



The Investigator's Gospel

An Eyewitness Journey Through Luke

Session 12 – Chapter 10 – The Sending of the 72

The Cost of Following – Luke 9:57-62

Three men approach Jesus, all with aspirations of discipleship. All three of Jesus' responses point to the radical nature of commitment to him and the extreme cost a disciple must be willing to pay.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' Jesus' singular devotion to his task means that he has no permanent home to provide security. Remember that Jesus had been rejected by his home town of Nazareth; from that point on, he had stayed as a guest with Peter's family in Capernaum.

Jesus said to another man, 'Follow me.' But he replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, *'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'* Respect for parents was of utmost importance in Jewish society. To "honour your father and your mother" is among the greatest commandments. Equally important was providing a proper burial for a loved one. Jesus' reply is meant to be truly radical and countercultural.

Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.' Jesus replied, *'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'* The statement echoes Elisha's request when he was called to be Elijah's successor (1 Kings 19:19–20 - *So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. 'Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,' he said, 'and then I will come with you.'* 'Go back,' Elijah replied).

Jesus next responds by playing off this same Old Testament text, since Elisha was plowing in his family's field when Elijah met him: *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). The farmer must keep looking forward in order to plow a straight furrow. Likewise, a disciple constantly distracted by past associations cannot provide effective service for the kingdom of God. Jesus demands an even more rigorous commitment from his disciples than Elijah and an even more dramatic break with family.

The Seventy-Two – Luke 10:1-11

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

The common picture of Jesus and the Twelve Disciples has to be adjusted in our minds – by this point of his ministry, despite Jesus’ stringent warnings regarding the cost of discipleship, there are nevertheless 72 committed disciples. They were to serve as an advance guard, preparing towns and villages for Jesus’ arrival.

It is possible that these are a separate group altogether from the Twelve, who have received identical instructions in the previous chapter (9:1-6).

Why seventy-two? The number probably symbolically represents the nations of the world. There are seventy names listed in the table of nations in the Hebrew text of Genesis 10, and seventy-two names listed in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. This difference in numbers could account for the textual problem in Luke, where some manuscripts read “seventy” and others “seventy-two”.

They are instructed to travel in pairs, perhaps for security, but perhaps also because the Old Testament instructs that two witnesses are necessary to provide valid testimony in court (Deuteronomy 19:15).

“Like lambs among wolves.” In the Old Testament, Israel’s unrighteous leaders are described as ravenous wolves devouring the poor and helpless among God’s people. Israel is also described in Jewish literature as sheep living among 70 wolves – the Gentile nations. The followers of Jesus are the true “flock of the Good Shepherd.”

The prohibition against *“purse, bag or sandals”* is another reference to the urgency of the mission, and the need to depend upon God to provide what is needed. The Hebrew nation, wandering the desert for 40 years, noted this unusual miracle: (*Deuteronomy 29:5 - Yet the Lord says, ‘During the forty years that I led you through the wilderness, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet).*

While this passage says to not bring a “purse,” which is to say “money,” in the earlier instructions to the Twelve, Matthew records (10:9-10): *“Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts.”* In contrast, Mark writes (6:8-9): *“no money (copper) in your belts.”* Luke (9:3) has *“silver.”* The socio-economic range of all three audiences is revealed in these differences!

“Do not greet anyone on the road.” This is not advising hostility, but is another indication of urgency, reminiscent of Elisha’s instruction to his servant upon a vital mission: *“Don’t greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer”* (2 Kings 4:29).

5 ‘When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house.” 6 If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

We understand peace as “absence of conflict,” but the Hebrew word “shalom” conveys a great deal more: *“the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment and delight.”* The introduction to the Gospel the disciples are to give is to offer this complete “shalom” – the offer to be at peace with one another, with creation, and with God. Those who accept the message are described as *“sons of peace.”* Hospitality will be offered as a sign of that acceptance, the acceptance of which is incumbent upon the workers, who *“deserve their wages.”* The disciples are not *“move around from house to house,”* in order to gather funds in excess of their needs.

The Apostle Paul quotes this passage in his own writings: (1 Tim 5:18 - *For Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’*). This is significant; the “ox” reference is quoting Deuteronomy 25:4, while the *“worker deserves his wages”* is not found in the Old Testament, but is directly quoted from this passage (a variation of which is found in Matthew 10:10), an indication that the words of Jesus are already being treated as authoritative Scripture in Paul’s day. Did Luke already have portions of his Gospel prepared, to which Paul had access?

8 ‘When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. 9 Heal those there who are ill and tell them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” 10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 “Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

The seventy-two, like the Twelve, are given healing authority. Throughout Isaiah, physical healing is a sign of the Kingdom of God, which mirrors the message the disciples are instructed to give. The message is simple – no arguments or debates, as in the ministry of Paul; simply the announcement of the imminent Kingdom of God. Jesus sends the seventy-two and tells them simply to give of themselves and point to the presence of God. Sometimes we make evangelism more difficult than it needs to be. Remember that the seventy-two are an advance guard, sent ahead to prepare for the arrival of Jesus. Ultimately, the work of salvation is up to God. It is not we who save. It

is up to disciples – to us – to point people to God and prepare them for the message of salvation.

Shake the dust off your feet (also in Luke 9:5). This is a formal act of separation, leaving the town to the judgment it deserves for rejecting the gospel, as will be seen in the verses which follow. In rabbinic traditions, the action indicated that the place was heathen and had no status among God’s people. This appears to be the sense in Acts 13:51, where Paul and Barnabas “shook the dust from their feet” against the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, who had organised persecution against them.

The Cities of Rejection – Luke 10:13-15

‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. 15 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are all within the small area on the north of the Sea of Galilee, marking the area of Jesus’ ministry known as The Evangelical Triangle. Tyre and Sidon, located today in Lebanon, were in Jesus’ day non-Jewish cities. While Jesus made brief visits there, the bulk of his three years of active ministry took place in Galilee. Despite this, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum remain largely unconverted.

Ultimately, all three suffer extensively as a result of the Jewish revolt against Rome (66-72 AD), major earthquakes (in the 300s and 700s) and Moslem conquest (in the 600s). All were completely destroyed, to the extent that, prior to archaeological work begun in the late 1800s, even the locations were lost. The precise location of Bethsaida is still a matter of some controversy.

With the advent of Christian pilgrimage in the mid-300s, Capernaum, which had maintained a Christian presence (but had minority rather than majority status), rose to brief prominence, with a shrine being developed around the former House of Peter. The Jewish synagogue, reconstructed after the earthquake in 363, was far grander, indicating that it was still a predominantly Jewish city.

The Fall from Heaven – Luke 10:17-20

17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ Jesus He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

Jesus is invoking Isaiah chapters 13 and 14, both in the Capernaum passage, and in the “Satan” reference above. Isaiah is pronouncing doom upon the Babylon (13:19-20): *“Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Babylonians, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; there no nomads will pitch their tents, there no shepherds will rest their flocks.”* Luke 10 is filled with references to this passage (as in Luke 10:12 – *“it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town”*).

When the disciples report that *“even the demons submit to us in your name,”* Jesus again turns to the Isaiah 13-14 passage. Long before the actual fall of Babylon (Isaiah is writing in the 700s BC – Babylon falls in the 500s), Isaiah predicts its demise (Isaiah 14:3-15, selected verses):

3 On the day the Lord gives you relief from your suffering and turmoil and from the harsh labour forced on you, 4 you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended! 9 The realm of the dead below is all astir to meet you at your coming; 11 All your pomp has been brought down to the grave.

12 How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! 13 You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ 15 But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit.

Jesus compares the demise of the power of Satan and the demonic realm with the destruction of Babylon and their King; the coming of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus breaks the power of Satan. As in Isaiah, the defeat is not instantaneous, but imminent. Much of the theology regarding Satan and Hell is derived from this comparison, most famously in Milton’s poem, “Paradise Lost.” With this reference from Jesus, quoting Isaiah 14:12, theologians have interpreted Isaiah 13 and 14 as speaking both about the fall of Babylon and the fall of the Satanic realm.

The Book of Life – Luke 10:21

“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Jesus is here referring to the common image of a book in heaven that records the names of the righteous. It is found throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Jewish literature. The background is the common practice of ancient cities and kingdoms to keep lists of citizens’ names.

- *Isaiah 4:3 - Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem.*
- *Malachi 3:16 - A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.*
- *Daniel 12:1 - 'At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered.*
- *Hebrews 12:23 - to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.*
- *Revelation 3:5 - The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.*

The Turning Away – John 6:60-70

What happened to the Seventy-Two? While John's Gospel does not have the "sending" passage, there is a clue as to what might have happened to this larger number. Jesus has fed the 5000, and John records Jesus' subsequent words, which include a reference to Communion (John 6:51): *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* This, and even more radical statements, prove too much for many of his followers (60, 66): *On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' ... From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*

The Twelve, however, remain faithful (6:67-69): *'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.'*

Note: There is no study scheduled for Dec. 17, 24, or 31. Studies will resume the first Tuesday in January – January 7. Merry Christmas! And keep reading your Bibles!