

## Luke 10:1-24

### Introduction

We're travelling with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. And last week's passage was challenging. We were reminded that *following* Jesus will involve experiencing rejection in one form or another. And we saw the commitment he expects of us. To be a disciple means putting him before all others and giving ourselves whole-heartedly to the task he's given us, the task of proclaiming God's kingdom. It's costly. And if that's all that the Christian life was about, we might be tempted to jack it all in. We might wonder how we got caught up in all this in the first place and ask ourselves whether it's worth it.

Perhaps that's how you're feeling this morning as we gather now. Perhaps you're all too aware of the cost of following Jesus and you're struggling to keep going. You're tempted to give up. Or perhaps you haven't yet committed to following Jesus and you're wondering whether it's worth getting started. Or perhaps you are committed to Jesus, and you have no thought of giving up. But nonetheless, you're finding it hard. It feels like a hard slog to keep putting one foot in front of the other and following him along the way. If any of those descriptions fits you, then I hope our passage today will be full of encouragement. Even if those descriptions don't fit you, and everything is going well, then I rejoice with you and I hope this passage will remind you how good it is to follow Jesus.

Jesus has called his disciples to fix their eyes on the task he's given them. And now, he sends them out to get started. He sends them out ahead of him to proclaim the kingdom. And that's our first heading: proclaiming the kingdom.

### Proclaiming the kingdom

Please look down with me at verse 1. **After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'**

Having sent the twelve to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God back in chapter 9 Jesus now sends a larger group of seventy-two or perhaps seventy, as some manuscripts contain. Either way, it's a number that hints at the mission to the nations of the world, that would begin on the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Their job is that of workers in God's harvest field. They're to go ahead of Jesus and prepare the way for his arrival.

There's a note of urgency about the task. Even this larger group isn't big enough, so they're to ask God to send more of them. The message of the kingdom is a message that people urgently need to hear. More workers are needed.

Again, there's an expectation of encountering hostility and rejection. Verse 3: **'Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.'** There's a sense of vulnerability of those who are sent. Proclaiming the gospel isn't a comfortable task. And they're to depend on God to provide for their needs. Verse 4: **'Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.'** There's no time to stop and chat on the way. They're to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the work before them. And Jesus tells them what to do. Verse 5. **'When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house."** If the disciples are welcomed, they're to stay there, in that house, without moving around, in effect becoming temporary members of the household. They're to conduct themselves as exemplary guests, eating whatever is put before them. And presumably, mealtimes would provide the perfect opportunity to talk and share the good news of the kingdom.

Isn't that often the way. Despite our best intentions, opportunities to share the gospel with those around us don't seem to open up. No matter how much we want to tell someone about Jesus, sometimes we just don't get the chance... until we can sit down and eat a meal with them or meet up for a coffee. Then conversations can happen. This is how the kingdom would advance. Verse 8. **'When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal those there who are ill and tell them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."**

The disciples are to proclaim the kingdom through deed and word, through healing the ill and telling them about Jesus. Our deeds today may be different but the principle's the same. We're to proclaim the kingdom through deed and word. When we tell people about Jesus and show them what it's like to live under his rule, the kingdom comes near to them. The kingdom hasn't come yet in all its fullness. But whenever the gospel is proclaimed, the kingdom comes near, and the invitation to enter is extended.

By the same token, the kingdom also comes near to those who reject it. Verse 10. **But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your own town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.**

When the disciples are not welcomed, the kingdom of God is no less near, yet now its proximity spells disaster. And the disciples are to warn people of the seriousness of rejecting their message.

When people hear the gospel, they're hearing an offer of life and salvation that should be grasped with both hands. The gospel calls them to repent of their old way of life and align themselves with Jesus. But, Jesus says, when they refuse to do that, they put themselves in a worse position even than Sodom and cities like it that the Bible denounces as evil. Verse 13. **'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long**

**ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.**

The seriousness and urgency of the task couldn't be clearer. Verse 16. **'Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.'** When people reject the gospel message we proclaim, they don't only reject us, they reject Jesus too. And in rejecting Jesus, they reject God the Father. There is no other way to God but through faith in Jesus.

