**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE KEYS TO GOSPEL HARVEST**

**Luke 10:1-24**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we come to what’s known as “Reformation Sunday”, the Sunday immediately before October 31st. It was on October 31st, 1517, that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, signaling the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, a movement that would spread like wildfire throughout the world, and in many ways continues to do so today.

Kevin DeYoung has written an article about the Reformation that will be published on October 31st on the Gospel Coalition websites in the US and in Canada. I happen to have an advance copy of this article, and I would like to read a portion of it to you:

We give thanks for Martin Luther, imperfect though he was, for the role he played in igniting a reform movement that caught fire in the cities of the Holy Roman Empire, spread through the rest of Europe, and now reaches to the ends of the earth. Wherever we find the Scriptures alone as the highest and final authority, grace alone as the only hope for sinners, faith alone as the only ground for justification, Christ alone as the only atoning sacrifice for sin, and God alone as the ultimate object of our worship—wherever we find these truths sung, savored, and celebrated, we have reason to rejoice in the Reformation.

But we do more on this day than give thanks for the past. We also marvel at what we see in the present. Who but God could have foreseen the triumphs of the gospel in the last 500 years—from the planting of Reformation churches in the New World, to the explosion of Christianity in sub- Saharan Africa, to revivals in Korea, to the endurance (and now spectacular) growth of the church in China, to renewed gospel vibrancy in places as diverse as Australia, the Arabian Peninsula, Brazil, and India? Who but God could have known that once the Bible was translated into English and German and French it would also be translated into Albanian, Cambodian, Japanese, Oshindonga, Navajo, and Swahili? Who but God could have predicted that with the advent of airplanes, radios, and the internet, the good news of justification by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone would be available to more people in more places than at any time in history? This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

God has done amazing things around the world through the simple obedience and faithfulness to the gospel of people like Martin Luther. Everyone here who has put their trust in Christ and now stands before God justified and adopted as his children are a part of the legacy of the Reformation. The reformers’ labours have truly led to an abundant harvest.

But when we narrow the scope of our view from 500 years to the last 50 years, and we shrink our gaze from the global scale to our own towns and neighbourhoods, it can be hard to believe that God can do the same thing today. It’s hard to believe that the harvest is truly as plentiful as we’ve seen in history. It may be plentiful for “them”, but not us. It may be plentiful “out there”, but not here.

In our text today, Jesus wants to address this kind of thinking. He wants to increase our faith for the harvest, and he wants to give us the tools and truths that we need to participate in the harvest. It’s not going to be easy, and we may not see the results right away, but God wants us to believe that he continues to work in and through his people today just like he did 500 years ago.

The title of this message is **The Key to Gospel Harvest.** My aim today is to show you that **Persevering in the Gospel Mission Comes from Rejoicing in the Gospel Message.** We will have three points today:

1. The Disciples’ Mission
2. The Disciples’ Joy
3. The Disciples’ Saviour

(1) **THE DISCIPLES’ MISSION**

Our text today begins with Jesus appointing seventy-two of his disciples to go out and preach the message of the kingdom to the surrounding towns and villages. There’s a lot of overlap between this narrative and the one in Chapter 9, when Jesus sent out the twelve apostles, but the main difference is that here, Jesus expands his missionary program beyond the apostles to the rest of his disciples.

This tells us that the work of sharing the gospel and healing the sick wasn’t reserved for the twelve apostles. It was intended for all of Jesus’ disciples. This work of reaching the lost is meant for you and me. We may not all be sent out like itinerant, travelling evangelists like these seventy-two were, but we are all sent out to do the work of reaching the lost with the message of the gospel.

This seems like an obvious point, but it's one that needs to be said. I was just at a Gospel Coalition Ontario seminar this past Thursday. John Mahaffey, a seasoned pastor in Hamilton with decades of pastoral experience, warned us that the first two things to go in a church’s ministry are prayer and evangelism.

Our church is no exception. Prayer and evangelism are the first two things to go because they're both so hard. They don't seem to bear much tangible fruit. Instead, they seem to come with a lot of disappointment. Prayers seem to go unanswered, and sharing the gospel seems to only come with rejection. Both come with a lot of work and seemingly few results.

But Jesus never makes obedience results-based. Jesus doesn't say "Go, but when people stop listening, you don’t need to go anymore." We are to go and reach the lost regardless of how they respond to us. That's what Jesus did. He had just been rejected by an entire village of Samaritans, but he didn’t give up. He moved on to the next village. And now, we see him organizing his disciples and sending them out to more towns and more villages. Reaching the lost was always on Jesus’ heart, and therefore, as his disciples, it must be on our hearts as well.

