

THE NATURE OF MISSIONS

LUKE 10:1-24

The Bible Gives Us A Realistic View Of The Ups And Downs Of Ministry

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The Nature of Missions

Luke 10:1-24

Last time we met, we witnessed the start of Jesus' march to Jerusalem. Jesus resolutely set His face towards Jerusalem. However, it didn't take long for us to realize that this journey was not going to be bump-free. In the very first city they approached, they were rejected. James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven on the city, but Jesus gently rebuked them. The lesson we came away with last week was that there are going to be ups and downs in ministry and following Jesus is often going to be difficult.

This morning, we are going to pick up this theme of ministry and discipleship. Jesus will commission more disciples to go out on a missionary journey and prepare towns for His arrival. Again, we are going to see that disciples of Jesus should not be optimistic or pessimistic. They should be realists. My son and I are exact opposites. I'm an optimist and he is a pessimist. His argument is that if he always thinks the most negative outcome, then he will never be disappointed. If things turn out well, then he will be pleasantly surprised. I can't make myself think like that. ... Until one day I went to visit a missionary family in the rain forest in Costa Rica. I arrived at the bottom of a mountain and the guide assured me the only way to get up the mountain was to ride up in a basket. We got in the basket and the guide started to pull us up on the rope. When we were halfway up the mountain, I noticed the rope was kind of old and frayed. The basket was no bargain either. With the ground way below, jagged rocks jutting out, and my let's say my above average weight, I asked the guide, "By the way, how often do they change the ropes?" He looked at me; he looked at the rope, shrugged his shoulders and said, "I guess every time it breaks."

I guess sometimes we have to just close our eyes and keep moving forward. But the point is that we are called to be realists. Jesus was clearly a realist and He wasn't hesitant to share both the ups and downs with His disciples.

MISSIONARY METHODS (VS 1-11)

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **THE BIBLE GIVES US A REALISTIC VIEW OF THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MINISTRY.** In other words, the Bible never sugar coats life in Christ. Jesus will instruct His followers on some missionary methods in verses 1-11. Here we will learn that **MINISTRY THAT DOESN'T DEPEND ON GOD IS NOT MINISTRY AT ALL.** Something we always need to keep reminding ourselves is that ministry is all about God and empowered by God.

In the first half of verse 1 we learn that we are chosen and commissioned by God. The Bible is clear that we can only come to God as He calls us and the Holy Spirit enlightens us. Verse 1 informs us that Jesus appointed 72 disciples for this next missionary outreach. There is a textual problem here. The manuscript evidence is

equally split. The NRSV and the NASB record the number as 70. The NLT and NIV record the number as 72. In most cases, we can identify which manuscript evidence is stronger but in this case one cannot be sure as to which number is correct. We know that Jesus chooses numbers that have symbolic meaning. For example, the 12 Apostles are meant to correspond with the 12 Tribes of Israel. If that is the case, then I would opt for the number 70. In Genesis 10-11 there are 70 nations listed in the Hebrew text. In Exodus 24, Numbers 11, 24, and 25 the number of elders appointed to assist Moses is 70. In Rabbinic tradition, Moses' commandments were being heard in 70 languages. And the religious court of the day, the Sanhedrin consisted of 70 members. 70 would be a meaningful number to the Jews.

On the other hand, the number 72 is not without symbolic meaning. Local councils consisted of 72 members. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures. Tradition has it that there were 72 translators that did the translation and in this Greek translation, 72 nations are listed in Genesis 10-11.

So you can take your pick as to which number is the correct number. It may have seemed to you a meaningless academic exercise that we just went through. However, let me leave you with this thought. There are people who go around saying the Bible is riddled with errors and that the Biblical text is unreliable. We have such good and reliable ancient manuscript evidence of the Bible that we can find something as small as a number discrepancy of 2 and strain it like a gnat. The Bibles we hold in our hands today are absolutely reliable and accurate. They are not riddled with errors. They are the words of God. There is no other book in history in which the facts are so well attested. We have tons of manuscript evidence like no other book in antiquity and we have manuscripts that date back to less than one hundred years from the originals. There is no doubt the Bible we preach and teach week after week is the word of God. The only duties for us are to preach and teach them with accuracy and to obey them. Jesus appointed and empowered these disciples to prepare people to meet Him.

