

## Part 36: Hope and Hardship in Following Jesus

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This past summer, a couple guys from here invited me on a hike. I had heard rumors that the hike was difficult, but when they asked me to go, both of the guys assured me I could do it. When the morning arrived and the hike began, I quickly realized two things: that the hike was far steeper than I imagined and that I was in far worse hiking shape than my companions imagined me to be.

For those of you who haven't had the privilege of laughing at my expense yet, I made it approximately 2/10 of a mile up Mount Sentinel on my first attempt before insisting that Tyler and Paul go on without me, while I sat down on a rock, thinking I was going to die. Fast forward to just a few weeks ago, I asked some of the guys involved in GCF to hike Sentinel on a Saturday morning. Despite my utter failure the first time, I found myself wondering if, armed with a better understanding of the pitch of the trail, I could do it.

Now, I don't tell you this to humbly brag about my physical accomplishments – I did the hike. Don't be too impressed, I barely finished it, while most of the guys with me seemed like they had just taken a leisurely walk through Caras park. One of the guys did the whole thing in jeans. But with the knowledge of the reality of what lay in front of me this time, I was no longer shocked, but knew this is exactly what any would-be hiker of Sentinel should expect.

In our passage today, Jesus, on his journey toward the cross, sends out a group of 72 of his followers to proclaim the kingdom of God to villages and towns ahead of his arrival. But in His sending, the sovereign Lord of the universe doesn't want his disciples to be taken off guard when they encounter trial. He promises their provision at every turn and gives great hope to the 72, but also prepares them for the difficulty they will face in following him.

**Our main point** today is: Disciples have hope to endure hardship in labor for the gospel because of the promised harvest and their union with Christ.

And we will look more closely at this idea in three points: The Lord of the Harvest (1-2), the Laborers in the Harvest (3-15), and the Landmark in our Labors (16).

Read again with me from **Luke 10:1-2** as we look at our first point: The Lord of the Harvest.

Here, the "after this" calls us to remember what has come before, directly tying these verses to the immediate context. I'd like to look back at some of what happened just prior to our text today so we can get our bearings.

Chapter 9 of Luke contained not one, but two times where Jesus told his disciples that he was going to die as a substitute and defeat death in his resurrection. With his face set toward the cross, Jesus shows himself to be the Lord.

Chapter 9 also contains the transfiguration, where Jesus' physical appearance is transformed before the disciples in blazing glory, clearly portraying his divine nature. In this same instance, God the Father speaks audibly to 3 of the disciples, thundering on a mountaintop, saying: **"This is my son, my chosen one; listen to him!"** In this event, God the Father audibly affirms Jesus' sonship and authority. Luke wants us to walk away from the transfiguration convinced that Jesus is the Lord.

Then, chapter 9 ended with one of the hardest teachings to date in Jesus' ministry where three different men excused themselves from following Jesus by having their priorities out of whack. Jesus issues a stern warning that, "whoever puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God."

It is after this, that Jesus appoints the seventy-two to be sent out. So when Luke draws our attention to Jesus as Lord, saying, "After this, the *Lord* appointed", and again "pray to the Lord of the harvest" he wants us to see that Jesus is the one with *the* authority to call people to himself and appoint them to service in his name.

As good readers, we ought to have ringing in our ears the words of God the Father, ripping through the clouds: "listen to him!"

So here in verse 2, when Jesus refers to himself as the Lord of the harvest, what harvest is he talking about? Notice what Jesus doesn't say! He doesn't say: the fields for sowing seed are plentiful. He doesn't say: the seeds have been planted, go water. No, he says, the harvest is plentiful. The use of the word harvest tells us it's actually time to gather in the crops. And the Lord of the harvest says there's much to gather!

This harvest is people whom Jesus has ransomed for himself, who are ready and waiting to hear the gospel, so that they might be finally and decisively be adopted as God's sons and daughters. Jesus has prepared a plentiful harvest of people, chosen for salvation.

What does this plentiful harvest look like? Look at **John 10:16**.

Or consider **Revelation 5:9b-10**, where John sees a great multitude around the throne of God in heaven, singing to Jesus.

This harvest that the Lord has prepared consists of those ransomed and purchased by his blood, for his possession, who have not yet heard the gospel and therefore not yet repented of their sins and believed in Christ for salvation, but who WILL repent and believe because they HAVE BEEN spoken for by Christ's death on the cross.

I'll bet you've never heard the gospel compared to WWE. If you haven't heard of WWE wrestling, it's not wrestling, it's just a bizarre form of acting. I've never watched it, but I looked it up, and there is a pre-determined outcome for who wins and who loses long before one of those goofy, spandex clad phonies ever steps foot into the ring.

