

Prayers

To God

Offer the Lord your feelings about the day ahead. Ask the Lord to guide you from your present to your future.

For myself

I praise You, Almighty Lord, for You take hold of my life and do good things through me. This is not my doing but Yours, and I praise You for the work of Your Holy Spirit within me. He sees more than I can see, He understands me more than I ever will, and He has strength greater than any strength I can muster. Thank You for leading me to repentance and to faith, and thank You for filling me with Your Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

For others

Pray for people across the world who live in poverty because their governments do not serve the people with equity and honest integrity.

Meditation

If my people would return to me, says the Lord,
Then they would find I have always loved them.

If my people would listen to me, says the Lord,
Then they would know I answer their prayers.

If my people would read my Word, says the Lord,
Then they would not have any lack of knowledge.

If my people would love their neighbours, says the Lord,
Then they would discover their lives enriched.

If my people would do what I say, says the Lord,
Then they would find that I am true to my Word.

If my people would pursue the truth, says the Lord,
Then they would walk with me into my Kingdom.

Life is a challenge for all people, says the Lord,
But there is peace for those who follow me.

Bible Passage

Luke 10:1-12

After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them ahead of Him in pairs to every town and place He intended to go. ² He said to them,

"Though harvest is huge the workers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to release workers for harvesting. ³ Get going, and pay attention! I am sending you out as lambs among wolves:

- ⁴ ***Take no purse, bag, or footwear.***
- ***Share no greetings with anyone on the way.***
- ⁵ ***Whatever house you come to, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶ And if someone of peace is there, then your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will come back to you.***
- ⁷ ***Remain in this same house, eating and drinking what they offer, for workers deserve their pay. Do not move from house to house.***
- ⁸ ***Whatever town you enter and receive a welcome, eat what is put before you.***
- ⁹ ***Heal the sick who are there, and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is very close to you.'***
- ¹⁰ ***But whatever town you enter that does not welcome you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'In protest, we wipe off the dust of your town that clings to our feet! Yet know this: the kingdom of God is very close.' ¹² I tell you this; on Judgement Day, it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.***

Review

Jesus has already told his disciples to do His work and take nothing with them (9:1f.), so why is it that Luke reports these instructions again, perhaps with more detail? The simple answer is that this commission was for a group of seventy disciples, not the twelve; but there is more. The two passages are remarkably similar, and our passage today adds some important further information and emphases.

However, if we are to understand why Jesus commissioned a second group of people for mission, then we must remember that between His two commissions (9:1f. 10:1f.), His own mission had changed direction. Jesus commissioned the twelve at the end of His Galilean ministry, and He commissioned the seventy at the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem. You may ask what the difference is, but perhaps we should not be looking for differences. We should rather accept that as Jesus went to Jerusalem, His work and mission in Galilee had ended but His mission to the world had just started. It is not something we quickly spot today, but in the first century, the number seventy represented the whole world; so Jesus commissioned enough disciples for a worldwide mission! This message was a great encouragement to the early church.

If we now look more closely at the commission here (10:1-12) and compare it with that in Luke 9:1-6, there are many clear similarities. That is, apart from the dramatic opening found

here, which gives a sense of urgency, typical of Jesus' manner after the transfiguration (10:1-3). In the rest of the passage, it looks as if the commission of the seventy is an expanded version of that of the twelve, with some additions to its general themes. Everything appears in a different order, but this is a list of these common themes:

- Proclaiming the Kingdom of God (9:2,6; 10:9)
- Healing ministry (9:1,2,6; 10:9)
- Taking nothing on the journey (9:3; 10:4)
- Instructions for initial hospitality (9:4; 10:5,7)
- Instructions for leaving where there is no welcome (9:5; 10:10,11)

I have already written a little about these in my notes for Luke 9:1-11, and I suggest you refer back to them. In summary, the fact that Jesus repeats these things emphasises their importance.

These two passages show together that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the miraculous ministry of Jesus are one and the same thing. Jesus assumed that His followers would do as He did; preaching, ministering healing, and setting people free from evil. His instructions to take nothing are reinforced (9:3, 10:4), and we need not analyse Jesus' examples of what not to take, such as purses, bags, shoes, shirts etc. No items of personal comfort or provision should be taken. This represents true dependency on God, and remains a challenge for all who follow Christ. The other common theme here is that of hospitality, and although Jesus wants His disciples to accept hospitality, He has no time for false pretences (10:5f.). Those who do not welcome the Gospel are a hindrance to His missionaries, and to '*wipe off the dust that clings to your feet*' (9:5, 10:11) means to get away from all that hinders God's mission.

But now, we must look at how Jesus emphasised his commission, and even expanding it. You may ask why deliverance ministry is not mentioned here when it is found in the earlier commission (9:1) and was clearly a major part of Jesus' work. The answer is within the powerful opening to our passage, which describes Jesus sending the disciples out '*as lambs among wolves*' (10:3). This picture reflects the wit and resources to deal effectively with an enemy, even one with seemingly superior force. Here, Jesus reminds us that the enemy is so often 'out there'; he is the 'wolf' in the world, hounding the efforts of God's people in mission. This picture should not be forgotten. Deliverance ministry is a necessary part of God's mission in this world, and God's workers must take on Christ's image ('the lamb') in order to deal with the enemy ('the wolf').