That mission has not changed for us. If you are a believer then you have been chosen and commissioned to bring people face to face with Jesus. There are many ways to prepare yourself to witness to others. We have had personal evangelism seminars here and we will have more in the future. Further, you don't have to be a smooth talker. Just tell people what God has done and is doing in your life. If you're not comfortable with any of that, invite people and bring them to church. I'm preaching the Gospel here week after week. Someone here can explain the Gospel to them. But make no mistake. If we are believers and followers of Jesus, then we are His chosen and commissioned disciples.

In the second half of verse 1 through verse 11 the disciples are instructed by God. I have already talked to you about the reliability of the Bible. The disciples in this morning's text received their instructions from Jesus in person. We receive our instructions through the Bible.

In the first half of verse 1 through verse 4 they received their instructions for travel. We have already studied the reasoning behind these methods in our study through Luke 9:1-6 so I'll just summarize here.

First of all, Jesus sent them out two by two. This is something we modern day believers have to remember. There may be times we will be forced to work alone and live out our faith alone. However, this is not to be the norm. Ministering alone and walking through our faith journey alone is dangerous. No one is strong and clear all the time. We will all journey through doubt, weakness, and cloudiness. The Bible is clear that we are God's gifts to one another for encouragement and strength. When we come across in the Bible God's servants ministering alone, we can be sure that something has gone wrong. Prophets end up ministering alone because Israel has gone astray. In the end, the Apostle John is alone because all the other apostles have been killed and he had been exiled to the Island of Patmos.

So they are to travel by twos, preparing local towns along the way to Jerusalem to receive Jesus' message about salvation and the institution of the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus met Peter, James, and John, He gave them a miraculous catch of fish that was so big, it threatened to sink the boat. Here He promises these disciples that many people will be ready to hear and receive the Gospel. There will be so many, it will be impossible to minister to all of them. And so they are to pray that the same Lord Who chose them would raise up more who can help them minister along the way. So they are to expect so much success that it will overwhelm them. Their method is to pray that God raise up others on the spot to help them.

Is that our expectation, that God perform so many miraculous works here that we won't be able to keep up? We must continually pray that God raise up godly workers here at Devon Church.

Do you remember when I said that the Bible was neither pessimistic nor optimistic? Look at verse 3. First Jesus pumped them all up with this promise of overwhelming success, and then He drops this bomb on them, "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." That can't be good. That sounds dangerous. Jesus didn't go into much detail, but that sentence sounds ominous. Jesus commanded them to go. If they wanted to be disciples they would have to go. But He also warned them He was sending them as lambs among wolves. Let me just summarize this. Jesus promised them great success, great difficulty, and grave danger.

And then He concludes their travel instructions by telling them not to pack and not to chit chat on the way. This sounds extreme but as we said back in chapter 9, the mission is urgent. Jesus will be passing through the city for His last time and people must be able to take advantage of His visit. Jesus is focused. He has a date with destiny in Jerusalem. The disciples must not waste any time. There will only be one chance at this. I am truly hoping that you and I start to develop this attitude as we encounter people every day. We may only have one shot at

introducing them to Jesus. I'm trying to be more alert to these opportunities. I hope you are too.

The second reason Jesus has them traveling so light is that He wants them to depend on God's provision. By making them physically dependent on God to provide for them, they will no doubt be reminded they are dependent on Him for the success of the mission as well. I have to say that I am pretty good at keeping this thought in my mind regularly. I am dependent on God to provide for me physically and spiritually.

In verses 5-7 Jesus gave them instructions for lodging. They are not in town for a social visit. When they find a house that will house them, they are to stay at that house and eat and drink what is provided for them by the host. They are not to be jumping from house to house, looking to upgrade their situation. As I was thinking about this, I started to remember that as they traveled through the Samaritan territory, they may be exposed to unclean food. Here Jesus told them perhaps not to worry about that. That would be a challenge. People called to foreign missions today have to have good stomachs. They are often required to eat what the locals eat. I'm good with that part of missionary work. I can eat almost anything. I've traveled extensively and have not found many foods I can't eat.

