**OUTREACH MESSAGE**

**THREE MARKS OF GOSPEL LABOURERS**

**Luke 10:1-20**

**INTRODUCTION**

During a recent flight for a family vacation, I passed some of the time by reading some of my old sermons. My purpose in reading these sermons was to provide myself with some constructive criticism to see how I could improve. But as I read these sermons, I found myself being deeply moved, challenged, and encouraged. It was as if my past self was ministering to my present self.

But of course, we all know that it wasn’t just *me* speaking to *me.* It was God speaking to me through his Word, through these sermons. That’s the beautiful thing about preaching expository sermons. I’m not just pouring out my own thoughts. I’m proclaiming God’s thoughts from God’s Word, which is a million times better than what I could say myself. Only God’s Word contains the truth and wisdom to change our lives in a way that honours God. I was reminded of this as I read these old sermons, and I thank God that he has given us the incredible gift of his Word.

I was also reminded of something else. Something more humbling. As I read these old sermons, I kept having moments when I thought, “Did I write that? I don’t remember that *at all*.” I’m talking about sermons I just preached a few months ago, sermons I spent hours studying, writing, and preaching that had somehow vanished from my mind. Such is the weakness of the human mind. We take in so much, but we retain so little.

And so, that inspired me to preach a text to you that I just preached to you back in October this year, one that most of you have likely forgotten. This text is actually one that I remember quite well, because it has had such a profound impact on my life. I have chosen this text because it’s about reaching the lost, which many of us will be doing starting tomorrow at our King’s World Summer Music Camp outreach.

Our text today is Luke 10. When I preached this sermon a few months ago, I titled the message “The Keys to Gospel Harvest”. Although the text is the same, my emphasis is a little different, focusing less on the harvest and more on the harvesters. And so, my title today is **Three Marks of Gospel Labourers.** Those three marks are:

1. Be Faithful
2. Be Prayerful
3. Be Joyful

(1) **BE FAITHFUL**

Our text today begins in verse 1 with the words “After this”. Luke wrote this little phrase to bridge chapters 9 and 10. “After *this* (what came earlier in chapter 9), 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.” What’s happening here is Jesus is expanding his missionary program by sending his disciples out into the towns and villages to proclaim the message of the Kingdom and prepare the people for Jesus’ later arrival. But what happened immediately before? What is the “this” in verse 1, and what lesson does Luke wants us to learn from it?

To find out, we need to start reading backwards into chapter 9. Verses 57-62 tell us that a bunch of people were coming up to Jesus and saying that they wanted to follow him, but Jesus responded to each one of them by essentially saying, “Are you sure you want to follow me? It’s harder than you think. You say you want to follow me, but I have nowhere to lay my head. You say you want to follow me, but you’ll have to put me before your family. You say you want to follow me, but you can’t have one foot in your world and one foot in mine.” The cost of discipleship is great, Jesus was saying, and not many are willing to pay the price.

Then we look a little further back to verses 51-56 and we see that Jesus had just sent messengers ahead of him to a Samaritan village so that the village would be ready to receive him, but verse 53 says,

“But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.”

Just like that, entire village of people rejected Jesus without even giving him a hearing, because he was a Jew on his way to Jerusalem.

This is what we are to keep in mind when we read the words “After this” in verse 1. It was after Jesus was rejected that he appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him. It was after Jesus taught about how hard it is to follow him that he continued to call people from every town and village to follow him.

Here’s the lesson for us, and it’s a crucial one: rejection in evangelism must not lead to retirement from evangelism. What would have happened if Jesus had retired after the Samaritan village rejected him? Or how would the world have been different if Jesus had said to himself, “The cost of following me is just too great. No one’s going to do it. I may as well just quit now and save myself from all the pain of rejection.” If that’s the path Jesus had taken, he would have lived a much more comfortable life. He would have lived a much *safer* life. But in the end, it would have been a failed life, because he would have failed to do what God had sent him to do.

