

Luke 10:1-16

Principles of Evangelism

We are all commanded to share the gospel. There is no rational way around it. We might complain that we are uncomfortable talking to others. That may be true. We might argue that we do not know enough to fully represent the gospel. That also may be true. We might even insist that others could do the job so much better than we. That also could be true. However, none of these excuses makes a believer exempt from sharing the gospel. It is a command, and we are to obey.

After the depressing, but illuminating, encounter Jesus had with the three would-be followers in the previous passage, it is encouraging to have recorded a much more positive event. Unlike those mentioned in the previous section, these seventy men were more than willing to deny themselves to follow Jesus. They cared not about personal comfort, wealth, or friends, but rather left all and risked everything to do the work Jesus sent them to do. As such, they are an example to all believers and, through the instructions given to them by Jesus, we can take away several principles that we can apply to ourselves as we share the gospel today.

Context and Method

“After this” (v. 1) means probably that this event occurs after the conclusion of the Galilean ministry and prior to Jesus going to Judea. As He began the journey, Jesus “appointed seventy others” (v. 1). That they were ‘others’ means they were in addition to the twelve disciples Jesus had accompanying Him and whom He had sent out previously (Luke 9:1-2). This also means that this is a separate sending out, and not a duplicate entry in the gospel accounts as some suggest.

There is great debate over whether Jesus sent out seventy or seventy-two in this instance. Arguments have been amassed by scholars on both sides. There is symbolism for each number and textual evidence to support each. While they are interesting (perhaps), for our purposes they do not matter. Whether the number was seventy or seventy-two, the many principles Jesus laid out for evangelism are the same. They apply regardless of the number being sent out, and they are relevant for today as well.

Another question to ask as we begin our study is why Jesus “sent them in pairs” (v. 1). Surely Jesus had much to do and little time in which to do it. He wanted them to go “ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come” (v. 1) and clearly this could be accomplished much more quickly if the number were not diluted by pairing them together.

Two answers present themselves. First, Jesus knew the value of mutual support and encouragement. “⁹Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. ¹⁰For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. ¹¹Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? ¹²And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Second, Jesus knew the Law. He was a rabbi, and He came to fulfill, not abolish it. Therefore He practiced the wisdom of Deuteronomy 19:15, “a single witness shall not rise up against a man on account

of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.” This practice seems to have taken hold in the early Church. In Acts we find Peter and John working together. Later, Barnabas and Paul are sent out together. Then we read of Paul and Silas going one way and Barnabas and Mark another. The list continues.

While we are no longer under the Law, it seems to me prudent that in many cases of evangelism, the practice of going out in pairs is still an appropriate method. Surely, the gospel should be shared at every opportunity, and we should not avoid sharing the gospel because we are alone. And there will often be cases where a friendship has developed between a believer and a non-believer where it is both appropriate and comfortable to share the gospel without another present. Still in some other cases (street evangelism comes to mind) it seems sensible to travel with a fellow believer for both support and mutual encouragement.

Be Compassionate

That “He was saying to them” (v. 2) these things ought not to be taken to mean that this was all Jesus said. As with other accounts of Jesus speaking in the gospel narratives, we cannot conclude that these are complete records of the entire conversation (or sermon). Rather they are what the Holy Spirit inspired each writer to record as it best fit that particular narrative. That is to say, Jesus did certainly say everything He is recorded to have said, but we should not conclude that it is everything He said.

That being said, Jesus began, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (v. 2). We often think of the harvest as those who join the kingdom of God. Rather though, I think the harvest Jesus is referring to is the coming judgment of those who are not believers. As Jesus spoke in parable regarding wheat and tares,

“³⁰Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘first gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn’ . . . ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴²and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (Matthew 13:30, 39-43).

This will be the final judgment for those outside the body of Christ, “¹⁴then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. ¹⁵And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe’” (Revelation 14:14-15).

There are many outside the faith and there are few workers to bring the good news to them. We must begin evangelism with a compassionate awareness of the awful plight of sinners who die unconverted. If we cannot begin to understand and appreciate the eternal torments to which they are bound, we will never be motivated to share the gospel.

For this we need to adopt the compassion of Jesus. Jesus was remarkably compassionate. In Matthew's account, Jesus framed this call to evangelism in the context of compassion, "³⁵Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ³⁶Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then He said to His disciples, 'the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few'" (Matthew 9:35-37). This was not a singular instance.

"When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14).

"And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, 'I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way'"(Matthew 15:32).

"When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34).

"Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him." (Matthew 20:34).

" Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'" (Mark 1:41).

"¹²Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, 'do not weep.' ¹⁴And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, 'young man, I say to you, arise!' ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother" (Luke 7:12-15).

We ought also to remember that these men are being sent out to generally Gentile and Samaritan populations. The kingdom of God was not for Jews alone.

