the citizenship records of the men and women and children whose rightful place is heaven. So, too, all who believe and are baptized have *our* names recorded in the Book of Life. So, too, we who enjoy the privileges of citizenship in this great nation, enjoy the unimaginable privileges of citizenship in heaven — chief among them being in the presence of God *forever*. This joy we share is the great joy that the seventy-two men were bringing, two-by-two, town-by-town. This immense privilege was what offered. But some towns rejected these men and this message, which means they rejected this joy that comes from God's presence.

Consider the judgment that was pronounced on Chorazin, on Bethsaida, and on Capernaum. Each of these cities eventually fell to temporal judgment: Chorazin was destroyed in the 1st century; Bethsaida in the 4th; and Capernaum fell to ruins by the 11th century. But Jesus' judgment against them is about the Last Day, about the Day of Judgment:

[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. [14] But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. [15] And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?

You shall be brought down to Hades. (Luke 10:13–15, ESV)

This judgment — this judgment on the Day of Judgment! — reveals how incredible of a mission these men were on. Everything about the mission of the 72 is about the Day of Judgment. What Jesus has in mind for these seventy-two men, what Jesus has in mind for the towns who received them, and what Jesus has in mind for these towns who rejected him is the same — his judgment on the Last Day. There, he will bring the seventy-two and those towns who received him with him into heaven. There, he will condemn the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum as unrepentant — as deserving eternal death.

This Congregation

What is more appropriate for a congregation of seventy regular worshippers than hearing Jesus sending out the seventy-two? As we have just heard, seventy is an extraordinarily advantageous number of disciples. We are not, as some might try to trick us into believing, a small congregation — but rather a congregation perfectly suited to

carry out extraordinarily effective ministry. We are a congregation of extraordinarily advantageous size to share the message of the gospel — to share that Jesus is Lord, that he died for you and for me for the forgiveness of sins, that he rose from the dead so that we will also have life, and that he will raise us from the dead on the Last Day to bring us to be with him forevermore. Christians are the only ones in the world who have this message of life. We are the only ones with true hope.

What will we do with this hope?

We may have concerns about how our society is becoming more or less religious, more or less Christian, more or less church. But the harvest isn't over! Notice what Jesus says to the men before sending 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.”*

The harvest is plentiful, and there is always a need for more workers — more pastors, more preachers, more teachers, more evangelists, more disciples. The harvest will always be plentiful up until the moment that the harvest is *finished*, up until the moment that the full harvest of souls has been brought in — and then Jesus will return. So one thing to do with the great hope we have been given is this:

Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

We pray that the Lord Jesus raises up pastors, preachers, teachers, evangelists, and disciples — to share that the kingdom of God has come near. So, let us together commit to praying for *this*.

Fruitfulness

The Lord *will* gather in his full harvest; the Lord invites us to share in his mission and his ministry.

Jesus called the twelve disciples at the beginning of his ministry. Jesus appointed seventy-two *in addition* to the twelve. That means Jesus appointed 84 disciples who were sharing in the ministry he gave them. The Lord has many, many more now sharing in his ministry. So, too, Jesus has allotted a share of his ministry in this congregation of seventy regular worshippers. He calls us to be *fruitful*.

Good fruit takes time — just as an orchard of olive trees or a vineyard takes years. We should therefore not view a lack of new Christians here as unfruitful, but rather we should view this time as tilling the soil, allowing our roots to become resolute, and absorbing the nutrients of Christ. There is no fruitfulness apart from him.

Jesus will make us fruitful. Some of this fruit comes from fighting against the sins in our body, heart, and mind. Some of this fruit the Spirit pours into our hearts — the Spirit's fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control — fruits that cannot exist individually. When we resist sins, when we produce the fruits of the Spirit — this congregation *as a united whole* is more beautiful and more fruitful.

The Lord Jesus does not see things as we do, and he does not discriminate as we do. The Lord sent the once demon-possessed man back to his hometown, back to all of the respectable people who had done the despicable thing of sending Jesus away. We cannot imagine a man more unqualified by our standards than someone who had no home, no sanity, no clothes, and who had been living in a graveyard. And yet that is the man that Jesus sent. That man was qualified to preach because Jesus sent him, and he responded in obedience.

Likewise, we need not worry so much about how equipped, prepared, or capable we are for ministry. For the Lord Jesus is more than capable of deploying each of us in his ministry.

How will we respond to the allotted share of the ministry which Jesus has given us? What will we do with the news of the kingdom of God? What will we do with this message of hope we hold—the message that promises forgiveness, resurrection, God's presence? That promises judgment to those who reject Jesus?

Let us be counted among those, like the twelve and the seventy-two, who are found faithful and fruitful.

✝ All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.