

Sermon 51: Luke 10:1-16: Preparation for ministry: The trust we exercise

OUTLINE

Trusting in prayer
Trusting in persecution
Trusting in provision

INTRODUCTION

Phillip Ryken tells the story of 'The China Gospel Fellowship—also known as Tanghe—is a large network of Chinese house churches. Early in 1994 the fellowship began collecting donations for a special missionary trip. Since most of the group's members live in poverty, their giving was sacrificial. People sold their chickens or gave up money they had been saving for marriage. No matter what the cost, they wanted God to be glorified in China. When sufficient funds had been raised, the fellowship held a worship service at which they commissioned seventy young evangelists to go out two-by-two and preach the gospel in the far provinces of China. The missionaries were young and single, some of them still in their teens. Given only enough money for a one-way journey, they were told to trust God to provide for their needs. This trust was well placed, for God was faithful to provide. Six months later all of the missionaries returned home safely, having established new churches in twenty-two of China's thirty provinces.

In sponsoring this mission, the Tanghe were carrying out the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. They were also following the example of Jesus Christ, who "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" (Luke 10:1).¹

Luke 10:1-16 tells us the story of the second wave of disciples being sent out to Israel, the sending of the 70/72, depending on which ancient manuscript you use. Many like 70 because there are 70 nations in the table of nations in Gen. 10; or because there were 70 descendant of Jacob that went to Egypt when Joseph was 2nd in command; or because Moses appointed 70 elders of the people of Israel. The size of this section reveals its importance in Christ's ministry. It is important because the time is growing short for Israel to embrace her Messiah. Christ is increasing the amount of sent out disciples to cover more ground because the time is growing short. Although the sending out of the 70 is not a model for us as a church, not every local church is to send out 70 evangelists, it does have important lessons for us who have been called to be part of the Great Commission.

We will be dividing this section under two headings, firstly we will be looking at the trust we have to exercise in fulfilling the great commission, and there are three things we need to trust God in, in prayer, in persecution and in provisions. Then secondly, we want to look at the message we are to declare, a message of peace, of the kingdom, and of judgement.

Trusting in prayer

V1, '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.' We see in v1 that Christ sends out these men ahead of Himself. What is important to note is that fact that it is not just the 12 but many more. Some wrongly think that the Great Commission that is

1 Ryken, P. G. (2009). [Luke](#). (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 509–510). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

coming later was only given to the 12 and not to the whole church but here we can see that Christ is already working with more than the 12. This reminds us that the Great Commission is given to the whole church. The command lasts as long as the promise, 'til the end of the age'. The command lasts until the ends of the earth are reached, and there are still peoples who have not been reached today. This does not mean that we are all pioneer missionaries, though it will mean that some might be. We all have a part to play in the Great commission. Housewives, the elderly, singles, youth, all of us have a part to play in praying, paying, going, or fulfilling some role that enables the church as a unit to be faithful to the gospel. There is the need on our door step and the need afar. Responsibility did not end with the death of the 12 apostles but continues with us.

V2, '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.' This is a saying that Jesus uses in more than one context in the gospels. He uses it here in reference to Israel, as well as in Matt. 9:37-38; but it is also a saying He uses in reference to the Samaritans in John 4:35. And we can safely imply that this is His attitude to the billions of souls in the world today. It is important to note the broader context in Matt. 9:36, 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples....' This is not the saying of a cold and calculating mind that is simply doing the math. Christ sees the masses and feels deeply for them. He sees their need, their vulnerability, and desires to serve them. This is a great challenge to us. We grow cold in our compassion, we stop seeing the needy masses and divide them rather in the world's categories or Boomers or Millennials; Labour or National; Maori or European. Christ views them in their spiritual need, He sees the deep extent of it, and His heart is moved to meet it.

He talks of the harvest being plentiful, but in proportion the labourers are few. How plentiful is the harvest today?

'If you measure the need by the number of people in unreached people groups, here are the top 10 countries:

1. India - 1,284,847,000
2. Pakistan - 198,455,000
3. Indonesia - 165,522,000
4. Bangladesh - 163,623,000
5. China - 146,215,000
6. Japan - 124,296,000
7. Iran - 81,619,000
8. Turkey - 81,091,000
9. Thailand - 68,064,000
10. Nigeria - 63,406,00²

What about labourers? 'It's estimated one missionary is needed for every 50,000 unreached person. As a result, we need 66,547 more missionaries to serve these people.' 'With 5.5 million full-time Christian workers [this includes pastors and home missionaries], a mere 7.6% are serving in another country.' The church has made amazing strides in missions, the impact of the missionary endeavour cannot be underestimated and we must give thanks to God for the work He has done in the last 2000 years. But the harvest is still great and the labourers are still few. But what about financing this endeavour? Here is a figure in