But there was another interesting thought in these instructions. Jesus told them to pronounce a blessing of peace to the people in the house. Look what Jesus said in verse 6, "If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him: if not, it will return to you." Jesus told us to pray for our enemies and to love them. Watch my reasoning here. I am going to pray for everyone that will allow me to. I always ask people, believers and non believers alike, if I can pray for them. I don't think anyone has ever said no to me. If I pray that God blesses someone and that person, being worthy to receive the blessing, receives God's blessings, then I am blessed because he or she has been blessed. If the person is unworthy of the blessing I pray, the blessing turns back on me and I receive the blessing. Let's be people who pray for others and bless others. We will receive all sorts of blessings.

There is a clause in verse 7 that was a saying of the time, "A worker deserves his wages." Pastors throughout history have been required to go through extensive schooling, training, and testing before they are ordained for ministry. They have been among the most educated in culture. In deciding to enter seminary and other postgraduate degree programs, the minister and his family make a conscious decision that they will not be rich.

I hear both Christians and non Christians alike express a great deal of resentment and animosity towards rich people. Frankly, I have a hard time understanding this. I have many friends who are very rich. I am very happy for them. They studied, sacrificed, and worked hard. I had good grades in college and high grades on postgraduate examines. I could have gone to law school or other professional schools but I consciously chose to go to seminary. I am not sorry about that decision nor am I jealous of my friends who are filthy rich. I had the same

opportunities that they did. I made a conscious decision to become a pastor and I am more than content with what God has done for me, in me, and through me.

I also want to remind you that we said back in our study through chapter 9 that sending out missionaries today on a wing and a prayer without proper monetary and prayer support is sinful and criminal. This was a special circumstance.

In verses 8-11, Jesus gave them further instructions for entering a town. Again, Jesus told them not to be concerned about what they ate. He told them that they were there to heal the sick and to encourage them to open up their hearts to receive Jesus Who would be coming to them soon. The Kingdom of God was near and was offering citizenship to all who wanted to belong to the Kingdom of God. So when a town demonstrated its openness to the Gospel message, healings and miracles would take place.

On the other hand, if the town was resistant to the Gospel, the disciples were to publicly denounce them in Jesus' Name by shaking the dust of their feet, reminding them that the Kingdom of God was near, Jesus was near, and judgment was near.

What we learn in this section is that ministry is not about us in any way. Ministry is all about God and done in God's power. **MINISTRY THAT DOESN'T DEPEND ON GOD IS NOT MINISTRY AT ALL.**

One of the things I never thought about when entering the seminary was the sadness ministers must endure. After more than 30 years in the ministry, I'm not sure if I'm reconciled with that yet. If I were to go back in time knowing the great deal of sadness ministers must live with, I'm not sure if I would do it again. As we will see, the sadness is not personal sadness. It is sadness in the fact that people prevent themselves for becoming whole in Jesus. Verses 12-16 describe missionary sadness. The truth is that **MINISTRY INVOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF SADNESS.** Ministers authentically try to help people but because of pride, spiritual blindness, arrogance, stubbornness, or rebellion, people often reject Jesus, His message, and even the ministers who try and minister Jesus to people. It's amazing to see how many people think they know and understand spiritual truths better than the pastors who minister to them. I still marvel at that after all this time in ministry. It still floors me.

MISSIONARY SADNESS (VS 12-16)

In verses 12-15 we find people rejecting the ministry. I have to admit that I don't know why Jesus chose the cities He did. I clearly understand His message but not the choice of cities.

First of all, let's deal with the clear message. Jesus is saying that if the miracles He performed during His ministry time on earth were performed in sinful cities like Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, those cities would have repented from their sinful ways and turned their lives over to God in faith. In fact we see the evil city of Nineveh

repent in sackcloth and ashes when God sent them the prophet Jonah to preach to them. Jesus is saying, “Look, I did all sorts of miraculous works among these people. I healed all kinds of illness. I cast out demons. I preached good news. I healed spiritual illness. I even raised the dead to life. And yet, people continue to refuse to believe that I am the Promised Messiah and they refuse to obey my Word.”