That Jesus was compassionate does not mean He did not understand the doctrine of God's sovereignty. He knew perfectly well that God predestined those He had elected to be saved. Yet, He wept over the fate of those who rejected Him, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. (Matthew 23:37). God is sovereign but man is responsible. Each man is responsible for his own soul. Those who reject the gospel are not only worthy of pity and compassion, but also wrath and judgment. We are responsible both for our response to the gospel and, as believers, responsible to share it compassionately.

Be Prayerful

Because of His compassion, Jesus implored His followers to "beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (v. 2). We cannot think too highly of the power and importance of prayer. Not all of us have the spiritual gifts or personal characteristics to be missionaries. Not all of us are financially able to give to missions. But each of us can pray. After all, "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16). One principle to take away is that each of us can pray for the spread of the gospel.

Be Obedient

The command is simple and direct. “Go” Jesus said (v. 3). The verb is rendered in the tense that means to keep going. It is not a one-and-done command. We cannot explain the gospel to one person and think we are finished any more than we can give to the church one time and think we have met our obligation to financially support God’s work. Also, there is urgency implied. When Jesus sent out these seventy, He was but a few months away from His death. He still had much ground to cover. There were many people in Judea who had not yet heard the good news that the kingdom of God had arrived. Today we do not know when Christ will return, but we do know that He could return at any time. There is less time to share the gospel before He returns each day.

Since these men knew enough to be saved, they knew enough to share the gospel. They could be witnesses. That is, they could tell what Jesus had done for them. They did not need to expound on the niceties of the Law, nor did they need to address such theological issues as might be raised to a rabbi like Jesus. They simply needed to proclaim the simplest of gospel messages, that the kingdom of God is here.

Specialized training in evangelism is very helpful. However, let it be understood that while a fine program like Evangelism Explosion equips a believer to share the gospel more effectively, completing EE is not a requirement to witness of Christ. We cannot hide behind the fact that we are untrained (or shy, or not comfortable, etc.) as an excuse for silence.

Be Aware

Jesus wanted these men to know what they were getting themselves into. Never one to make things seem what they were not just to aid recruitment, Jesus reminded them that “I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves” (v. 3). This was a clearly understood metaphor in Palestine. Shepherds guarded their flocks from predators, and wolves were their main enemy. Jesus always wanted His followers to know the truth. He wanted them to count the cost and understand fully the implications of their commitment to follow Him. He warned His disciples at a later date, “¹these things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. ²They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. ³These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. ⁴But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them” (John 16:1-4)

We must remember that following Jesus is a perilous occupation. “Cain will murder Abel, if he can, to the very end of the world” wrote Martin Luther. Let us not forget that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Let us never be so naive as to “be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13). We do not know the lives of these seventy men. How many of them were persecuted in the synagogues in which they spoke? How many were ostracized by their families for choosing to follow Jesus? How many of them were martyred in later days? All we know is that Jesus sent them out fully aware of what they would be facing as followers of His.

Another principle to take away is that we ought to understand fully the cost of discipleship. We cannot be shocked when things do not go our way in this world as we follow Jesus. We must focus on the advantage we have eternally, and let that be our joy.

Be Humble

As with His own disciples, Jesus commanded these seventy to “carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way” (v. 4). As we have learned, this did not mean they were to take nothing, but rather nothing extra. They were to rely upon God’s provision. They needed to come to the point where they could say, like the greatest missionary of the early Church, Paul, “¹¹I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹²I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.” (Philippians 4:11-12).

The greeting referred to was not simply a saying of ‘hello’ to fellow travelers. It had to do with the ritualistic greeting of Jews on certain occasions.

“⁵Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God. . . . ⁷Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. . . . ¹²Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses’ father-in-law before God” (Exodus 18:5, 7, 12).

The purpose of this injunction was twofold. First, these men were not to expect to create a relationship with someone along the way that might lead to their supporting the mission. Second, they were not to evangelize based on friendship, but rather on the power of the gospel message itself.

This, of course, was not an everlasting requirement. As we learned before, Jesus changed His instructions to accommodate the needs of His disciples. Later He exhorted them “whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one” (Luke 22:36). But it is worth nothing that was after He had established the fact that God was the ultimate provider, ““when I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?” They said, ‘No, nothing’” (Luke 22:35).

The seventy were also clearly told to not try to improve their accommodations as they traveled from place to place. When they came to a house that received them they were to “stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house” (v. 7). As we learned before, other teachers often went about from home to home seeking the best place to stay and offering to grace a particular home that gave them in return the finest provisions. These men, followers of Jesus, were to distinguish themselves by not doing that.