Well, in his promise of a plentiful harvest, Jesus is promising his disciples that the whole thing is rigged! In his sovereignty, he has chosen an abundance of people for salvation, whom he is drawing to himself. There's no shortage of people ready to hear the gospel, just believers willing to speak it.

Consider some numbers with me this morning. We are meeting today with 300 or so Christians, to worship Jesus together. Loudly and publicly.

We have a team of elders, who lead well in their shepherding and teaching the word of God publicly and privately. We have weekly men's and women's bible studies, discipleship groups, and biblical counseling where we experience gospel change in all of life together. We have access to loads of resources on the Sovereign Hope website alone aimed at deepening our love for Jesus and understanding of his gospel.

We meet weekly or bi-weekly for community groups, where we encourage one another and point each other toward Jesus. We have bible studies scattered throughout campus at the University of Montana, where students can come and learn more about who Jesus is and what he's done to save sinners. We share the gospel publicly and usually without backlash and we disciple students, with open bibles, sitting in coffee shops on campus.

I looked it up this week, and it's likely that there are around 35 so-called evangelical churches in Missoula alone, representing possibly up to 20,000 professing Christians in a city of 74,000. I realize these numbers might be really generous, but even if we assume it's a quarter of that – let's say there are 5,000 professing Christians in Missoula.

Contrast that with the Arain (ah-rah-een) people in Pakistan. This is just one of the world's 7,417 unreached people groups. An unreached people group is defined as a distinct ethnic group containing less than 2% evangelical Christians with little to no access to the gospel, a church, a bible, or a believer.

There are 11 million Arain people, and not a single known Christian. If a massive bomb dropped in their region of Pakistan tonight, which is entirely possible, every single one of those 11 million people would spend eternity suffering in hell. No one has gone to these people with the gospel. We know from Revelation that Arain people will be represented around the throne of God in heaven, that Jesus has purchased some of these people with his blood.

So, just as the harvest was plentiful when Jesus sent out the 72 to towns and villages on the road to Jerusalem, today, among the Arain, the harvest is plenty. And today, in the other 7,416 unreached people groups across the globe, the harvest is plenty. People are there waiting to hear the good news that Jesus has done everything required to save sinners and restore us back to God. But no laborers have gone. This fact ought to devastate us.

So, we should go! And you'd think this would be Jesus' first follow-up statement to his disciples. The harvest is plenty, the laborers are few, so go be a laborer! But Jesus wants his followers to be keenly aware of who does the work here and who gets the credit. Look again at the **second half of verse 2**.

Jesus not only prepares the harvest and draws people to himself, but he is the one who prepares and sends laborers back into the harvest. We conclude our staff meetings each week by saying, "The things we're trying to do are things only God can do, so what are some encouragements from last week?"

In the same way, Jesus calls his disciples in verse 2 to remember that reaching the plentiful harvest is not a merely human endeavor, relying on human means and schemes to accomplish his purpose of reaching the lost. The things he's sending the disciples to do are things only God can do.

So why is there still a shortage of Laborers? If we consider all that is to come in our passage, we see some possible causes of the laborer crisis as Jesus prepares his disciples for both provision and rejection as they go out.

Which brings us to our second point: **The Laborers in the Harvest.**

Read again with me from **verses 3-4** where we'll see some possible threats to our obedience in laboring.

Not only has Jesus prepared a harvest of people who will respond to the good news, and not only has he provided labors for that harvest, but he will provide for their every need, **SO THAT** the disciples will be laser focused on the task at hand.

Just as a helpless lamb among vicious wolves would have no hope but to depend on its shepherd for provision and protection, so the 72 are to go into the world, depending on Jesus and his people for everything they need. He tells the disciples not to worry about bringing a bag of cash and a suitcase full of extra supplies, nor to worry about booking a room on Travelocity because being consumed with these preparations will distract them from the reason they're sent out: to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God!

He even warns them not to greet anyone on the road while they're traveling from place to place. In that day, it was common practice among travelers to stop and engage in lengthy conversations with fellow travelers they met on the road, probably not terribly unlike when you set up at a campground in the bitterroot. This might sound like Jesus is telling his followers to be rude, but this is again a call to single-minded obedience to him! One pastor puts it like this: "Dispense with those formalities! There is no time for trivia!" (Sproul)

Jesus, in his infinite wisdom and intimate knowledge of humanity, knows our weaknesses. Hebrews tells us he was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" so he knows full well our predisposition toward distraction from the things that really matter. He knows the internal pull his followers will feel toward lesser things. He knows how his followers could easily baptize conversations on the road with spiritual purpose when it's actually just an excuse to push off the one thing we're called to do.

Can we take a moment to pause and ask ourselves some honest questions in light of Jesus' warning to the disciples: what are the internal threats in my life that distract me from whole-hearted pursuit of Christ and his purposes in the world? Am I so concerned about having a sufficient income to provide for myself and my family or to pay for an adventurous lifestyle that I prioritize my school-work and future job over growth in Christ-likeness? Am I so consumed with pursuit of a better job with higher pay to get a bigger house that I disobey Jesus by not sharing the gospel with my lost neighbors? Am I so driven by my appearance and how others see me that I give less to provide for the advancement of the gospel than to accessorizing myself or my kids in the latest clothing?

Am I so distracted and numbed by mundane, fruitless conversations about the weather, sports, music, recreating, and entertainment that I fail to seriously engage anyone around me with the good news of the gospel?

What if when Jesus sends us out as lambs among wolves, the wolves aren't just external persecutors but the competing desires of our own hearts? What if the protection and provision we need from our Shepherd isn't entirely external, but the worst attacks actually come from within?

Today, Jesus' warning to his followers in Luke 10 applies to us. Today, he is calling us to repent over our distracted, self-oriented pursuits and because of and through the gospel - reorient our lives and priorities around his clearly defined purpose for our life!

So back in our text, Jesus prepares and warns the seventy-two not to concern themselves firstly with what they will eat, wear, or where they will sleep, and not to get distracted by their social lives, but to know that God has divinely prepared "sons of peace" who will receive the laborers into their homes and provide for them.

Look at **verses 5-9** where we see the hope of divine provision. Jesus promises provision in 3 primary ways: financial support, food and shelter.

If the disciples say, "peace be to this house" and a hospitable person is there to provide for them, their peace will rest upon that person. If not, their peace returns to them and they move on, knowing full well that the Lord will deliver on his promise of provision through someone else. In verse 7, Jesus wants the sent ones to receive what is put in front of them without sheepishness, knowing that their provision is again, not a merely human provision. When the goers found a gracious host, they were to stay put with them as a gracious guest and eat and drink what was given to them.

Jesus may have had in mind homes and individuals in the area who didn't keep strict Jewish dietary regulations, and his permission to the disciples to eat and drink what's offered shows that he intends for them to keep a singular focus on proclaiming his kingdom, not getting bogged down in worry over the external, temporal trappings of religion.

And finally, in the last verse of this section, Jesus gives his followers authority to heal, but not simply for the sake of physical healing. **Look at verse 9.**

The seventy-two are instructed that in towns, among people who receive them, they are to heal for the sake of announcing the arrival of God's Kingdom! The arrival of God's kingdom here is GOOD news, with physical healing pointing toward a greater, spiritual healing to come through Christ's death and resurrection. So what about for towns and people who don't receive Jesus' followers? Jesus prepares his disciples for the hardship of rejection! Look with me at **verses 10-15.**

We see first in these verses that there is an assumption that the disciples will be rejected, that there will be towns that don't receive them. Like my second attempt up Sentinel, these sent ones should not be surprised when met with trial and rejection. Here, the Lord tells them it will be a reality.

Jesus does not mince words about how people will feel about his followers. Rather than giving them a handbook on how to win friends and influence people, Jesus shoots straight with all who would follow him.

We see this so clearly in **Matthew 10:22**, where Jesus tells them: “You will be hated by all for my names sake.”

Rather than wallowing in rejection, the disciples are to publicly pronounce judgement on these unbelieving towns of people by wiping off the dust of their feet against them and moving on. What I find striking though, is that Jesus instructs the disciples to proclaim, just as they did in the towns that received them: “Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.”

Jesus’ instruction to proclaim the kingdom of God to those that receive the 72 *and* those that reject them brings up an important truth that we can’t ignore.

All of us know when we’re honest with ourselves that we haven’t lived as we ought, haven’t submitted to Jesus as Lord every moment of every day, and have pursued our own desires above everything else. We have sinned and we deserve punishment for our self-serving life in pursuit of self-sovereignty.

But the same Jesus who stood on a mountaintop in divine, blazing light in our text from a few weeks ago, is not JUST fully God but also fully man, stooping so low as to take on human flesh, live in perfect obedience to the Father, and in today’s passage is very much on course toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, where he will bear all of the wrath of God against sinners who will come to him in repentance and faith.

This is the good news that the 72 are to proclaim – The Kingdom of God is here and at its heart is a king who is gracious and merciful. The kingdom of God is certainly good news to all who know their need! One pastor says, “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” (Keller)

If you’re here and you’ve never put your trust in Jesus, we would plead with you to do so today! In doing so, he will raise your dead soul to life, bring healing to your sin-sick heart, and give you peace, hope, and joy that you can’t even imagine.