² <http://missionaryportal.webflow.io/stats#:~:text=World%20Missions%20Statistics-,How%20Many%20Missionaries%20Are%20There%20in%20the%20World%3F,are%20serving%20in%20another%20country.>

American dollars: 'Since it takes \$59,500 a year to support a missionary, we need \$3.96 billion a year to support these missionaries. It sounds like a lot of money. And it is. Yet evangelical Christians together earn \$5.98 trillion dollars a year. That means if every evangelical gave an extra \$6.63 for every \$10,000 we earn, that would cover all missionary financial costs.'

Christ gives instruction: 'therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.' Christ in the face of this need throws us upon God and two stark realities stand out. God is the Lord of the harvest. He is powerful, He is sovereign, He is in control. Christ reminds us of this that we pray with faith not despair. And we are told that it is His harvest. We can take the problems of the world on our shoulders as if we are solely responsible for them, but the harvest is His and we are co-workers alongside Him.

Not only does praying remind us who is in charge and who will secure the outcome. But prayer also forces us to search our own hearts to see if we are in line with the Lord's concerns. Do we feel for the people or are we caught up in our own concerns alone? Are we giving as the Lord has given to us? I am praying that God would send out missionaries, but am I to go? Lord, if I cannot go in what other way can I support the work?

Prayer not only changes us it also calls upon God and His power for the outcome. God uses prayer and appoints prayer as a means for His will. After prayer great things happen. Let me give you just one example, "The revival that came to England in 1859, and particularly to the preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, can be traced back six years to the prayers of his London congregation. Spurgeon himself commented: 'When I came to New Park Street Chapel it was but a mere handful of people to whom I first preached, yet I could never forget how earnestly they prayed. Sometimes they seemed to plead as though they could really see the Angel of the Covenant present with them, and as if they must have a blessing from him. More than once we were all so awe struck with the solemnity of the meeting that we sat silent for some moments while the Lord's power appeared to overshadow us; and all I could do on such occasions was pronounce the benediction, and say "Dear friends, we have had the Spirit of God here manifestly tonight; let us go home and take care not to lose His gracious influence." Then down came the blessing; the house was filled with hearers, and many souls were saved.'

Trusting in persecution

The second area of trust in is the face of persecution. V3, 'Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.' Christ's command to 'go'; is the same as His command to us, 'go.' Christ in sending them puts things in perspective. He is sending them out into an unbelieving environment. He is sending them into a place where the devil has those who will do his will in working against God. By this point in Christ's ministry there have already been attempts to kill Him, John 5:18, 'This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.' Luke's gospel has been focusing on mostly the positive reception of Christ, but we must always remember the insidious undercurrent of rejection. This reminds us that even though we are on the King's business the world is against Him. Even though the target audience is Israel, even though the message is the best news that can ever be heard, even though the reality of the Messiah among them is the most significant event in the history of their nation, even though there are miracles to prove the truthfulness of the message, we are walking into a war zone. We are on the side of truth and right but the world is not, they will be pitted against us.

Despite this difficulty and these odds we are called to go. Go, embracing hostility, go embracing rejection and death and persecution and mockery. Go, despite these things.

Christ uses the picture of lambs among wolves. Not even sheep or rams among wolves, but small, weak and helpless lambs. This picture of lambs indicates firstly, that we are not going out as well armed militants with aggression enough in our hearts to overcome every objection and obstacle with physical force. The lamb calls to mind the sacrificial animal that was given. Christ as the Lamb of God comes to the earth and gives Himself, He does not wage war against it, but rather dies as a lamb for its life. He was sent as a lamb, we are sent as lambs. The great irony is that in the book of revelation in the battle between the lamb and the dragon, it is the lamb who is victorious. And in our own struggle against the devil and the systems of this world that he influences against us, we overcome him as Christ did. Rev. 12:11, 'And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.' This is one of the most important verses in the bible for understanding our place in this world in this time when the devil has been cast down. We are not called to be political militants, but proclaiming martyrs. Lambs among wolves.

