

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 15: The Seventy-Two, the Good Samaritan, Mary and Martha -- Luke 10:1-42

The road is dusty and the laborers are few. Jesus appoints seventy-two and sends them out two by two, ahead of Him, into every town and place He himself was about to go. He does not hand them a strategy for success or a guarantee of comfort. He tells them they are lambs going out among wolves, that they should carry no moneybag, that they should heal the sick and say to whoever will listen, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (v. 9). Before a single mission is launched, He tells them to pray, because the harvest is plentiful but the workers are scarce, and the Lord of the harvest is the one who sends. From the very first verse, this chapter is about a King whose reign is breaking into the world through ordinary people who will simply go where He sends them.

When the seventy-two come back, they are giddy. "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" (v. 17). And Jesus answers with one of the most arresting sentences in the Gospels: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (v. 18). But then He gently redirects their joy. Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, He says. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven (v. 20). Spiritual power, success, even results in ministry, are not the deepest ground of a disciple's joy. Salvation is. And in that same hour Jesus himself rejoices in the Holy Spirit, thanking the Father for revealing these things to little children, and turning to the disciples to tell them that prophets and kings longed to see what they were now seeing.

Then a lawyer stands up to test Him with the oldest and best question a person can ask: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 25). Jesus draws the answer out of him: love God with everything, and love your neighbor as yourself. "Do this, and you will live" (v. 28). But the man wants to limit the size of his obligation, so he asks, "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). In reply Jesus tells the story that the world has never forgotten, of a beaten man in a ditch, a priest and a Levite who pass by, and a despised Samaritan who stops, binds the wounds, pays the bill, and shows what mercy actually costs. Go, Jesus says, and do likewise.

And the chapter ends in a home, where two sisters host the Lord and respond to Him very differently. Martha is busy, distracted, anxious about much serving, while Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to His teaching. When Martha complains, Jesus does not scold her for working; He gently names what is wrong with her heart. "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (vv. 41-42). Read this chapter slowly and watch the threads come together: the King sends His servants, the King saves and writes their names in heaven, the King defines neighbor-love that crosses every barrier, and the King tells us that above all our doing, we are first to sit at His feet and hear His word.

Group Discussion: When the seventy-two returned thrilled that even the demons submitted to them, Jesus told them, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20). We are tempted to anchor our joy in results, in usefulness, in things going well. Why is it so easy to let our happiness rise and fall with our successes, and what would it look like to make our salvation in Christ the steady ground of our joy this week?

Personal Reflection: Picture the two sisters in that house: Martha frantic in the kitchen, Mary still at Jesus’ feet. Jesus said Mary had chosen “the good portion” (v. 42). Where are you more like Martha right now, anxious and troubled about many things, and what is the “one thing” you may be crowding out? What would it take this week to actually sit down and listen to the Lord before you rush off to serve Him?

Read Luke 10:1-42

Study Questions

1. Jesus appoints seventy-two and sends them ahead of Him, telling them the message everywhere is, “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (v. 9; also v. 11), and He says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (v. 2). What do these verses teach about the nature of the kingdom Jesus was bringing, about who does the sending, and about the urgency of the work?
2. Jesus sends the seventy-two as “lambs in the midst of wolves” (v. 3), telling them to carry no moneybag and to depend on the hospitality of others (vv. 4-7). When God calls you to step out for Him, how do you usually respond to vulnerability and the loss of control, and where is He asking you to trust His provision rather than your own resources right now?
3. To the towns that received His messengers Jesus said, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (v. 16), and He pronounced woes on Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for refusing to repent despite the works done among them (vv. 13-15). What do these verses teach about the authority of Christ’s message, the seriousness of rejecting it, and our accountability for the light we have received?
4. Capernaum had seen mighty works and yet did not repent, while Tyre and Sidon, Jesus said, would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes (vv. 13-15). Where have you received great light, clear teaching, repeated warnings, abundant grace, and grown a little too familiar or complacent with it? What would genuine repentance look like for you in response to the light you already have?
5. When the seventy-two returned rejoicing that the demons were subject to them, Jesus said, “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20). What does this teach about the true and lasting ground of a Christian’s joy, and why does Jesus deliberately redirect their joy away from spiritual power and success toward their salvation?

6. In that same hour Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” and thanked the Father that He had hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children (vv. 21–24). What is it about a childlike heart that God delights to reveal Himself to, and where is your own pride, sophistication, or self-sufficiency keeping you from receiving the kingdom like a child?
7. Jesus says, “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” (v. 22). What does this verse teach about the unique relationship between the Father and the Son, and about the fact that we can know God the Father only through Jesus Christ?
8. Jesus told His disciples that many prophets and kings longed to see what they were seeing and did not see it, and to hear what they were hearing and did not hear it (vv. 23–24). We hold the completed account of these things in our hands, yet we can grow numb to it. What would it look like for you to recover a sense of wonder and gratitude this week for what God has let you see and hear in His word?
9. A lawyer asks, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and Jesus leads him to the great commands, to love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, saying, “Do this, and you will live” (vv. 25–28). When the man tries to justify himself by asking “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29), Jesus tells of the Samaritan who showed mercy to a stranger and a man of his enemies, and says, “You go, and do likewise” (v. 37). What does this passage teach about loving God and neighbor as the summary of God’s law, about the surprising reach of true neighbor-love, and how do we hold this together with the truth that we cannot earn eternal life by self-justifying works, that genuine faith in Christ is what produces real mercy?
10. Look back across the whole chapter: the King who sends, the joy of names written in heaven, the mercy of the Samaritan, and Mary seated at Jesus’ feet while Martha is anxious about many things (vv. 38–42). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 10:1–42 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 22:34–40, Jesus naming love for God and neighbor as the two greatest commandments on which the whole Law hangs; Romans 13:8–10, love as the fulfilling of the law; 1 John 4:19–21, that we love because He first loved us, and that the one who does not love his brother cannot claim to love God; Ephesians 2:8–10, saved by grace through faith, not by works, yet created in Christ Jesus for good works; Colossians 1:13–14, God transferring us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption.