

Luke 10:1-24

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[0 : 00] So do turn with me to Luke 10. If you go to church Bible, it's page 868.! Kurt Sernu had a job, but he was anxious whether he'd keep it.

The government are anxious, aren't they, that they keep unemployment levels low. And lots of us, we enjoy holidays, don't we? Easter holidays, two weeks away, three weeks away.

And we enjoy rest. But human beings have a sense, a strong sense of the need to work. Our country needs a workforce to function properly. But it's often in that realm that our thoughts about work often start and finish.

We don't often think of ourselves as workers outside of the jobs we do, do we? The possible exception is on Saturday, we think, I've got loads of jobs, I've got work around the house.

But when it comes to our role within the kingdom of God, I'm not sure that worker is a common way that we tend to think of ourselves. Disciple, yes.

[1 : 31] Child of God, probably. Ambassador for Christ, hopefully. But worker. It's probably not your first instinct that we describe ourselves as, our identity as Christians.

I certainly don't hear people using that language much in their conversations or in their prayers. But it's definitely a key word for Jesus here in verse 10. So verse 2, the ESV uses the word laborer.

He says, the workers are few. And he encourages his disciples to ask God to send out more workers. At the same time, Jesus is sending out his disciples on a mission of their own.

He's employing them in his workforce. They are his laborers. And that's confirmed by the phrase Jesus uses in verse 7. He says that the laborer, the worker, deserves his wages.

And so Jesus is saying, isn't it, his kingdom needs workers. But what is the work? Well, the context of the work that Jesus speaks about here is the harvest.

[2 : 38] Look at verse 2, the harvest is plentiful. The workers are needed for the harvest field. But what does he mean? Back in chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel, John the Baptist said that when the Messiah comes, he would come and he would arrive with a winnowing fork in his hand to clear his threshing floor.

He would gather the wheat into the barn, but he'd burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. And so right from the very beginning of the Gospel, we've been invited to see Jesus' ministry as a harvesting ministry.

Jesus is gathering his people into the kingdom. But he's pronouncing his judgment on those who reject him. And what we see here, Jesus is recruiting workers to help him with his harvesting.

He's inviting his disciples, his followers, to join him in the work. So verse 2 is not primarily about the need for full-time ministers or missionaries. Even though there's whole organizations set up that have reductionally interpreted that verse in that way.

No, verse 2 is primarily a verse about Jesus recruiting his followers to share in his work. It's a verse about disciples learning to do what disciples are meant to do.

[3 : 56] And that's what we're going to think about together tonight. What does it mean for us to follow Jesus by working for him? And our passage falls really neatly into two sections.

You can see it really obviously. In verses 1 to 16, there's a sending out. And then in verses 17 to 24, there's a coming back. So let's consider each and two. Look at point 1, the sending out.

Look at verses 1 to 16. They're all about Jesus sending a large group of disciples out. 72. If you go back to Luke chapter 9, right at the start, he sent 12 disciples out on a similar mission.

But now Jesus widens the circle and there's a wider group of disciples to help him. And as verse 1 tells us, they were sent out in pairs to the places that Jesus was about to go.

They were preparing the way for him, a bit like John the Baptist had. It couldn't be clearer that they are working for Jesus in the ministry of Jesus. It's his harvest.

[4 : 55] He is sending them out. They do what he needs them to do. And so they get to do what Jesus does. Just like the 12 did in chapter 9.

They heal the sick. They proclaim the kingdom. They are to imitate Jesus' compassion. And they are to be heralds of Jesus' message. And they are to engage in their work prayerfully.

Look at verse 2. They are to ask the Lord of the harvest. To multiply disciples as they play their part. They are to engage in their work with undistracted focus.

Verse 4. And they are not to worry about how God will provide for them. And in this way, Jesus echoes the hard sayings that Luke collected together at the end of chapter 9. To follow Jesus.

To leave behind lesser preoccupations. And give yourself heart and soul to the supremely important work of the kingdom. But given that Jesus' harvest includes both gathering wheat and burning chaff.

[6 : 02] It's unsurprising, isn't it, that Jesus teaches his disciples to expect varied and opposite reactions. As they prepare the way for him. So he says, you should expect some to welcome you.