But friends, if we are lambs, then the Lord is our Shepherd. And if God is your shepherd, then no matter the situations that you go into, you shall not want. He will provide all that you need and will not tempt you beyond what you can bear. Despite the many anxieties that can come upon you in His service you will find rest as He causes you to lie down. And He will not feed you upon left overs but you will be nourished with green pastures. You will be fed and watered by the best food and from quiet waters. Though you may often feel depleted He will restore your soul. He will not leave you on your own but He will lead you. And He will take you by the best path, the paths of righteousness. And you will be given the best purpose to live for, for His name's sake. Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need not fear any evil. For He Himself is with you. His rod of strength and His staff of guidance are in His hand and He wields them with perfect skill on your behalf. And He comforts you when you are dis comforted. Even though you may be surrounded by enemies, the red eyes reflecting the camp fires surrounding the camp site, you will feed in confidence looking those enemies in the eye. Any wounds you get He will anoint with oil. And you will have a cup that is not merely sufficient but which overflows. This life will be full of goodness and mercy following you, and death is an entrance into His house. If you are lambs, then He is the shepherd who goes in search of the one, who carries it on His shoulders, who no one can snatch out of His hand.

Trusting in provision

The third area of trust is in the area of provision. If God is the Lord of the harvest, then just as Boaz provided for his harvesters, the Lord will provide for us. V4, 'Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.' The instructions here are similar to the instructions that Jesus originally gave to the 12 in Luke 9:3-5. Firstly, we are told that the disciples should take no money bag. This would be the regular traveler's purse with all the traveler's cheques for expenses. In other words, don't take any money with you. Now we all know that if you are travelling you need to have money. God is calling these disciples to rely on Him. God provides where God calls. Now one of the reasons for this would have been the particular nature of the mission to Israel. The Israelites would be tested in the area of hospitality. Would Israel receive God's messengers and this receiving indicated not only in a hearing but accommodating and enabling these preachers in their mission through hospitality? Hospitality was the primary way in which the message was spread. This is why John says in 2 John v10-11, 'If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do

not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹ for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.' This is not indicating that you should not allow Mormons or Jews into your house but rather that you should not enable them to continue to spread their ministry through hospitality. Not taking money with you implies faith in God on the part of the one going to spread the word. But notice that there is a demand on the one who hears. Do you believe the word and will you provide for that word to be spread?

Some might look at this verse and think that this verse pushes us towards a view of missions that is run on faith alone. Today missionaries go through a process of training for years before being sent out, and they have to have raised a large part of their support through local churches before a sending organization will send them. Are these organizations in disobedience to God because Jesus sent out these with no moneybags? No, we are in a different situation. Now if some in their naivety trusting in the Lord decide to go out, and the Lord provides for their faith, praise God. As we have said before faith is like a bowl, no matter what size bowl you bring to God He is able to overfill it. But this particular method of no money is not the rule, though faith in God is. We must not forget this life of faith for ourselves; will we attempt great things and expect great things because we have faith in a great God?

Not only are they not to take money, nor are they to take spare provisions in a knapsack or a spare pair of shoes. Here there is another challenge and the challenge is in the area of comfort and contentment. Listen to v7-8 as well, '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. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.' Here we see that the disciple is not to go from house to house deciding who provides the best cooking and who has the softest bed. They are not to go from house to house like money of the stoic teachers did with a money bag in hand collecting money. They are to eat what is set before them. No doubt Jesus was anticipating that many of those who would receive the word would be the poor and despised of this world. The disciple who spreads the word recognizes this and accepts whatever provisions God provides through His people. Paul applied this in his own ministry, Phil. 4:12-13, 'I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.' 'According to J. C. Ryle, the austere instructions that Jesus gave to his evangelists 'ought to remind us of the necessity of simplicity and unworldliness in our daily life. We must beware of thinking too much about our meals, and our furniture, and our houses, and all those many things which concern the life of the body. We must strive to live like men whose first thoughts are about the immortal soul. We must endeavour to pass through the world like men who are not yet at home, and are not overmuch troubled about the fare they meet with on the road and at the inn. Blessed are they who feel like pilgrims and strangers in this life, and whose best things are all to come!'³

And we see as well that they are not even to greet people on the road. Why is this? Is Jesus encouraging a form of rudeness where we don't have to give people common courtesies? The answer is, no. In the ancient world greeting someone was not the simple event of shaking hands and asking how do you do? Greetings were long strung out affairs that often ended in delays. There is an air of urgency about this mission that means the disciples must not get caught up in niceties but must be busy about the work. This sense of urgency is something that we can apply to our own situation. Are we so self-absorbed that

³ Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, p. 517).

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we have lost sight of that this world is coming to an end, that Christ is going to return, that every eternal soul is hanging over an eternal destiny between heaven and hell, that life is so fragile that any of us can die at any moment?

Let us conclude here: we are to go trusting in the Lord of the harvest. We exercise our trust in prayer, in persecution and for provision.