So how are we to do this? How are we to go and reach the lost? I see four principles in our text today that are meant to shape how we go about fulfilling our mission.

First, we are to pray. Verse 2: "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.'" When was the last time you prayed that God would send out laborers into his harvest? I must confess that it has been awhile since I have done so, and this despite the fact that it's part of my job description to pray!

Jesus commands us to pray that God would send out more laborers, more evangelists, more church planters, more missionaries, but we rarely do. Why is that? It's because we don't really believe that the harvest is plentiful. Believing that the harvest is plentiful is what provides the motivation to pray for labourers. Jesus says, "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 command to pray for labourers is fueled by the promise that the labourers will always have a harvest to reap.

Jesus tells us that we can believe that the harvest is plentiful because the harvest belongs to God. Verse 2 says that we are to pray to *the Lord of the harvest* to send out laborers into *his* harvest. The harvest belongs to God, which means that he can do anything he wants with it. He can make it sparse, or he can make it plentiful. Jesus tells us that God has chosen to make it plentiful. It's so plentiful that twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples personally trained by Jesus weren't enough to completely bring it in. God wants more labourers to go out into his harvest, and he will only send them out if we ask.

I thank God that others have not been as unfaithful as I have been in praying for labourers. Precious men and women are being sent out, because people are praying for it.

* Our region of churches in Sovereign Grace has plans to send out Brandon Long, a 2017 graduate of the Sovereign Grace Pastors' Conference, to plant a church in Cincinnati Ohio next year.
* Our friend Michael Granger from our sister church in Louisville is raising funds to move his family to Ethiopia to plant a church there along with his wife Kenean, who is native to Ethiopia.

That's just in Sovereign Grace. God is doing countless other things in other denominations all around the world. But despite all that’s going on, there's still not enough labourers. The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, let us commit ourselves to praying regularly that God, the Lord of the harvest, would send out more labourers into his harvest.

Second, we are to trust. Verse 3: "Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road." Jesus is sending us out on a dangerous journey. We are like lambs among wolves. Do you know what wolves do to lambs? They maul them, they kill them, and they eat them. Jesus is telling us that we are being sent out to suffer. What's more, Jesus sent out the seventy-two with no money, and no extra clothes. That's not meant to apply to all disciples for all time, as there are many other examples of disciples being sent out with provisions and resources, but the principle applies to everyone: we are to go out trusting in God to provide for our needs and protect us from our enemies.

Third, we are to serve. In verse 9, Jesus commands the disciples to "heal the sick". It seems that Jesus gave the seventy-two authority to miraculously heal sickness just as he did for the twelve apostles. And like the twelve apostles, this authority to heal included the authority to cast out demons, as we see down in verse 17. We believe that the Lord can and does give such gifts to his people today. The difference today, however, is that not everyone gets them. Some get them, and some don't. The point for us is that as we engage in gospel mission, we are called to serve others. Whether it means miraculously healing people's physical illness or healing their emotional scars through the ordinary means of love, we are all called to serve.

Fourth, we are to speak. Verse 5 says that we are to speak peace to people: "Peace be to this house!" This peace, of course, is *shalom* peace, which is the Jewish concept of holistic peace. It's both internal and external. It's peace with yourself, peace in your relationships with others, and most importantly, peace with God. Whether people have this peace or not depends on their response to the message summarized in verse 9: "The kingdom of God has come near to you." The kingdom of God has come near because the King has come near. Jesus is the King, and he has come to establish his heavenly reign on earth. He will reverse the effects of the Fall and redeem a people for himself, who will dwell with him in his kingdom forever.

Jesus says that when we encounter "a son of peace" - meaning someone who responds with faith to the message of peace - we give them the same peace that we have come to enjoy through Christ. But if there is no faith, then our peace returns to us, and they are left without it.

In other words, God has chosen to use us as his instruments of peace. God is the one who gives peace, and he has chosen us to be the ones who hand it out through our words. This is an amazing privilege. We are God’s very representatives. Jesus says in 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." We are representatives for Jesus, the King of peace, and Jesus represents God, the giver of peace.

This is an amazing privilege, but it is also a heavy responsibility. How people respond to our message will determine whether they have peace with God both now and forever. If they reject us, they reject Christ, and if they reject Christ, they reject God himself. I don’t know where God will send you, but I know he will send you. God may send you to share the gospel with unreached people in far off countries. God may send you to plant a new church. Or, God may simply send you to reach your neighbours, co-workers, and family members. Whoever it may be, let’s be faithful in stewarding this precious message of peace that God has entrusted to us.

