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Luke 10:1-12, 16

THE LORD OF THE HARVEST COMMISSIONS HIS WORKERS

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Do you see it? If you close your eyes, can you see it? I'm talking about the harvest. It's not so easy to see. You see the fields in April, May and June and it's very difficult to see much of anything. But the time will come. Something is growing even though we can't always see it. Different things are ready at different times. This is a good time for berries: strawberries, raspberries, blueberries. In the fall we will have apples. Corn, wheat, barley, soybeans and many other things are planted. They grow and they wait for the harvest. The time will come when everything is ready. My brother-in-law is a farmer. It isn't always easy getting the spring planting in. Sometimes you have had so much rain that the tractor can't get into the fields. Then it's not always easy when harvest time comes. You have only a window of time to get everything in. You work long days and well into the night.

Jesus speaks to us about a harvest of souls. Last week we saw that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. He was going there for one purpose. He was going to fulfill God's plan of salvation. That would come as Jesus would suffer, die and rise again. The time was getting short. It was now less than six months away. Jesus would speak as though everything were already accomplished. He would do exactly what he said he would do.

The time would come for the harvest. Someone would have to spread the word. Who would do it? We think immediately of the Twelve. They were always with Jesus. Jesus had sent them out before this. He had given them the authority to drive out demons and to heal the sick. They were to preach the kingdom of God. They had returned. Jesus fed the 5000. He heard Peter's confession of him being the Christ, the Messiah. He had been transfigured on the mountain as he stood with Moses and Elijah. He was on his final tour.

Jesus would now commission another group of people to prepare the way. Every stop was important. Every word that was preached to the people would have an impact, perhaps not at this time, but certainly after Jesus died and rose again. We say that Jesus had twelve apostles. He had many disciples. A disciple is a learner, a follower. Jesus had many of these people who came from all over Galilee and Judea. They listened to his sermons and teachings. Some may have been pretty much full-time followers, some part-time. An apostle was a man who was personally, called, trained and then sent by our Lord Jesus to preach and to do miracles in his name. They would have to be witnesses of Jesus' entire ministry including especially his resurrection. Eleven of the Twelve would die confessing Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

It is reasonable to assume that these 72 men who are sent out here to prepare the people for Jesus' coming would also be witnesses of the resurrection. St. Paul speaks of the 500 witnesses of the risen Christ in I Corinthians. Many would be part of the 72. They were chosen by Jesus to go and prepare the way. Jesus is coming! They were like John the Baptist times 72.

They were to go out two by two. They were there to help each other. They were there to talk to one another, encourage and strengthen one another. There would be highs and lows. Some days would be very joyful. Others would be very disappointing.

The harvest is plentiful. The world is the harvest field. We know that God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus came into the world to be the Savior of all. He did not die for just a select group of people; he died for all. There are many cultures and countries and people. They live in slavery to sin, death and the power of Satan. They have no hope without Jesus. How can they hear without a preacher?

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. There are millions of people without the Good News of Jesus. Who will tell them? Sadly the classes of pastors at our Seminary have shrunk over the last years. They are less than half of what the classes were thirty years ago. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore to send out workers into his harvest field." We are to ask, to beg, to beseech the very gates of heaven. And as we do so, are we willing to be the answer to our own prayers? Not everyone can serve as a pastor, but everyone can do something. Are you willing to support the work of the church with your offerings?

What kind of pastors do we want? Jesus used Galilean fishermen, but these were men whom he trained in every way possible for three years. Do we want our pastors to know the Bible? I would certainly hope so. Do we want them to know the Bible in its original languages? Why did God say things in this way other than that? There are reasons and good ones. Do we want our pastor to know doctrine, the teaching of the church? There are plenty of people out there who try to make the Bible say anything they want it to say. Does God's Word change with the times or is it timeless in its application to people's lives? Do we want our pastors to distinguish between Law and Gospel? Do we still preach the Law to hardened sinners and the Gospel to troubled sinners? Or doesn't it really matter?

There are no perfect pastors out there. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. God is the one who will provide the strength we need. We need people who are not ashamed of Jesus and his Word. We live in a time of political correctness. We hear about not offending people. Well, we need pastors who will preach the Law so sharply that it cuts like a knife through our hypocrisy and denials and justification of our sin. We need to expose error so that we can point to the truth of God. That is not easy and it is not popular. It will offend many people. That is why people hated Jesus and they hated Noah and Moses and Elijah and John the Baptist and Peter and Paul and millions more who have stood in our Lord's place.

Jesus sends us out like lambs among wolves. That doesn't sound like a very pretty picture. When we think of that, we can imagine a lot of carnage. If you were a betting man, you would certainly put your money down on the wolves. Yet Jesus does not say that we will be torn apart.

We live in dangerous times. We have come to the Fourth of July weekend. It is a time to think of our nation and how richly we have been blessed by God. We have so many freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But Christianity is definitely under attack in our country today. We have done our best to tell God that we don't want him in our nation today. We have our own gods of self and pleasure and convenience and political correctness. Did you see the people celebrating the right to kill their own children this past week? What does this say? In California right now there is a bill that will effectively close down every Christian school and university. Will it pass? Yes, it seems that atheists who want to go to Christian school will be offended by religion classes and morning chapel. Here's a solution. Don't go to Christian school if Christianity offends you. It is considered a wonderful thing if people fly the gay pride flag at their homes. What response would we get if we flew the Christian flag?

We must pray for our country and we must pray for our workers. We must be on our knees asking God to give us Godly leaders who will do what is right. But we know that God is on our side. We also know that the gates of hell cannot prevail against our Lord and his Church. The Gospel will always be foolishness and a stumbling block to many, if

not most people, but it is the power to save others. Let us never forget our Lord's promise that he is with us always to the very end of the age.

The 72 were to put their trust in God completely. They would not need an extensive wardrobe. They shouldn't have to worry about money. Everything they needed would be provided. They were to say, "Peace to this house!" This is the peace that passes all understanding. This is the peace announced to the shepherds on the plain of Bethlehem by the angels. This is peace with God, the peace that comes from sins forgiven. This is the peace that could only come from the Prince of Peace, Jesus our Lord. That person would receive the blessing of peace, but if that person refused it, it would return to the one who gave it.

We realize that not everyone wants that peace that God offers. There are plenty of people who want to remain slaves to sin. There are plenty of people who love sin. They will not give up any part of their lifestyle. They even want us to rejoice and be proud of that sinful behavior. There is a great difference between a sin of weakness that we recognize and pray that God will help us to overcome and an open defiance of God's Word where a person will continue in his behavior no matter what the word of God says.

The 72 were not to go from place to place. They were to stay at one place. They deserved to be supported by those who received the gift of the Gospel. They were not to demand it, but they had every right to receive it. We don't pay our pastors a salary as such. Congregations are there to take care of the earthly needs of their workers. Depending upon the congregation and the area, some may give more and others less. Their gifts should be sufficient.

The 72 were to go to both homes and villages. They were given the power to heal the sick, establishing them as Christ's messengers. They were to say, "The Kingdom of God is near!" Is Jesus just a man? Some thought so, but others came to the conclusion that he had to be more than that. He had to be the Christ. He had to be the very Son of God. After Jesus rose from the dead, these people would see that.

"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." Don't be deceived that it is only people bringing this message. If we accept the messengers, we accept Jesus. If we reject the messengers, we reject Jesus. And if we reject Jesus, we reject the Father who sent him. It is the same today.

The harvest is there. Our Lord Jesus is returning soon. Pray that the Lord provide workers for that harvest of souls. Pray that the Lord uses you! AMEN.