The Mission, the Message, the Motive
Luke 10:1-24

As we saw last week, from the end of chapter 9 onwards Luke's gospel takes a different turn. So far Luke has been emphasizing Jesus' miracles – leaving us to face the question: who is this man? But having answered that, from now on Luke concentrates on Jesus' teaching – if Jesus is the Son of God, if He is the sovereign king, then what does it mean to follow him, what does it mean to be his disciple. And this morning we're going to see that to be a disciple of Jesus means to be on mission. It means to be on mission with a message that transforms lives through the grace and peace of God in Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the mission first:

The Mission
As he gets these 72 disciples together and sends them out ahead of him Jesus tells them in v2, 'The harvest is plentiful.' He's like a farmer standing on the edge of his fields, and as far as the eye can see there is wheat ready to be harvested. And he's got these workers around him: and he's saying, there's the task boys, it all needs to be brought in to my barns; thousands of people who will come to know me.

Now, do you think the harvest is any less now than then? Wouldn't Jesus stand overlooking Lausanne and all the surrounding areas and say – 'the harvest is plentiful'? Just think of the schools and the universities, as the students return in the next few weeks, think of your workplace and your friends. Consider the number both of French and English speakers who don't yet know Jesus and imagine the size of the harvest, the harvest of people coming to know Jesus, seeing their lives transformed by His grace and love. And that's just here; now multiply that across the globe.

And as you contemplate the scale of the harvest, what does Jesus ask of us? In view of these fields of people ready for harvesting, what can we learn from these 72 going out on mission that will help us bring in the harvest here and respond appropriately to the harvest in the world. Well, given the harvest, Jesus calls us to do three things: pray, go and give.

Pray:
Before Jesus tells these 72 all the nitty-gritty details of what they are to do, he tells them to pray. V2: 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the Harvest.'

So the first thing the scale of the harvest should prompt us to is prayer. And we can pray with supreme confidence because Jesus says that God is Lord of the Harvest, and later on in v21 he calls him 'Lord of Heaven and earth', who is in absolute sovereign control over the harvest field. So our ability to bring in the harvest does not ultimately rest on our efforts out in the field, it rests on the Sovereign God. And the great thing about being convinced of God's sovereignty is that the mission cannot fail – it really is mission possible. The abundant harvest will be reaped, he will save those he is calling to himself. And he calls us, firstly, to partner in that through prayer.

But look what he tells us to pray for: v2 again, 'Pray earnestly to the Lord of the Harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' When you understand the harvest I want to reap, Jesus says, pray for more workers to reap it. Now that's a challenge because sometimes we can like church or homegroup the way it is, and more people coming in unsettles that, and Jesus is telling us: pray for that change to continue – pray for more workers to be raised up and trained up and sent out so my harvest can be brought in. It's the opposite of praying for a nice, steady church life. So can I ask you, will you pray for that for us here?

So many of you serve so faithfully, and in the last few weeks we have had to say goodbye to some wonderful workers in Kevin and Nicole, Gustavo and Suleidy, and John and Kim, let's pray that God replaces them. Pray that from among us God would raise up workers to bring in the harvest. That others would come to know Jesus and help still others come to know him. Pray that as term starts we are able to gather a core group of students who will catch a vision to see students come to know Jesus. Pray for the evening service, that we'd be able to restart it and that that would be effective in reaching people. Pray for our French speakers, that God would raise them up and enable them to reach out to their own. And for all of us, pray for our relationships and friendships, that God would use us to reap a harvest in the lives of others.

So he calls us to pray. But it doesn't end with prayer. The next thing Jesus says to these 72 in v3 is 'Go'.

Go:
When Su and I were at college, there was a group of students called the beautiful people – and they seemed to have it all: they were intelligent and articulate and sporty and good-looking to boot. And it may surprise you to know that I wasn't numbered among them. And the danger of thinking about the mission is that you think it's just for the beautiful people, those select few who are especially gifted who have it all together, who have the charisma to draw people. But when Jesus sends out these 72 it's like him saying 'game open'. Because these 72 aren't the 12, I mean we know the names of the 12, but no-one has a clue who these 72 were, they're just 72 nobodies, people like us, who Jesus sends out.