(2) **THE DISCIPLES’ JOY**

Following these instructions, Jesus has something else to teach the disciples, a truth about where they are to find their joy. This truth will keep their priorities right and sustain them as they continue fulfilling their mission. This leads to our second point: The Disciples’ Joy.

Before we get to the disciples’ joy, however, we need to talk about a harder topic. We need to talk about judgment. That’s because we need to understand God’s judgment before we can truly experience true joy.

That’s what we see in our text. Jesus has some sobering words about judgment in verses 10-11. Jesus tells his disciples that, if a town of people do not receive them, then they are to say, “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.” What’s this about? The disciples are using symbolism to communicate to the people of the town that they want nothing to do with them. They don’t even want to take the dust of their town with them as they leave. Why? Because judgment is coming, and the disciples want nothing to do with judgment.

Jesus speaks of this judgment in verses 13-15. He pronounces “Woes” over the two towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida in verse 13, and he speaks similar judgment over Capernaum in verse 15. A “woe” was an exclamation of pain and pity for the misfortunate that awaits someone. It would be like hearing that someone had a terminal illness and saying, “I am so sorry.” That is what Jesus felt for the people of these two towns because of the coming judgment, a judgment that was coming upon them because of their rejection of him.

Jesus goes on to talk about the nature of their judgment in verses 13b-14: “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.”

What Jesus is doing here is he’s comparing these three contemporary cities with two cities from the Old Testament that were notoriously sinful. Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel all spoke judgment over Tyre and Sidon for their rebellion against God and their rejection of his ways. But as bad as they were, the three cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were worse. Why? Because they saw Jesus do amazing miracles never done in Tyre or Sidon, and yet they still refused to repent and believe.

Luke doesn’t tell us what Jesus did in Chorazin, but we do know what he did in the other two towns. It was in Bethsaida that Jesus fed more than five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, and it was in Capernaum where he freed a man from a demon in the local synagogue and healed a centurion’s servant with a word spoken while he was still far off. Jesus did miracles in both of these towns that were so amazing that, if they had been done in Tyre and Sidon, the people would have repented and believed. That is why Jesus says that the people in the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum will be judged more harshly.

We don’t often think about judgment like this. We often assume that everyone God sends to hell is judged equally. That’s not the case. Hell will no doubt be torment for everyone, but some will experience greater torment than others, and one of the factors that will determine the extent of that torment will be the opportunities God gave them to respond. The greater the revelation he showed them, the greater their moral responsibility.

That is true for all of us as well. If you’re here Sunday after Sunday hearing the gospel preached, seeing God change lives, perhaps even seeing God do miraculous things, or if you grew up in a Christian family that faithfully taught you God’s ways and God’s Word, *but still, you do not repent and believe*, then God will judge you more harshly. I do not say that out of a sense of pride, as if I’m better than you. I’m not, and God knows I’m not. I am a sinner who, apart from God’s grace, deserves the harshest of judgments. But God’s grace is more than sufficient to save us from that judgment, if only we would repent and believe.

This context is what we need in order to understand what Jesus says next about joy. Verse 17: “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’” It seems that the disciples’ mission was a success. Jesus confirms this in verse 18, when he says, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Whether Jesus is referring to an actual vision of Satan falling from heaven or he’s speaking in symbolic language, we’re not sure, but the point is clear: when labourers go out into God’s harvest to preach the message of the Kingdom and to do the work of the Kingdom, Satan is defeated. There are spiritual consequences to our earthly ministries. This is something worth celebrating.

It’s also something that could very easily make us proud. The fact that powerful evil forces must bow down to us could easily make us think that we’re something, when in reality we’re nothing. That’s why Jesus reminds the disciples that their authority over the enemy isn’t their own. It belongs to Jesus. The demons are subject to the disciples because they go forth in the name of Jesus as his representatives.

Now we get to Jesus’ main point 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.” The disciples rejoiced in the success of their ministry, but Jesus is saying that they have another reason to rejoice that is so much greater that the success of their ministry doesn’t even compare. And what is that greater joy? It’s the joy of knowing that their names are written in heaven.

In other words, 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 knowing their names are written in heaven is the joy of the gospel. The joy of the gospel is so great that it makes 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 our greatest joys are found in what we do, whether it be what we do in our families, what we do in our work places, or what we do in our 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 not because of what we have done. It’s because of what Christ has done.