Today there is a real hardness of heart among both believers and unbelievers. God is taken for granted. People are unwilling to submit to Jesus and to follow Him. Even unbelievers have come to make up their own Gospel and their own Jesus. Do you remember earlier when we said that God sent out the disciples two by two? We said that something has gone very wrong when people minister alone. One of the most dangerous phrases I have heard in the Christian church is, “God has told me to do this or take this course of action,” or, “God has spoken to me about this or that.” Once you say that, you cut off all possibility for discussion. How is one supposed to respond to that? I can tell you positively that I have heard people say that to me thousands of times and I can’t think of very many times I was convinced their message was from God. Many times I could identify the person they got the message from and that person clearly was not God. Other times people have desires, pray about it, and then determine it was God speaking to them. I have to say that in all my years in ministry, the times I have been convinced that God spoke to these people are very very rare. I want you to take this to heart. If you come to me with the phrase, “God told me this,” you have cut off any potential for dialogue. Who can contradict God? Certainly not me.

So the point here is that we live in the same kind of time as the Old Testament judges where “everyone does what is right in their own eyes.” People today have the opportunity to hear, receive, learn, and obey the Word of God. If people have clearly heard God’s Word, seen God’s miracles, and continue to reject Him, then it will go worse for them on judgment day than people who have never heard.

I think we all understand that. However, I am really confused as to why Jesus chose the cities He did. Luke has Jesus traveling through Samaria to Jerusalem. Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are all in the Galilee region. Secondly, these are three cities in which Jesus enjoyed great popularity and had a great ministry. People loved Him in these cities and Jesus did a lot of incredible miracles in these cities. We would describe these cities as success stories. They were like the cities in which Jesus told the disciples they would be overwhelmed with success. So why would Jesus choose these cities? I have to say that I don’t have a clue. What I’m about to say cannot be supported by anything I have read. It is a total guess. I think Jesus could be speaking to people in these cities who continued to reject Him. In other words, if I lived in one of these cities and saw Jesus give sight to blind people, give hearing to the deaf, cure leprosy, heal all sorts of crippled and deformed people, cast out demons, raise the dead, and multiply a couple of fish and loaves of bread and feed thousands, watch Him live an incredibly righteous life, and still reject His message, I deserve to spend eternity in the most horrific type of hell possible. I think that is a lot like people living with unbelieving spouses or

family members. The unbelieving spouses and family members should have seen the miraculous work Jesus has done in the person and given their lives to Christ. I have many friends and family who I have told about Jesus. They can see how He has changed my life. They really are without excuse. Many of them have made up their own religious rules for living and their own idea of Jesus. They have rejected the Gospel message.

In verse 16 people reject the messenger. The one thing pastors have to have is thick skin. I think that we have to be people who don't take things personally. We have to remember that people are not really rejecting us, they are rejecting God.

Let me summarize this section. One of the saddest parts of pastors' jobs is to teach people the truth, watch them reject it, and turn their lives into a train-wreck. Even sadder is when they train-wreck others' lives. I think most of us pastors know intellectually that is the way it has to be but it doesn't make it any easier to swallow. If you love the people you minister to, there will always be a part of you that is sad. Most of us also know that people are not rejecting us but that doesn't ease the pain much either. **MINISTRY INVOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF SADNESS.**

MISSIONARY JOY (VS 17-24)

On the other hand, there is indescribable joy in the ministry. In verses 17-24 Jesus describes missionary joy. **MINISTRY ALSO INVOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF JOY.** There is nothing more exhilarating than watching someone come to Jesus in faith. Dedicating babies to the Lord is a great privilege. Marrying a couple who has dedicated their marriage to God is a real celebration. Baptizing someone is a real joy. The ministry is filled with joy. Even presiding over the funeral of one who was a faithful Christian is also a cause for joyful celebration.

The joy of success is described in verse 17. The disciples return with joy to Jesus and report all the success they had. It is obvious that they healed the sick, preached the Gospel, and cast out demons in Jesus' Name. Anyone who has done ministry in Jesus' Name can tell you how happy you are to see people healed and find freedom in Christ. There are a couple of things we must discuss in this first. First they address Jesus as Lord. As they submitted to Jesus, the demons submitted to them. That is something we constantly need to remember. Our primary purpose in life is not to go out and do all sorts of religious stuff or to do good deeds. Our primary purpose in life is to submit to Jesus as Lord.