But the kingdom of God does not just mean grace and peace to all universally. The kingdom of God is judgement for those who reject the king and his messengers. Here in verse 11 of our text, the arrival of the kingdom of God is extremely BAD news!

What we know from context and from Jesus’ own words in this passage is that Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are all cities or regions where Jesus had previously performed miracles, preached the good news, and demonstrated his power... but where the people rejected him. Look at **verse 13b**.

Have you ever heard someone say or thought to yourself even, “if only I were alive during Jesus’ day, I would believe. If only I could have experienced his miracles, healing, and the power of his teaching firsthand, I would trust him.”? As appealing as that logic is, it’s simply not true. The people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are so hard-hearted, it doesn’t matter that the King of God’s Kingdom is standing in front of them – these cities were all likely in the same general region, and here are just a few events from the gospels that probably took place in or near this location:

The sermon on the mount, the healing of Peter’s mother in law, the healing of the paralytic whose friends brought him in through the roof, the healing of the bleeding woman, Jesus raising a little girl

from the dead, the healing of two blind men, the healing of a mute demoniac, the healing of the man with the withered hand, among countless other examples of droves of people in crowds receiving healing from the King.

Each of these events showcased Jesus' wisdom, power, and divinity in stunning ways! And yet, the people who observed them failed to turn to Jesus in faith.

The corruption and godlessness of cities like Sodom, Tyre and Sidon are massive. In the Old testament, there are a handful of cities that represent this sort of overwhelming sinfulness and hatred of God, and these 3 are obvious offenders. One commentator writes that Sodom "represents the quintessence of wickedness in the Old Testament, which was destroyed by divine judgement" (Sproul).

Tyre and Sidon show up in Ezekiel 26-28, where God, through the prophet Ezekiel blasts these pagan nations for their overwhelming pride! Consider **Ezekiel 28:6-10** as God addresses Tyre.

Time won't allow us to look at the Lord's words against Sodom and Sidon, but hear the severity of God's judgment toward Tyre for their persistent, unrepentant pride. They have mistreated Israel, but the most severe sin they've committed is saying "I am god", as in, I call the shots. No God will rule over me. So by the time Ezekiel comes along, the judgement God pronounces on these nations is complete and utter destruction.

And if this is the wrath God pours out on this ancient people, prior to Jesus' incarnation, how much more severe a judgement for those who reject God now that the Son of God, God in flesh, stands before them? As one commentator points out, the idea here is that "increased understanding of God's revelation means increased responsibility" for how they respond (ESV study).

We, today, have the full council of God's word in the Bible, something none of these pagan nations had. We have seen not just Jesus' life and teaching and healing with clarity in the gospel accounts, but we have seen him die an agonizing death in the place of sinners. We have seen his death-defeating resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father...

We have seen that He has sent his Holy Spirit, and seen his appointed apostles obey his commands and preach and proclaim the gospel to the nations. We've seen the establishment of his church throughout history and continue to see multitudes of ongoing conversions and provision. We have access to God's sweeping plan of redemption woven throughout all of scripture...

How much more severe will the judgement be on those of us who reject him now? Again, if you're here today and you fear this is you; if you know you've rejected the Lord, turn to Christ. His mercies are new every morning! Repent and believe in Jesus.

This leads us to our final point this morning: **The Landmark in our Labors.**

The idea of a landmark is extremely important. I have an amazing memory, like what make and model car my third grade teacher drives, but also a terrible sense of direction.

More often than not, I end up setting off the alarm on my car in order to find where I parked. So it sounds silly, but when I go to Costco, I have these memory tricks to help me out. They always involve some sort of landmark, a point of reference by which I might know my car's location. I'm parked in the row 10 red posts to the left of the entrance of the store. It sounds dumb, but it works for me. Sometimes.

After Jesus promises provision and warns the disciples of rejection, he provides them with a final encouragement in their going, a landmark to remember who they are and where their worth and confidence lie.

Look one final time with me at **verse 16**.

This passage is beautifully bookended with the comfort of Jesus not only being the Lord of the Harvest in verses 1-2, but also *their* Lord in verse 16. Those who go out into the harvest have *union* with the Triune God of the universe. This means that when rejected, it is not a personal slight to retaliate over, but they are to remember that God himself is the one being rejected.

This fact ought to give us great freedom when we share the gospel with others. When we get rejected, we are in the perfect company of Jesus, who was rejected in our place. Even if we are persecuted to the point of death, Jesus died in our place first, so we don't have to suffer an eternal death in hell!