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 lifted him up to heaven where he will reign 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 our greatest joy. The gospel makes it possible for us to rejoice even when we don’t see the harvest. The gospel makes it possible for us to rejoice even when life is so hard that we have no other reason to rejoice. How? Because the gospel tells us that all the judgment Jesus just spoke about will never fall upon us. It has already fallen upon Jesus. Jesus took our punishment, so that we could receive his heavenly reward. It’s because of the gospel that every day can be a joyful day, because the worst thing that could ever happen to us will never happen to us.

This is what we need to persevere in the work of the gospel over the long haul. If we find our greatest joy in what we do and what we accomplish, then it won’t take much for our joy to disappear. All it will take is a season of discouragement or doubt to strip us of our joy and drive us to despair. But if our greatest joy is rooted in the gospel, if it’s in the fact that our names are written in heaven, then there’s nothing that could ever lead us to give up.

(3) **THE DISCIPLES’ SAVIOUR**

After Jesus speaks about the disciples’ joy, he goes on to speak about his own joy, and in doing so, he reveals a powerful truth about himself that will further sustain us in our labours for the gospel. This leads to our third point: The Disciples’ Saviour.

Verse 21: “In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘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.’”

Luke has told us several times in his book so far that Jesus spent much time praying, but this is the first time when he actually records what Jesus said. It’s an astounding moment in which all three members of the Trinity are present: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moves the Son to rejoice in something that pleases the Father. And what is it that Jesus rejoices in? It’s the fact that the Father has chosen to hide something from the wise and understanding and to only disclose it to “little children”.

But what is the Father hiding? Jesus tells us in verse 22: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father…” In other words, the Father is hiding knowledge of the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God, which in turn means that the Father is hiding knowledge of himself, since only the Son knows the Father.

Jesus is talking about God’s sovereign election in salvation. God chooses whom he will save by choosing who will know the Son. To the wise and understanding of this world, God conceals this knowledge, but to the “little children” – literally “babies” in the Greek – it was his gracious will to reveal it. This doesn’t mean that God never saves intellectuals, scholars, or professionals. What it *does* mean is that God’s favours choosing the weak people of the world over choosing the strong.

This has been the testimony of the church from the earliest days till now. The church is made up of people from all different classes of society, but it is overwhelmingly composed of the people who have the most needs. That’s one of the reasons why the gospel is booming in places like Africa, South America, and China. God is saving more people in those kinds of places, because he delights in revealing the Son to those who suffer most.

But why is that? It is so that God would show sinful humanity that the things that the world values – money, success, power, influence – mean nothing in his eternal kingdom. As the Apostle Paul would write about the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

And when God, in his sovereign, gracious will, chooses to save someone who is wise, or powerful, or of noble birth according to worldly standards, he doesn’t call them to himself until he first makes them come to him like a little child: with simple faith, in simple dependence, for a simple, loving relationship with him. As Jesus would say later in Luke 18:17,

“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

The doctrine of God’s sovereign election is really no different from Jesus’ saying that God is the Lord of the harvest. The harvest belongs to God, because salvation belongs to God. Our confidence in a plentiful harvest comes from our confidence that God will bring about a plentiful harvest of souls.

There’s one more truth embedded in verse 22 that I must bring to your attention. Commentators call one of the most powerful Christological statements in Luke’s gospel. Jesus says that “All things have been handed over to me by my Father”. Think about that. All things. All things includes the choice of who is saved. Jesus confirms this when he says at the end of verse 22 that no one knows “who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Jesus, this 1st century carpenter from Nazareth, the son of Mary and the alleged son of Joseph, is just as intimately involved in the choosing of people to save as God himself. This can only mean one thing: Jesus, the Son of God the Father and full of the Spirit of God, is God himself. One God in three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – our Triune God who saves us.

This is why Jesus went forth joyfully in reaching the lost with the gospel, and this is why we can as well. Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. He chooses who will be saved, not us. And this is also why we rejoice so greatly in our own salvation. He chose us, when we would never have chosen him. He humbled us, when we were too proud to come to him. And now he is pleased to use us to call others to himself, so that together we might worship him forever.

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus ends this section of narrative with these words to his disciples in verses 23-24: “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.”

Blessed indeed were the disciples who walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, and saw Jesus with their own eyes. Generations upon generations of men and women who lived before Jesus and after Jesus have longed for the same experience. But one day, all whom God has chosen, the “little infants” of the world, will be gathered up into his kingdom to live with him forever, where we will spend unending days gazing upon the beauty of our Lord and Saviour.