And if you were a Jew at Jesus' time the number 72 would have made your ears prick up, because in Genesis 10, in the table of nations, guess how many nations are listed there, how many people groups it gives in the ancient world? 72. It's as if Jesus is saying, this mission is *for* everyone and it's *to* everyone. It's world-wide in it's scope.

It's not just for a select few, for a few paid staff, we're all called to go. Now, in Ephesians 2:10 Paul writes, 'For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in.' So whilst the part each of us plays in bringing the harvest in is going to differ, we all have a part; your heavenly father has prepared tasks for each of us to do, that are uniquely suited to the work he has been doing in your life – the skills he put there, the lessons of life you've learnt. And it's for us to step out and walk in

them, reaching out to others who don't yet know Jesus, going ahead of Jesus in their lives as the 72 did.

And so whilst the call to be a disciple of Jesus is firstly a call to come, what follows you coming is the command to go, because this isn't something we keep to ourselves. Just like Abraham, we're blessed to be a blessing, we're called into his family to be sent out into the world.

So in response to this plentiful harvest Jesus calls us to pray, to go and thirdly, he calls us to give.

Give:
Now in his instructions to the 72 Jesus tells them in v7 that when they come to a town and someone receives them they are to 'remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the labourer deserves his wages.'

He's already told them not to go weighed down with stuff - no moneybag, no knapsack, no extra pair of sandals, instead they are to trust God to provide for them. And he will do that, in their case, through the generosity of those they are taking the message to.

But what's interesting about those words of Jesus in v7 that 'the labourer deserves his wages' is that it is one of the few direct expressions of Jesus that is either re-quoted or alluded to in the letters of the New Testament. And Paul uses that expression twice, and both times in different letters (1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tim 5:18) the implication is that it is us, fellow Christians, who should financially support those engaged in harvest work, giving to mission. So we pray, we go, but as disciples we also give of our resources to see others come to know Jesus. And we can do that by giving to the church - we give away 10% of what we receive to missions, and by giving to those missions organisations that are faithful to the call to take the good news of Jesus to the nations.

So the harvest here and across the globe is plentiful, Jesus says, and in response we are to pray, go and give.

But as we go, we go with a message.

The Message
And that message is the gospel – it's the good news of what God has done for us in and through Jesus. Now our vision as a church is that all of us would be so rooted in the gospel and the gospel so rooted in us that it would have a wonderful, radical, transforming effect on our lives. Rooted, radical. But that gospel isn't ours to keep hidden away in secret, it's ours to share.

And as he sends out these 72 Jesus gives them and us two components of this good news. Firstly, it's a message of peace. V5-6, 'What ever house you enter, first say, "peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.' And Jesus is talking something deeper there than a casual greeting – this is *shalom*, the peace of God; and that

peace is at the very heart of the gospel. As we go, we go to people who are separated and alienated from God just as we were, who are rebels against him, at war with him, and out of his love for rebels and for the glory of his name, God comes in Jesus with this offer of peace, to make his enemies his friends and he does that through the death and the resurrection of Jesus: Col 1:19-20 says of Jesus, 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.' The gospel is a message of peace.

Secondly, it's the message of the kingdom. V9, Jesus says, 'say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."' Now right from Genesis onwards, through the establishment of the people of Israel as a nation in the Exodus, through the failures of the judges and the kings, God has been working out his plan to see his rule and reign established in the earth. And now, in Jesus, his kingdom has come. And it didn't come as people expected, with the king, the messiah coming reigning in victory, but it comes in Christ the king dying for his enemies. And the message of the kingdom is that the king has come and we are all invited to enter in, through repentance and faith, to submit to his good rule, to the glory and honour of God as king.

But this message isn't just words. As he sends them he tells them in v9, 'Heal the sick'. The kingdom of God isn't just a matter of talk – it's seeing and demonstrating the rule of the king in people's lives by praying for the sick, caring for the poor, mending people's lives, their bodies and their minds, through acts of sacrificial, practical love.