Jesus will remind them of this when He defines joy in verses 18-20. Jesus is a good empathic listener. He says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The disciples said that even the demons obeyed them in Jesus' Name and that was Jesus' response. Probably Jesus is referring immediately to the success of the disciples in setting people free from illness, demon possession, and freeing them from sin through the Gospel message. The defeat of Satan has begun and will be finished at the cross and the resurrection. Jesus can also be talking outside time and referring to the time Satan was originally kicked out of heaven and to the end

of time when Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Meanwhile, God and His Kingdom are now on the move.

Jesus reminded them that they continue to have power and authority to use His Name. They will have power to overcome all sorts of obstacles associated with evil: snakes, scorpions, and Satan himself. By the way, if there is something in the Bible that can be misused, it will be misused and turned into a cult. There are churches that misuse this passage and handle poisonous snakes during the church services. That's not what Jesus is commanding us to do here. He is reminding us that He has defeated evil and in His Name we can defeat the evil one. He has given us authority to minister in His Name. That's what we should focus on.

And then it comes; Jesus said, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. This is something we ought to repeat to ourselves every morning and every night. If you are a believer, then there was a point in time when God recorded our names in the Book of Life which is maintained in heaven. Picture this. A person on earth confesses her sins and receives Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Jesus points to the angel who is the official scribe. The angel then writes the young girl's name in the Book of Life. The name is written in indelible ink, the blood of Jesus. And then there is a party thrown in heaven in honor of the new convert. At the end of time when Jesus looks through the Book of Life, that girl's name will be there with your name and mine. He will then welcome us into heaven for eternity. That day happened for each one of us who are believers. That's what we ought to be thankful for.

And then Jesus went on to describe God's joy in verses 21-22. Thinking about all that had just transpired, Jesus became giddy. I don't know how to translate the word that describes Jesus' joy. The word in Greek is *agalliao*. It is a ramped up form of joy. Some translations translate it exceedingly glad or full of joy. Jesus then went on to praise God because He did not show favorites in salvation. Salvation was available to all who would receive it. Rich or poor, humility was what is necessary to receive salvation. But God withholds His truth from the proud, the arrogant, and self-righteous. What I want to emphasize here is that in verse 21 God is the One Who chooses to whom He will reveal His truth to. It is God's decision and prerogative to reveal. Now look at verse 22. Jesus claims the same prerogative. He will choose the people He wants to reveal God's truth to. Jesus is here claiming to be God. The only true knowledge of God the Father comes through Jesus the Son. If we know Jesus we know the Father. If we don't know Jesus we have no possibility of having a relationship with God. In bodily form, Jesus received all things in order to accomplish His mission as Messiah. There is only one path to God; that is through Jesus and Jesus alone. There is no other way. God takes joy in providing a way for us to be in a personal and intimate relationship with Him. He did that by sending Jesus on this mission to die for our sins. Jesus takes joy every time someone takes advantage of His offer of salvation. Jesus is kind of saying that every time one of us is saved and is brought into a right relationship with the Father, His death was worth it.

And now we see more occasions for the disciples to experience more joy in verses 23-24. Even though Old Testament prophets, wisdom people, priests and kings longed to see the coming of Messiah and His Kingdom, they never received this privilege. But here, these common disciples were witness to Jesus' miraculous coming. Not only did they get to see and meet Jesus up close and personal, they were actually authorized to perform miracles in Jesus' Name. We, like the disciples have the opportunity to get personal with Jesus. We like the disciples have been invited to participate in Jesus' ministry. And we like the disciples have been given authority to minister in Jesus' Name. MINISTRY ALSO INVOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF JOY.

One of the things that continue to give me certainty in the truth of Christianity is the fact that the Bible accurately portrays the realities of life. The Bible is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. THE BIBLE GIVES US A REALISTIC VIEW OF THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MINISTRY.

Last week it seemed as if Jesus was unnecessarily harsh in responding to potential followers. However, we can see that being a Christian is not for the faint of heart. Jesus has given each one of us the command and authority to do ministry in His Name. Listen to the Apostle Paul's description of his ministry for Christ:

“23They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. 24Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. 27I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

28Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along. 29Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger” (II Corinthians 11:23-29 / NLT)?

None of that took away from the satisfaction Paul got from serving Jesus as his Lord and Savior. It was enough for Paul to know that his name was recorded in the Book of Life safely preserved in heaven. Does that cause us to rejoice even in suffering? It should.