- The first addition to the second commission is this; Jesus told the disciples not to greet people while on their journeys (10:4). Now, the traditional Hebrew greeting was 'shalom', meaning 'peace' in general. So the 'peace' of a missionary should be reserved for those who receive God's Word and His Kingdom (10:5f.).
- The second addition is a description of sharing 'peace' when entering the house of a host (10:5,6). We are told that this formal greeting must not be taken lightly, for how can God's peace be shared if someone rejects His message? Our passage reflects the idea that the offering of friendship and goodwill is important, and the work of the Kingdom cannot be done if it is rejected.
- The third addition is Jesus' command to eat and drink what is provided (10:7). This may seem difficult for those who have delicate tastes and many likes and dislikes. Yet on mission, food and drink must be accepted, like '*pay*' (10:7) and personal feelings should not distract from the Gospel. Confusion is created if a guest representing God does not accept hospitality given!
- The fourth addition is the instruction not to move about within one town. Again, the point is obvious, for what messages will be given if Jesus' missionaries move around,

and give the wrong impression. They appear perhaps to sample the best of what is available, or even gather influence! Stability is the best witness.

- The last addition comes in the last verse, which adds a warning of Judgement to towns rejecting the message of the Kingdom of God. Twice, Jesus asks His missionaries to tell people that the '*Kingdom of God is very close*' (10:9,11). It is gloriously near to those who experience God's healing touch (10:9), but near in the form Judgement for those places where God's missionaries have been rejected.

Together, these additions firm up Jesus' commission of the disciples, and they constitute probably the best 'handbook' of mission found in the Gospels.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V2 **'to release workers for harvesting'**

Other translations:

'to send out workers into His harvest field' (NIV)

'to send out labourers into His harvest' (NRSV)

The Greek words translated by most Bible versions 'send out', is quite strong. It is usually translated 'cast out' and is used of casting out demons, for example. If we now try to work out what it might mean to throw something out in a positive rather than a negative sense, we then arrive at the idea of 'releasing', or letting something go. For this reason I have use this idea of 'release', and I reckon that it makes a good deal of sense here (see study).

V3 **'Get going and pay attention!'**

Other translations:

'Go!' (NIV)

'Go on your way, see ...' (NRSV)

There are two Greek words used here. The first ('hypagete') is an emphatic dismissal with a sense of urgency, and the second ('idou') calls the disciples to listen and pay attention. It seems inadequate to translate this passage without referring to both verbs, indeed, emphatically.

Further Comments

The harvest and the workers

One interesting feature of this passage is that Jesus talks here about 'harvest', and this is the only place in Luke's Gospel where we find the word. The Gospel writer who uses it most is Matthew (9:37,38, 13:30,39, 21:34,41), who refers to the harvest as meaning the 'End Times', or the 'Last Judgement', on many occasions.

Luke seems to use the word slightly differently, in order to refer to the work of proclaiming the Kingdom. In his perspective, the 'End Time' had come with the ministry of Jesus, and the harvest work of gathering the faithful had begun. He knew nothing of our modern perspective of 'End Times' as something yet to happen, and a harvest yet to be reaped.

Nevertheless, we can understand and accept this Scripture. There is a work to be done whatever our perception of the time, and there are few to do the work compared to the enormity of the task. Here, Jesus encourages his disciples to ask God prayerfully to 'release' more people into the work of harvesting. Now when Jesus said this, he was commissioning seventy people, and expecting that more would be added to that number. Indeed it was, for the Acts of the Apostles reports much greater numbers being added to the church in the days after the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41, 4:4 etc.), as the Gospel was preached by the apostles and healing miracles took place. Today, it is still a suitable burden for our prayers to pray for more 'workers', even though the total numbers we deal with today are very different. Until Christ comes again, the work continues, and the request must surely be repeated.

Not exchanging greetings while on a journey

Today, some cultures offer people little chance to talk to each other while journeying, so Jesus' instructions about not sharing greetings with people while on a journey will seem unremarkable and make little difference. For example, millions of people travel around London each day without saying a word to each other!

We should recall that a 'greeting', while not a notable feature of life today for many people, was certainly far more important in Biblical days, and we need to understand how it worked. In those days, it was deemed insensitive not to speak to people met on a journey. The exchange of greetings was an important feature of travel that was part of the way people established their security on journeys. Friendliness within any region was a positive sign, and unfriendliness was very negative; it does not take much imagination to work out why.

Why then, with this background, does Jesus give this command? It is because He wanted His disciples to go about His work without hindrance, and not be put off by trying to access the usual 'vibes' about whether a route was safe to travel or not! The one on mission should have confidence in God alone for protection and safety, and the exchange of greetings might well distract from the mission, or tempt someone to question God's guidance.

The closeness of the Kingdom of God

Notice the string connection here between the message Jesus preached and that to be preached by the disciples. Here, He tells them to say to the sick '*the Kingdom of God is very close to you*' (10:9), and we compare this with Jesus' first proclaimed message, '*the Kingdom of God is very close ...*' (Matt 4:17f.). The theme of the closeness of God's Kingdom is important for all the Gospels, and it seems that Jesus used these words frequently.