And others to reject you. And it seems to me that those contrasting responses, they are right at the heart of the first 16 verses. So, in these 16 verses, can you see the expectation of welcome?

To begin with, Jesus teaches his disciples to expect some to welcome him. To begin with, when he says in verse 2, that the harvest is plentiful. You see that?

He seems to imply that there's reason to expect the sowing of his kingdom seed. It will bear fruit.

We preached through Luke's gospel probably about five years ago now.

And we saw that the message of the kingdom is for everyone. It's not just for Jews. It's for Gentiles. It's not just for the religious. It's for the irreligious. It is not just for the rich.

[7 : 09] It is for the poor. It is for all people. And Jesus says, as they go ahead of him, it will become plain where the fruitful soil lies. Because those inclined to receive Jesus' message will be those inclined to receive them.

And there's a link here, isn't there, between hospitality, welcoming him, and salvation. Verses 5 and 6 talk about those who welcome the blessing of peace which the disciples will utter.

Such people will welcome the disciples into their homes because they themselves are children of peace. And when they're welcomed like this, Jesus encourages his disciples to stay in those homes.

To eat what they're offered. To heal the sick. To proclaim the message. The kingdom of God has come near to you. The expectation of welcome. But there's also the expectation of rejection.

And Jesus teaches his disciples to expect this kind of welcome. But he also teaches them to expect this kind of rejection. And it's his tender kindness that causes him to do so.

[8 : 19] If you've got a task for someone that's pretty straightforward. Then you're generally happy, aren't you, to jump into it without any need for the fine print, as it were.

But if you need to do something for someone, and it's going to be difficult in some way, you appreciate, don't you, the heads up if it's going to be tricky. Some prior warning.

No one likes to be caught by unpleasant surprises. It's a kind. It's kind of the task giver to prepare the task doer. And so it is here. Jesus loves his disciples enough to tell them it's straight.

Look at verse 3. Go your way, behold, I'm sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. It's not encouraging, is it? One commentator says this.

The simile points to both danger and helplessness. That's not a great combination. It's kind of manageable, isn't it, to be in danger if you can combat it in some way.

[9 : 23] It's okay to be weak as long as you're not in danger. But to be endangered and helpless is terrifying. It means that you are entirely dependent on someone else to help you.

So it's good, isn't it, that those who work for Jesus have the Lord of the harvest in their corner. But of course, it's not just in verse 3 that Jesus prepares his disciples for the risk of rejection.

It's also in verse 10 and following. He says in verse 8 and 9, some will open their homes and some will welcome you. And then verse 10. But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we will wipe off against you.

Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. Do you notice that the message the disciples bring to those who reject them is very similar to the message that they will bring to those who welcome them?

So verse 11 and verse 9 are nearly identical. Except in verse 9, the message for those who receive the disciples is that the kingdom of God has come near to you.

[10:43] In verse 11, the kingdom of God has come near, full stop. And I think that difference is meant to be significant. The lordship of Jesus is the reality that everyone must contend with.

For those who believe the lordship of Jesus is a reality to rest in. The kingdom of God has come near to you. To you. You have a relationship with this king.

You know this king. You welcome this king. But to those who don't believe, the lordship of Jesus is a reality to be feared. The kingdom of God has come.

Jesus is Lord. What are you going to do about it? And from verses 12 to 15, Jesus underlines this very point. Do you remember Sodom?

Sodom was absolutely decimated by God's judgment. But it will be far worse. Far worse for those who reject Jesus when the day of judgment comes.

[11:52] The people of Tyre and Sidon, they were stubborn and unrepentant. But even they, says Jesus, would have bent the knee. When they saw the incredible miracles Jesus and his disciples performed.

But not so the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida. So the judgment on Jesus' contemporaries will be worse than that which even Tyre and Sidon faced.

Their destiny, can you see it in verse 17? In verse 15, it's not the heavens, it is Hades, it's hell.

And that's because by rejecting the harvest workers, they reject the Lord. By rejecting Jesus' messengers, they reject Jesus.

And if they reject Jesus, they likewise reject the one who sent him. Verse 16, the one who hears you, hears me. The one who rejects you, rejects me.

[12:52] And the one who rejects me, rejects the one who sent me. And so on the day that Jesus sends out these 72 workers, he wants them to make sure that they expect both welcome and rejection.