Some decisions we make are of no great significance. Deciding whether to accept a sweet that someone offers you is unlikely to have any great consequences. Deciding whether to accept a new two-year contract from your energy provider is more serious. It will lock you into their prices for the foreseeable future. Deciding whether to accept a job offer or a proposal of marriage is more serious still. It's a decision that could shape the rest of your life. But nothing is more serious than how a person responds to Jesus. It will determine how they experience not only this life but eternity. And we must tell people that. The choice they make about Jesus couldn't be more serious. Their eternal destiny hangs on it. The tragedy is that so many people don't understand that. We need to warn them. If you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian, please don't underestimate what's at stake in rejecting Jesus. It's to pass up the only way to life in God's kingdom and to miss out on heaven forever.

Well, I promised you some encouragement and you may not be feeling particularly encouraged yet. What we've seen so far is that the call to follow Jesus means experiencing rejection, it requires wholehearted devotion, and it involves proclaiming a message of the utmost seriousness. You may not feel there's much to encourage us yet. But the encouragement comes as the disciples return to Jesus.

With what we've read so far, we might expect them to come back feeling despondent and dejected. They've gone out like lambs among wolves. Given what happened in Samaria, they've probably gone out fearing more rejection and hostility. And perhaps that's how you feel as you seek to live for Jesus in the world. You fear the worst. You expect rejection and discouragement. But in verse 17 we discover, perhaps unexpectedly, that the disciples come back rejoicing. And that's our second heading: the disciples' joy.

### **The disciples' joy**

Look at verse 17. **The seventy-two returned with joy and said 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'** Who wouldn't be delighted? Their mission has been a success. Even demons have submitted to them as representatives of Jesus. And Jesus explains why. Look first at verse 18. **He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'**

Satan is the leader of all those who oppose God's kingdom. And I think Jesus' words here are best understood as a prophetic vision of the future. Jesus has seen the ultimate downfall of Satan. He has seen Satan's final defeat as the result of the cross. This is the victory that Jesus will accomplish in Jerusalem. And the disciples are already experiencing that victory as they go out in his name and proclaim his kingdom. That's what Jesus is referring to, in verse 19. **'I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.'**

Snakes and scorpions are Jesus' way of referring to the demonic forces of Satan. They're the kind of creatures that send a shiver down your spine. But they have been overcome. Their power is nothing when pitched against the authority of Jesus. There's nothing they can do to stop the coming of his kingdom. That's why the disciples have had such success. They're already beginning to experience Christ's victory breaking into history as they go out proclaiming his kingdom.

And that's what we should expect. Yes, we'll face rejection. Yes, we're going out as lambs among wolves. And yes, we'll have to have some difficult conversations as we warn people of the seriousness of rejecting Jesus. But Satan is a defeated enemy. And there is nothing his forces can do to stop the coming of God's kingdom. As we get on with proclaiming the gospel message, we should expect to see people being freed from Satan's power as they put their faith in Jesus and take their place in God's kingdom. And *that's* something to be encouraged by. Satan has been defeated at the cross. He has been thrown down. And we should expect to see Christ's victory breaking into people's lives as we share the gospel message with them. We should expect to see Satan in retreat as people put their faith in Jesus. Now *that* should be cause for rejoicing. And perhaps you've experienced that joy.

But, Jesus says, that's not all. See what he says in verse 20. **'However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'**

Of course, not everyone will respond to the gospel with faith. There will be times of success. But there will also be times when our attempts to share the gospel go nowhere. If our joy is grounded in our successes, then it will go up and down. There will be peaks and troughs. When things are going well, we'll feel happy. When they're not, we'll feel down. But the promise of heaven has no peaks or troughs. It's constant. And it's where our greatest joy should be.

If we belong to Jesus, we have been enrolled as citizens of heaven. We can enjoy the successes we have as we follow him in the world. And there *are* great joys to be experienced in the Christian life, especially as we see others come to faith. But our greatest joy should come not from the things we experience in this life but from knowing that we have an unshakeable relationship with Jesus that we will enjoy forever in heaven.