This verse changes everything for those who proclaim the gospel – we have the rock-solid landmark of knowing we are secure in union with the Father, through the work of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our hope is not in avoiding persecution or living in the security of the red white and blue, but in the untouchable safety of knowing and being known by Jesus.

I want to give us just a couple of points of application in closing.

I think the 3 primary things Jesus calls his followers to in Luke 10 are to: **pray, go, and send**.

When Jesus tells the 72 that there is a laborer shortage for the harvest he's prepared, the first step of obedience he gives them is to **pray** and ask God to raise up laborers.

This is not a generic call to prayer, but we learn in this passage that Jesus' desire for his followers is to pray for evangelists and missionaries to be raised up for the work of preaching the gospel to those who haven't heard. So we are to pray specific, targeted prayers to God for people to be goers to the unreached.

One of the most crushing indictments on my prayer life I've ever experienced was when a pastor posed the question: "if God answered every prayer for every single person you've ever prayed for to be saved, how many people would become Christians today?" In the same way, if God answered every prayer of ours as a church for laborers to be raised up for the 7,417 known unreached people groups across the globe, how many people would be going out as missionaries today?

Check out the Joshua Project's Unreached of the day app for concise ways to pray for specific unreached people groups.

Let us be marked by desperate pleading with God for laborers to go out from this place!



Secondly, Jesus calls his followers to **GO** into the harvest. We might find ourselves trying to pick and choose which of the 3 application points we will participate in. And some of us might say quickly, “ah, yes. I’ll be a prayer warrior, but I’m not a goer.” Let’s not let ourselves off the hook so quickly. Obedience in our passage doesn’t end with the disciples sending up a quick prayer. The same people he commands to pray, he commissions to go out. The prayer for laborers is often a cyclical one – pray for laborers to go out, be the laborers who get sent out.

There are two categories I think we should think through in terms of going. The first and easiest is that we ought to “go” locally. How many of us could say with confidence that we’ve clearly articulated the good news to a lost person this week? This month? This year? Ever?

Can you imagine having discovered the cure for cancer and keeping it to yourself? How much hate for your fellow humans would you have to have in your heart to hide such knowledge? How much more urgent when eternal life is at stake. We have the cure. We have Jesus, our neighbor’s only hope of salvation.

But we can’t be content to only engage in going locally. It is likely, or at least somewhat feasible, that your neighbor will interact with another Christian at some point in their life, even if you were to move. But you know who won’t ever meet a Christian? Over 3.37 billion people who live in parts of the world where they will likely be born, live a full life, and die without ever hearing the name of Christ. That is 42.5% of the world’s population who will never hear the gospel from anyone.

The Joshua project estimates that it would take just 226 laborers to reach the Arain, the Pakistani people group I mentioned earlier. That is a tiny sliver of the Christians in Missoula, Montana alone.

We must go globally! Could you be one of those 226 missionaries needed to reach the Arain? What keeps us from going? Is it fear of losing comfort here? Fear of missing family? Fear of persecution? THE VERY WORST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN IS DEATH, which means the worst that can happen is you enter eternity with Jesus, free from suffering, sin, and pain. Forever. Let’s not be so short-sighted that we think this life is all there is. Let’s live with ambition for the gospel going out to the plentiful harvest that Jesus has prepared!

One final point of application is to **send**. Aside from praying and going, Jesus promises goers that he will provide for their means through his people. Certainly this includes praying for those who are sent, but Jesus actually promises material provision for those going through people, so we’re going to focus on financial support of missions work this morning.

The church should provide the provisions and income needed so that goers can go without getting bogged down in the tangible things they need to fulfill the work at hand. To labor among an unreached people group is difficult enough when well supplied. How much more, if a missionary lacks financial provision and can’t put food on the table, will the difficulty of the task increase?

Today, it is estimated that Christians across the world earn about 53 Trillion dollars annually. 1.5% of that number is given to any type of Christian cause whatsoever. 6% of the 1.5% goes to anything related to “missions”. 1.7% of that 6% goes toward reaching the unreached. Are you getting the picture, that a tiny fraction of a fraction of a fraction of Christian resources are used on this task of reaching the plentiful harvest of unreached people groups in our world today?

As those who have received grace and provision generously from God in the gospel, we ought to be sons and daughters of peace, as in our passage today, who provide tangible nourishment and wages to those laboring for the gospel where Jesus' name is not currently known.

I want to end with this final thought this morning: If you're quick to think that praying, going, and sending might not be for you, if you rest on the fact that "you're just not called to participate in missions":

Here is your call, Christian: "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

Here is your call, brothers and sisters: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all I've commanded you, and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."