And even now, Jesus wants his disciples this evening to be armed with those two expectations.

Those who do the work of Christ will encounter polar opposites as to how people respond.

And so Jesus helps us tonight with these words. He helps you in the language class. He helps you at Little Stars in Club 16 and Ignite at the book table.

Do we expect rejection and suffering as we labor in the harvest? But do we also expect welcome? I suspect if you look over history, it's easier to expect one of those things than the other.

There have been times in this country, and even now in some places in the world, where the gospel seems to be welcomed more than it's rejected. And it's vital in those situations that God's people remember it's not always going to be like this.

[14:13] But at this point in history, in our part of the world, I suspect it's far easier for you and I to believe in rejection than in welcome. And in days like these, we need the word of Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, to remind us that the good shepherd has sheep out there who will come into the fold.

There is wheat still in the field waiting to be gathered. Some will welcome us when we come with the message of Christ's kingdom.

And we ought to expect no less. Second half of the chapter is in verse 17 and 24. It's the coming back. The coming back. And that's what Jesus says when the disciples are sent out.

So what about the words of Jesus when they come back? Well, if the focus of verses 1 to 16 is a contrast, the focus of verses 17 to 24 is a contrast between two types of joy.

First of all, a joy in serving. Can you see that? There's the joy of 72 disciples. They come back from their mission. And it's a joy I think that many of you will be familiar with.

[15:31] Maybe you've done the language class. Maybe you've done little stars. Maybe you've had an opportunity to share the gospel.

Maybe youth group has gone really, really well. Maybe at house group Bible study, people have engaged with your questions. They've prayed about what you've studied in the passage.

Imagine that. And you feel elated. And you go to home. You put your head on the pillow. And you are full of joy at what God has done. And you're thrilled at how God has used you in his service.

There are times I drive away on a Sunday night and I'm ecstatic. I can remember times walking away from the youth group or home group feeling the sin.

The joy of serving Christ. The joy of knowing you've contributed to the work of the kingdom of God. And it's very kind of God to do that, isn't it, I think. To be sent out as a lamb amongst wolves and to

return with a bursting heart.

[16:44] It's quite something. Given how hard it can be. And so I think it is a wonderful thing that God has made ministry so richly enjoyable. And so it was with the disciples on this occasion.

Look at verse 17 with me. The 72 returned with joy. You can hear it, can't you? Lord, Lord, Lord. Even the demons are subject to us in your name. They proclaimed the gospel. They healed the sick.

They'd been casting out demons. And they were amazed they'd been able to help people in that way. Perhaps they even felt empowered by the authority that Jesus had given them.

And Jesus doesn't rain on their parade. His first instinct is to recognize the authority that they have. And he carefully reminds them in verse 19 that it's an authority that was given to them by his power and his grace.

But he does affirm, doesn't he, they're doing his work. The harvest was advanced. And Satan's work is being unbound.

[17:47] I think that's the point of verse 18. They're casting out demons. It's as if Jesus can see into the heavens. And he can see as if Satan is falling before his very eyes.

And so Jesus affirms here, doesn't he? He's not only granted them power, but also protection. While they were doing his work. And so he welcomes their joy.

Joy in serving. But he also goes on to the deeper point of joy in seeing. Can you see in verses 20 to 24?

Or he speaks to them about another joy, a better joy. I don't think Jesus is rebuking them in verse 20. It's as if more, if I can put it like this way, he wants to tease them into an even richer rejoicing. Imagine a dad on Christmas Eve. And he hears his daughter praying. And his daughter prays, Lord, please may I get lots of gifts tomorrow on Christmas Day.

[19:03] May I get the joy I want from the gifts. What does the dad do? Dad says, you mustn't pray like that.

No, he doesn't. The dad says, listen, you want to pray that your family members would enjoy Christmas? You want to give thanks that Christmas is about a greater joy than presents?

The father doesn't tell his daughter off for praying for something. She's perfectly entitled to pray for. But he coaxes her, doesn't he? To pray in a way that's more deeply in tune with the purposes of God.

With the perspective of his father in heaven. I think that's what Jesus is doing here. The disciples are perfectly entitled to rejoice in ministry. And its effectiveness.