Has rejection in evangelism ever tempted you to retire from evangelism? It has for me. There was once a time when evangelism was part of my weekly routine. I preached on the streets downtown, I would walk up to university students and take them through a gospel tract, I would sit down with random homeless people on the streets and tell them the good news about Christ, and most importantly, I would intentionally schedule time with unbelieving friends to speak to them about their need for salvation. How did they respond? Some responded favourably, but most of them responded with rejection. Again and again, rejection. It was often done with a smile and a “no thank you” or a “I’m glad that works for you but it’s not for me”, because Canadians can be unfailingly polite, but as nice as they tried to make it sound, it didn’t soften the sting in my heart at all.

Over time, I started spending less and less time with the lost and more and more time with believers. Why wouldn’t I? In the church I get acceptance for my gospel proclamation. In the world I get rejection. Why would I go out there where it’s so hard, when I can stay in here where it’s so easy?

If you’ve been tempted to let rejection in evangelism lead to retirement from evangelism, then Jesus’ example here in Luke 10 is exactly what we need. Jesus was committed to reaching the lost, and that commitment remained unshaken even in the midst of rejection. The fact that not many people were following him didn’t deter him. It didn’t even discourage him. Instead, Jesus actually found ways to multiply his evangelistic mission by sending out his seventy-two disciples.

How was that possible? How did Jesus keep going when he could have easily become so discouraged and given up? It was possible because Jesus was faithful. He was faithful even when his ministry didn’t look very fruitful.

He was also faithful even though he knew that the lack of fruit was likely to continue. We see that in the instructions that Jesus gave to the disciples in verses 3-15. He says in verse 3 that he is sending them out “as lambs in the midst of wolves”, and in verse 10 he says that entire towns will reject them just as the Samaritan village rejected him. And when that happened, the disciples would have to say some hard things about God’s coming judgment.

Jesus was rejected, and Jesus knew that further rejection was coming, both for him, and for his disciples, and yet he kept on going, because he was faithful. He was faithful to do what his Father sent him to do, and nothing would throw him off track.

How about you? Are you faithful? And will you be faithful when there doesn’t seem to be much fruit? That’s the true test of faithfulness. You don’t really know if you’re faithful until obeying God starts getting really hard. Until it starts hurting. Until it seems pointless. An unfaithful person will give up, but a faithful person remains faithful even when there’s a lack of fruit.

That’s the challenge for us as we prepare for another King’s World tomorrow. This will be our fourth annual King’s World outreach. We have seen some evidences of fruitfulness over the years, but nothing really that tangible. No one has been baptized. No new members have been added to our church. At times, it may seem like a massive investment of time and resources for so little return. At times, we may be tempted to think, “What’s the point? No one’s going to respond.”

When we’re tempted to think like this, we need to look to Jesus and his example in our text. Jesus didn’t give up on reaching people even when people gave up on him. He kept going, and so should we. God calls us to be faithful just like his Son was faithful regardless of whether we see the fruit.

(2) **BE PRAYERFUL**

Now you may be thinking, “But it’s so hard to remain faithful. It’s so hard to keep obeying when you see so little return for it.” It’s true. It’s hard to remain faithful, especially in evangelism. It’s been said that the two things that churches lose most easily are prayer and evangelism. God has to provide the grace that we need if we are to remain faithful, and as we will see, he has provided by turning us to himself in prayer. This leads to the second mark of a gospel labourer: be prayerful.

As Jesus prepares to send out the seventy-two disciples, he gives them a number of instructions in verses 2-16. He tells them what they are to bring and not to bring, what they are to do if someone is receptive to their message, and what they are to do if someone rejects them. There’s lots of practical advice here, the “how to’s” of evangelism. But here in verse 2, we see that Jesus chooses to begin his instructions with prayer.

“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.”