That does not mean that these men ought not to accept what was offered. They were free to receive hospitality, but they were not to expect to be entitled to any special treatment. Jesus let them know that “whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you” (v. 8). For Jews traveling through predominantly Gentile and Samaritan areas, this meant that they were relieved from strict obedience to the Jewish dietary laws as they went their way. If they dined in a Gentile home or with Samaritans to whom they were sharing the gospel, they were permitted by Jesus to eat what was set before them. They were not to let their own peculiar requirements for food be a stumbling block to receiving the gospel. They were not to let food get in the way of the message. This was consistent with what Jesus had preached about the Sabbath in general, “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke

6:5) and food in particular, “¹⁸do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:18-19).

Another principle to remember is that we should not care too much about the niceties of life. We should pass through the world like we travel on vacation. We ought to recognize that the place we live and the food we eat is not what it would be like at home.

Be Gracious

Jesus instructed these men that “whatever house you enter, first say, ‘peace be to this house’” (v. 5). They were to extend an offering of peace. But this implied more than an informal greeting. The peace being offered was the peace of the gospel message. They were quite literally bringing the opportunity for peace with God with them as they entered. That is why not all would receive it. “If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you” (v. 6). If their message was not received, they were to go on their way. It was not their fault, and they were not to take it personally.

As we share the gospel, a principle to keep in mind is that if those with whom we share are unreceptive, it is not us they are rejecting. It is Jesus; it is God the Father, they are rejecting. The harvest is the Lord’s, not ours. Jesus emphasized this without condition when He concluded His exhortation to these seventy, “the one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me” (v. 16).

Be Practical

These men were given the power to do great things as they went about preaching the kingdom of God. They were to “heal those in it who are sick” (v. 9). They were to not only deal with things eternal, but with things practical. Many to whom they would go had specific immediate needs beyond those of salvation, and these men were to be attentive to those needs.

They were given these powers because they were necessary to authenticate the gospel message - to offer positive proof that “the kingdom of God has come near to you” (v. 9). With the completion of the canon, such extraordinary spiritual gifts are no longer required. Still, the fact that we do not possess these same powers today does not absolve us from being aware of, and attentive to, the practical needs of those to whom we preach the gospel. We may not be able to exorcise demons or heal the sick or raise the dead, but we, too, are to do what we can do that is practical and reasonable for those who hear the gospel message.

A Word about Judgment

It was clear that Jesus did not expect these men to be well received wherever they went. Therefore He instructed them, “¹⁰whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near’” (v. 10-11). They were not to sneak away in the night, but to make a public declaration of the sins of the city and the wrath to come.

As we have learned before, the act of shaking the dust off one's feet was a symbolic act that meant a great deal in Jewish culture. It was a way of demonstrating that the rejection of the good news of the gospel resulted in the bad news of judgment. Jesus often spoke not only of heaven but of hell, and so should these men. Reminding people of the wrath to come, Jesus said on one occasion, “²⁸do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). To do otherwise was to paint only half a picture of the kingdom of God.

Jesus emphasized the judgment of unbelievers by mentioning six cities. Three of these cities were Jewish and three Gentile. “¹²I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. ¹³Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades!” (v. 12-15).

Amazingly, the three Jewish cities (Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida) would face a more stern judgment than the three Gentile cities (Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon). “That day” (v. 12) refers to the great judgment of Revelation. These latter three were the epitome of corruption and wickedness. But the three Jewish cities had the opportunity to hear first-hand the Messiah, the Son of God. And because they rejected Him, their punishment would be more severe. Jesus had taught this truth in parables, “from everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:48), and the writer to the Hebrews echoed the same sentiment regarding those who had the opportunity to believe but chose not to, “how much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God” (Hebrews 10:29).

That Sodom would be punished less severely than any town in Israel must have been incomprehensible to Jews. It had served for millennia as the poster-child for sin. Tyre and Sidon had also been specifically singled out for the wrath of God by the prophets (Isaiah 23, Tyre and Ezekiel 28, Tyre and Sidon). Jesus had made Capernaum His center of operations while He ministered in Galilee, and both Chorazin and Bethsaida were nearby and must have heard Jesus speak personally on several occasions.

Yet that was just the point. We must remember the great sinfulness of those who reject the gospel. They will be judged according to the opportunity they had. Great religious privileges confer with them great responsibility. That Capernaum felt entitled to recognition, believing it would be “exalted to heaven” (v.15) only made their sin that much greater. We can take away from this that it was, and is, possible to hear Jesus preach, see Him do miracles, and yet remain outside the state of grace. Proximity, alone, does not confer blessing.

It is interesting that there is no great sin associated with these Jewish towns. Unlike Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon which were fertile grounds of great wickedness, these towns committed no great hostile acts toward Jesus as far as we know. To be sure, the people of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus from a cliff, but there is no record of that happening in Capernaum. They were merely unbelieving. This, too, is a lesson. To remain unsaved, we need not be openly hostile to Jesus, apathy will do just as well.

Take Aways

As we obey God's command to share the gospel, may we do so filled with His Holy Spirit that we might be directed and empowered to evangelize others with attitudes and actions that reflect the God we serve.