That's a good thing. But he coaxes them into a joy that is more in tune with his heavenly father's perspective. He sees their good joy, but he invites them into a deeper joy.

[20:07] And he wants them to rejoice not so much in serving, but also to rejoice in seeing. Seeing is the way Jesus describes it in verses 23 and 24.

Look at verses 23 and 24. Turning to the disciples, he said privately, 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.

Think of that. The Old Testament is full of Old Testament rulers that saw God do pretty remarkable things. It's full of prophets that heard the voice of God unmistakably in their ears.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, Elijah, Elisha, Moses. Every single one of them would gladly trade places with the littlest person in Jesus' kingdom.

What a thing to say. Jesus' disciples then and now are the envy of prophets and kings. Why? Because of what they see.

[21:19] They see Jesus, God's Messiah. The prophet of prophets and the king of kings. And these disciples, in Luke 10, they saw him, they heard him.

And though differently, we still see him. We still hear him. But the seeing of verses 23 to 24 is the equivalent of knowing of verse 22.

Look at verse 22. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

No one knows the Son like the Father. No one knows the Father like the Son, except those to whom the Son reveals the Father. Can you see that?

We know him just like the Son does. And again, that's an astonishing thing to say, that the Son shares his intimate knowledge of the Father with his disciples, then and now.

[22 : 30] Because we see the Son, we know the Father. And we know him because Jesus has revealed him. So verse 22, but also 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've hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and you've revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, such was your gracious will. Notice that both the Father and the Son are described as revealers here.

The Father and the Son work in unison to open the eyes of Jesus' followers, so that you tonight can see his kingdom clearly.

The wise and the learned, they don't necessarily know the things of the kingdom, because you can't buy them, you can't acquire them, you can't learn them.

Rather, it is revealed. Which is why even babies can have this blessing. It is a gift from God.

[23 : 36] And with these words, Jesus makes grace bright. As he loves to do. As if seeing is equivalent to knowing, and as if knowing is a gift of God's initiative and grace.

And then it all adds up to your name being written in heaven. Look at verse 20. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your name is written in heaven. Jesus is saying, listen, here's the thing to rejoice in. Rejoice in your serving by all means, but there's a greater joy to be had, and Jesus wants to tease us into it.

The joy of seeing, of knowing, of being the recipient of divine revelation. Of having your name written in God's book. And your place in heaven guaranteed.

How easily confused I get about this. I've often driven home on a Sunday night elated, because of what God has done. And how he's used me in the preaching of his word.

[24 : 53] I don't always drive away like that. But when I drive away like that, and my heart is elated, did not my heart have a million reasons to burst, even before the Sunday had begun?

Does not my heart, as a follower of the Lord Jesus, and your heart, if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus, have a million reasons to swell with joy, every single hour of every single day? Jesus says it does.

And Jesus coaxes us to see that there is really no greater joy than that. And so as I finish, I want to ask a question, and the question I want to ask is, who am I?

In each of the talks of these next three weeks, I want to finish by asking a question about how Jesus sees who we are. In Luke chapter 9, Mark chapter 8, Jesus asks his disciples the famous question, who do you say that I am?

It's the big question of Christianity. And I want to take that question, and I want to turn it around.

And so I want us to turn to Jesus tonight, and I want to ask him, who do you say I am?

[26 : 07] That's how I want to finish tonight. And so according to Jesus, who am I? And I think the passage we've looked at tonight gives you two answers to that question.

The first answer that this passage gives you to the question, who am I, is you're a worker if you're in the kingdom. I'm a worker, and that is as much true for me as it is for you.

I'm not a worker for Jesus because I'm a full-time Christian worker. I'm a worker for Jesus because I'm a disciple of Jesus. And to become a disciple of Jesus is to embrace the master's disciple-making work.

We fish for people because Jesus fishes for people. We help in the work of harvesting because harvesting is what Jesus does. And Jesus calls all his disciples to share in the work of the Lord. The work which the Apostle Paul says is never in vain. And so what does this look like? Well, it looks like that I share the compassion of Jesus as I care for the people I meet and interact with each day.

[27 : 17] And I'm serious about the message of Jesus too. So I do look for opportunities to share the message with those same people I love because Jesus loved. I'm a herald of the news of Jesus' kingdom.