There are two things here in verse 2 – a promise, and a command – and the relationship between the two is that belief in the promise empowers obedience to the command. The command is that we pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out labourers into his harvest. We are to pray that God would send his people to the lost to reap a harvest of salvation, so that many would come to know the gospel and believe. That’s what we are to pray.

What about the promise? The promise here is that the harvest is plentiful. When Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful, it’s a promise, because the harvest isn’t here yet. It’s on its way, but it hasn’t yet arrived. And the reason why it’s not here yet isn’t because there’s something wrong with the harvest. There’s something wrong with the labourers. There aren’t enough of them! The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few, but as soon as there are enough labourers, the bounty of the harvest will finally be seen.

When’s the last time you prayed that the Lord would send out labourers into his harvest? We may pray a lot about the harvest, but we don’t tend to pray a lot about the labourers. Why is that? Because we think the problem is with the harvest, not the labourers. We pray, “Lord, save people” way more than we pray, “Lord, send people” because we don’t believe the promise that the harvest is plentiful. We think that it’s the harvest that is few, not the labourers, when it’s really the other way around.

When I preached this text back in October, the Lord laid it on my heart to pray regularly for labourers. “Lord, send out labourers from our church. Send out church planters. Send out ministry workers. Send out faithful believers to share the gospel with their friends. Oh Lord, let us be a sending church. Let us be a multiplying church.” Those aren’t the kinds of prayers I’m used to praying, and at times, I continue to struggle with obeying this command in verse 2.

If you find it hard, like I do, to pray for labourers, then you need the promise in verse 2. You need to cling to the promise that the harvest is plentiful. You need to believe that promise with all your heart, because the promise is what empowers obedience to the command.

But how do we know that the promise is true? How do we know that the harvest is plentiful? We know because *Jesus* says that it is, and Jesus is *the Lord* of the harvest. The harvest belongs to him. He knows exactly how big or how small it is, and he tells us that it is plentiful.

Obeying the command in verse 2 is really a matter of trust. Do you trust Jesus? Do you take him at his word? Do you believe that what he says is true? If so, praying that the Lord would send out labourers becomes easy, because if the harvest truly is plentiful, and the labourers truly are few, then the greatest need in evangelism isn’t fruitful responses. The greatest need in evangelism is faithful labourers.

One last point about this before we move on. Notice who the command in verse 2 is directed to. It’s directed to the seventy-two disciples. Jesus is telling those who are sent to keep praying for more to be sent. The labourers are to pray for labourers. The sent are to pray that the Lord would send more.

Traditionally, people have broken up the Christian community into two groups: those who are sent, and those who are sending. God either sends you to do gospel ministry, or he uses you to send others. That’s a helpful distinction, but we can’t forget that the sent are also meant to send. Not everyone is sent, but everyone is meant to be a sender. That’s what we see in verse 2. The sent are sending by praying for more to be sent.

Some of you won’t be with us this week as we reach out through our summer camp, and that’s ok. God has called you to attend to other things. But as you tend to those things, I want you to think of yourselves as *sending* those who will be at camp. The reality is that we couldn’t do this outreach without you. We need your prayers. We need your encouragement. We need to know that you are standing behind us supporting us as we reach our community with the gospel.

And for those who will be with us at King’s World this week, I want you to know that you are God’s answer to my prayers. You are the labourers I’ve been asking for. I’ve been praying that the Lord would send people from our church, and he has. Some of those whom God has sent have moved to different places, but others are right here, faithfully reaching the community that God has placed us in.

Jesus’ reminder for those who are sent is that, though you will be busy serving, teaching, running around, and managing the chaos, you must not forget to pray. Whether you are sending or sent, the command is the same: *pray earnestly* *to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest*.” Pray that the Lord would send faithful believers into the lives of these families. Pray that the Lord would send church planters to start faithful, gospel-centered churches in their communities. Pray that the Lord would raise up labourers even among the children we’re reaching this week. Let’s all pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out labourers into his harvest, because the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.