This remains a challenging phrase, and one that is worth both thinking about and preaching today. God has promised to be 'with' His people, so we should not be surprised to hear the message even today; 'God's Kingdom is very close'. It is an invitation to explore, a challenge to consider, a warning to change our ways, and a call to repentance, and much more.

A warning to Jerusalem

The warning of Judgement in verse 12 is something to be borne in mind; but why did Jesus say this? Was it so that we might include the warning of judgement in our preaching? There is one other possible reason. Jesus had just decided He must travel to Jerusalem to be '*rejected by the elders ...*' (9:22). So His heart must have been thinking about Jerusalem and the supreme rejection He would face there. His words here read like a prophecy of destruction falling on Jerusalem for her rejection of God, a destruction just like Sodom.

This prophecy was fulfilled. In AD70, the Roman army razed Jerusalem to the ground, destroying every building and making it impossible for Jewish people to live there for centuries. It has of course been rebuilt, but we should not forget history, or the fact that some of Jesus' own specific prophecies have been fulfilled.

Discipleship

Application

Combating the enemy

We can only combat an enemy if we know who he is and what he does. The evidence of Jesus' ministry is that evil resides in people in the form of the demonic, and can be cast out without too much difficulty. To make more of personal deliverance ministry may be to assume the enemy has too much influence, especially within the lives of people, though Christians are unwise to ignore this.

Equally, no Christian can ignore the presence of evil in the world and its 'wolf' like capacity. Another Biblical picture is given by Peter, who says '*the enemy the devil roars around like a lion, looking for people to devour*' (1 Peter 5:8). These pictures are an important reminder that satan attacks us from 'without', as well as 'from within'. If we know this, we will hopefully be better prepared for the battles we must face, and hopefully fear them less.

The demands of discipleship

It is hard to study this part of Luke's Gospel and not begin to feel rather overwhelmed by the magnitude of what it means to be a disciple. The trouble is that our perspective is of people who have a great deal, who must give up much, whatever our Lord will do to meet our future needs. While this is hard for us, those who give up all things for the sake of the Gospel testify almost unanimously that it is worth it; God's provision is so great!

On the other hand, we should not forget those who wish to respond to God's call who have virtually nothing anyway. How wonderful their journey of faith, and what glories they can reveal to people who have so much!

Giving and receiving a welcome

This passage tells us something about welcoming and hospitality. The gift of hospitality is a precious gift, and one that should be exercised, both in giving and receiving. How will we receive the ministers of God's grace if our doors are shut and we exclude the world of faith from our homes? Certainly, some within our churches think this is wise, but it is not.

An example of 'raw' mission

Not more than eighty years ago, students from Cliff College, the UK Methodist Lay training Centre and Bible College in Derbyshire used to walk through England, Wales and Scotland in teams of about 10 to 12, preaching the Gospel as they went and accepting hospitality from whoever would give it. They pushed their belongings around in a cart! The students would do this for their entire 'holidays' from study, and many walked hundreds of miles; they also saw hundreds if not thousands of people saved by the grace of God. During my time as a College tutor there, we continued to have missions, but of a different kind, with hospitality pre-arranged. But the Principal used to get regular letters from supporters telling him that unless he re-instated the raw travelling missions of earlier students and evangelists, there would be no revival in England! I reckoned then, and still do, that they had a point.

Not chasing lost causes

One important theme of today's passage is that of not remaining where the preaching of the Kingdom is not accepted. Perhaps too much time is given by us to bad causes, and we continue to try and prop up our lost causes when we should rather learn from the principle of 'death and resurrection'.

I know to my personal cost that in some places, churches must die for the work of God may be done. It is true, though no one should quickly assume such judgement. Judgement, as

this passage reveals, is God's alone, but we need to make wise decisions about giving our time. We cannot escape the encouragement this passage gives to abandon and leave behind not merely 'lost causes', but those who have already rejected God's message.

I also know that when I preach I am sometimes speaking to people who already know what they do not want. So if I preach enthusiastically about God's power and the work of the Holy Spirit, I will be told 'this is not acceptable here'. Yes, I have been told this more than once, and I have had to accept that is not wise for me to preach at such places again. I must follow Jesus' commission on this matter.

Ideas for what to do

- There are many features of this passage. Read it carefully, and let the Lord speak to you through it. He will lead you to the part of it that has particular meaning for you.
- Pray for the church of God, especially those places where attitudes have hardened and some aspects of the Gospel are not welcome. If you know of such churches, then pray for them in earnest, and try to speak to people about the issues that concern you about them.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your opinion, what are the most challenging aspects of Jesus' call to mission?
2. How can we exercise hospitality to greater effect within the churches of God?
3. When is it right to 'wipe the dust off our feet' and leave a situation in order to pursue our calling?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we are amazed that You trust us with Your call. You have worked through men and women for centuries, and you long to do even more through us today, when we are obedient to Your will. May I be one of Your servants, and may my life be focussed on Your perfect will, Lord Jesus: **AMEN**