But being a worker for Jesus doesn't just have implications for how I live and how I speak in the world. It has implications, doesn't it, for the way that I conduct myself behind closed doors.

Because being a worker for Jesus means being a prayer for Jesus' work. In fact, that is, I think, in some ways, the big shock of the passage.

The harvest is plentiful, so get out there and share the message. No. That's not the first thing Jesus says. He says the harvest is plentiful, so pray.

Ask. Ask the Lord of the harvest to multiply the workers. And this will happen as more people become disciples and so join the disciple-making work.

[28 : 26] And this will happen the more Christ's people see the world as he does. If I'm a worker, I'm also a prayer. And I will pray specifically for more workers.

But being a worker for Jesus also means loving, speaking, and praying with clear expectations. Do you remember what those expectations are? I expect that some will reject the message and they will reject me.

I will expect that some of my prayers for people will not lead to their salvation. And that's a painful thing to have to acknowledge, isn't it?

But Jesus teaches us to acknowledge that. And yet, I also expect some to welcome me as I share the message of Christ's kingdom. I would expect my prayers for some will lead to them becoming Christians.

Christians. And I think in our day, in this country, in this church, we don't find it easy to love, speak, and pray with this expectation.

[29 : 36] We see so much rejection that we're lulled into believing that's all there is. But we mustn't be. Rather, we share the message of Jesus anticipating that some will believe it.

And our prayers should be full of real hope for changed lives. We expect some to welcome us and so to welcome Christ. And that's what it means to be a worker. And that is, this is who I am.

And if you are a disciple of Jesus, then this is who you are too. You're a worker. You're a little child. You're a little child. You're a little child.

There's something else, isn't there, that Jesus says about our identity in these verses. And it's something we must not miss. I'm a worker in Jesus' kingdom, but I'm also a little child. And that's how Jesus refers to his disciples in verse 21.

I don't know whether you noticed it. In that same hour, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. I'm like a little child in Christ's kingdom because everything I have has been given to me.

[30 : 59] I'm not part of Christ's kingdom because I'm wise. And I'm not part of Christ's kingdom because I'm learned. And I'm not part of Christ's kingdom because I've logicked it out and I'm certainly not part of Christ's kingdom because I'm a worker in it.

First and foremost, I am part of the kingdom of God and my name is written in heaven because the Father and the Son have revealed themselves to me. I'm part of the kingdom because grace is bright in my life.

I'm blessed. I'm the envy of prophets and kings. And so like Jesus did in verse 21, I praise God. I praise God because it's his grace that's won this blessing for me.

I praise God now and forever. I praise God like Jesus did with a heart full of joy through the Holy Spirit. And this, chiefly this, must be the source of my joy. I may have days of great joy because the Spirit submit to me.

I may have days of great joy because the mission goes well and the sermon is a humdinger. I may have days of joy because it's genuinely a thrilling thing to be a worker in Christ's kingdom.

[32 : 21] But I have a joy that surpasses even the most elated day as Christ's servant. It's the joy not of serving, but of seeing.

Of seeing Jesus' glory and hearing Jesus' voice and knowing Jesus' Father. And believing with assurance that my name is written in his book.

And that one day I will be in heaven with him. And that must be more precious to me than all the ministry that I can ever exercise as a worker.

That I'm a little child in his kingdom. And so particularly for preachers, speaking to myself, and for those in full-time ministry, I think no passage of the Bible should shape our sense of self than this one.

And as I've thought about this passage over years and years and years, this passage must make a huge difference to the way we value ourselves. And so these words of Jesus have taught me not to find my identity in my ministry for Jesus, but in who I am before God because of Jesus.

[33 : 39] Because I am not defined by what I do for him, but by what he's done for me. And these words profoundly reshape how we see ourselves.

Not first and foremost as a pastor, as a worker, as a leader, but first and foremost as a disciple, as a little child.

And it's with these words that Jesus calls us to be workers for him whose work is radically humble. In fact, I think that's the big theme as you go through Luke 10 of humility.

To follow Jesus, to be his disciple, is at its course a life of humility. humility. As we've seen today, humble working.

Because I am not only a worker, but I'm also a little child. I'm his little child. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

[34 : 55] And 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 you've revealed them to the little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. Let's pray.