And wonderfully, what we discover in the remaining verses is that *our* joy in Jesus is mirrored by *his* joy in us. We rejoice at the thought of being with him in heaven and he rejoices at the thought of having us there! So that's our final heading: Jesus' joy.

### Jesus's joy

Please look down again at verse 21. **At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.'**

Commentators have noted that this is the most joyful description of Jesus anywhere in the Bible. He is overflowing with joy at the thought of his disciples' salvation. And he praises his Father because he has upset conventional wisdom. Rather than revealing himself to those of status and learning, God was making himself known to the equivalent of little children, in other words, to those of no status and minimal education. Knowing God has nothing to do with how clever someone is. We don't figure God out. Nor is it to do with how good or religious someone is. We can't earn our way to God. Instead, God comes to the lowly and meek and draws them to himself through Jesus.

See what Jesus says in verse 22. **'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'**

The only way to come to know the Father is to have him revealed to you by the Son. But, Jesus says, this is what the Father delights to do. He doesn't do it reluctantly or begrudgingly. It's what he loves to do. And it fills Jesus with joy – with exuberant, overflowing joy. He loves to bring lowly sinners into loving relationship with his Father. He loves to bring people like you and me back to God.

Let me quote from Tim Chester's book *Enjoying Jesus*. It's an excellent book that's well worth reading. Commenting on these verses, he writes this:

So, what makes Jesus happy? The short answer is *you*. In fact, Jesus is "full of joy" because of you. He's full of joy because you now have a relationship with the triune God. (Tim Chester, *Enjoying God*, p. 96)

Has anyone ever said to you, "I was having a really rubbish day, everything was going wrong, but then I thought of you, and it put a smile on my face."? Jesus is saying something similar. What is it that puts a smile on his face? It's you. If you're following Jesus, you rejoice at the thought of being with him in heaven and he rejoices at the thought of having you there. And we need to understand what a privileged position we are in. Verse 23. **Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell**

**you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.'**

The disciples were able to see the kingdom of God breaking into history through the ministry of Jesus. What a privilege! What's more, they *shared* in his ministry as they took the good news of his kingdom to the world. With their own eyes, they were seeing people coming into the kingdom of God and receiving the joy of salvation through faith in Jesus.

And that privilege is ours too. It's our privilege to bring people to Jesus and introduce him to them as their King. It's our privilege to see people of all nations taking their place in God's kingdom as we share with them the message of the cross. And as we do that, and people respond in faith, we too are seeing what the prophets and kings of the Old Testament longed to see but didn't. We're seeing God's kingdom come. What a privilege!

### Conclusion

Let me end with an illustration some of us heard from Paul Mallard at the Kent Men's Convention. I want you to imagine a set of scales. The old kind of kitchen scales that has a bowl on either side. As we go through the Christian life it can feel as though the costs outweighs the gains. We've thought about some of those costs. Rejection, isolation, hostility. The cost of giving our wholehearted commitment to Jesus and putting him first, before all others. There's a lot that's good about the Christian life, really good. But there can still be times when the scales feel heaviest on that side, when they seem to tip down on the side of the cost. When those times comes, we need to remember that we're not at the end of the story yet. God's kingdom is coming. And think what will happen to the scales when it finally arrives. Think what it will be like when you draw your first breath in the new creation. Think what it will be like the moment you first open your eyes and look around at the splendour of the new heavens and the new earth. Think what it will be like when you meet Jesus face to face, and his smile greets you. Think what it will be like finally to live in a world in which there is no sadness or sin or suffering, only joy in his presence. What will happen to the scales then? No one's going to look back and say it wasn't worth it.

That's where we're heading. That's the destination Jesus is leading us to as we follow him. And he sends us out to our friends and neighbours to bring with us as many as we can. If you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian, we would love you to be there too. Please ask one of us, any one of us, to tell you how.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, we rejoice that our names are written in heaven. And we thank you that you have made us participants in your work of salvation as we proclaim your kingdom. Please help us to do so with courage. And please grant us the joy of seeing others take their place in your kingdom through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.