(3) **BE JOYFUL**

Gospel labourers must be faithful, and gospel labourers must be prayerful. There’s one more mark of a gospel labourer in our text today, which leads to our third point: be joyful.

Luke tells us in verse 17 that after this initial wave of evangelism, “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’” It seems that the disciples were quite encouraged by their first missions trip to the surrounding towns and villages. Why? Because powerful spiritual forces of evil were obeying the words of the disciples. The disciples told them to go? They went. The disciples told them to be silent? They shut their mouths. These demons, who were vastly more powerful than the disciples, were submitting to the disciples’ commands, because they spoke in the all-powerful name of Christ. We see that in verse 17: “even the demons are subject to us *in your name*.” Jesus has authority over all the spiritual forces of evil, and the disciples carried that authority with them.

This was incredibly exciting for the disciples. In fact, it was so exciting that it’s the only thing they reported to Jesus. They didn’t tell Jesus how the towns and villages responded. They only told him how the demons responded.

In response, Jesus says two things to them. He begins with encouragement in verses 18-19: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 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.” Jesus is confirming to his disciples that his authority was indeed passed on to them, an authority that not only protected them from harm, but was being used to defeat Satan himself.

And then he has some correction for them in verse 20: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

In other words, the disciples were finding their greatest joy in the wrong place. They were rejoicing over their success, but Jesus wanted them to rejoice over their salvation. They were rejoicing that the demons were subject to Jesus’ name, but Jesus wanted them to rejoice that *their* names were written in heaven.

This joy is nothing less than the joy of the gospel. It’s the joy of knowing that their sins are forgiven. It’s the joy of knowing they have been declared righteous before God. It’s the joy of knowing that they have been welcomed into heaven to dwell with God forever. The joy of being saved is meant to be so great that everything else we rejoice in, even the good things like serving God and seeing a harvest, seem like they’re not worth celebrating at all.

This is crucial for us to grasp. We live in a time when people’s greatest joys are found in what they do, whether it be what they do in our families, what they do in their work places, or what they do in their ministries. Jesus challenges us to find our greatest joys not in what we do, but in where we are going. We’re going to heaven, and it’s all because of Christ’s work, not ours.

If you believe that Jesus, the Son of God took your place on the cross to die for your sins, and that God raised him from the dead and exalted him to heaven where he reigns until he returns to judge the living and the dead, then your name is written in heaven. You don’t need to be good enough. You don’t need to do all the right things. All you need to do is to receive God’s free gift of salvation by faith, and your name will be written in heaven.

This is the good news of the gospel, and it is the source of greatest joy. It’s what makes it possible for us to *enter* this week bursting with joy. God doesn’t want us to wait and see what comes out of this camp before we respond with joy. God wants us to rejoice *now*, because the greatest gift that can be rejoiced in is already ours!

If we see a harvest this year, we will rejoice. It is right for us to rejoice in the salvation of sinners. In fact, Jesus says that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who need no repentance. People coming to saving faith in Christ is cause for celebration, and we will celebrate if God saves people this year.

But if we don’t see a harvest, *we will still rejoice, because our names are written in heaven whether we see a harvest or not.* We may not see God save this year, but we have seen God save us, and that is reason enough to celebrate and rejoice for all eternity.

Gospel labourers are joyful people, because we’re not just messengers of God’s grace. We are recipients of God’s grace, and we can’t forget that. We need to remember. We need to meditate. We need to give thanks, because knowing that our names are written in heaven is the only thing that will give us joy regardless of what happens around us.

**CONCLUSION**

And so, whether we are sending or sent, and whether we see a harvest or not, let us be faithful in reaching the lost. Let us be prayerful in asking the Lord for more labourers. And let us be joyful, knowing that our names are written in heaven.

We serve a great Saviour, one who calls people from every tribe and language and people and tongue to know his love and love him in return. Let’s never forget that *we* are a part of that people, so that we would truly know the joy of our salvation.