And Jesus makes it clear that that message is going to get a response. Just as there were whole towns who refused to listen to Jesus, so people will reject the message of the 72 back then and from us today. Jesus performed miracles, the Son of God himself preached in towns like Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, and still people chose to reject the message. So even though the harvest is plentiful, don't be surprised if, as you go with the message of the King's peace, you encounter rejection, refusal and resistance. But that's no cause for discouragement: firstly, God is sovereign over the harvest, and even when people reject it Jesus makes it clear in v11 that that doesn't alter the fact that the kingdom has come. Secondly, don't be discouraged, because there are those who will respond positively, sons of peace, Jesus calls them – and those are the ones to concentrate on.

If people reject the message, Jesus says just move on, shake the dust from your feet, don't spend hours arguing fruitlessly, move on to those who will hear, who are waiting to hear from the King.

And if it's a message that brings a response, that response, Jesus makes clear, has consequences of either blessing or woe. The city of Sodom is the archetypal example in the Bible of a people who turn their back on God; and yet the consequences for those who turn their back on this message of peace from the King are worse than the consequences Sodom faced, Jesus says. The king has come and calls us rebels to lay down our arms, to come and enter his kingdom,

he's made that possible by giving his own life in place of ours, but if we chose war, war is what we will get.

But you can hear that and be fired up with a desire to get the message out that doesn't differ much from some pumped-up politician pressurizing someone for their vote. And that's why Jesus addresses our motive in going.

The Motive

When the 72 come back they are full of it – v17, 'The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" But that joy earns a gentle rebuke from Jesus – don't rejoice that the spirits are subject to you. Now why does he rebuke them? Isn't it a good thing to enjoy serving him and seeing satan's kingdom get pushed back? He rebukes them because they are getting their joy, their kick from the wrong thing.

You see you can take joy, you can get a kick out of being spiritually superior: the demons are subject *to us*. And the danger is that what then motivates your ministry, what empowers you in 'pray, go, give', is pride: you're the one with the message of truth, you're the one with the answers, you're the one who knows the bible, you're the one whose life is sorted, you're the one before whom demons flee. And Jesus says, don't rejoice in you or your gifting or in any sense of superiority or power, because that results in pride and pride was what brought satan down – v18 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'.

Instead, Jesus says, v20, 'rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' Your motivation for mission, what should empower you in *pray, go, give*, is not what you have or what you can do, or what you can offer. Your joy in serving the king comes from what he has already done for you. He has written your name in his book of life. In the census of the citizens of the kingdom, your name is written there. And I don't want to get technical but when Jesus says 'your names are written' – Luke uses the perfect tense – this has already been done for you; its not dependent on your success of failure, on what you can do for God, God in his grace has done it for you, he has already written your name in his book of life. And that is what should give you joy and empowerment in service. It's not a sense of superiority, it's God's grace to you in Jesus.

Now as I was thinking about this this week, I remembered two events from my past where my name was written in a book. The first one was when I was a boy – as a family we had sailed along the south coast of England and moored up outside a rather smart and prestigious yacht club, where my father wanted to become a member. And whilst my mother and father were in the bar my brother and I found the visitors book – which we proceeded to write our names in and deface with a whole load of boyish immature graffiti. When my father discovered it he was furious: I had written my name in a book which I had no right to write in. But the second occasion was a few years ago when some friends, gave Su and I for our wedding anniversary a voucher to go to a very upmarket restaurant that we couldn't possibly afford on our own. And as we went in, feeling somewhat out of place, we were in some trepidation – what if the reservation hasn't been made – but then the head waiter greeted us – and I gave him our names, and his

response was ‘of course, Mr. and Mrs. Slack, we have you in the book, come to your table.’

Now, the first of those I tried to write my name in a book I had no right to write in; the second my name was written in a book I couldn’t possibly afford and someone else had picked up the tab.

And the gospel of Jesus Christ, this message of good news, is that our names are written in heaven and it’s not because of anything we have done, nor could we ever earn the right to write in the book, it’s because Jesus has paid the price. And when you understand that and grasp that, firstly it gives you joy for what God has done for you; but secondly when you know that God loves you, and accepts you, and it’s not based on your successes or failures, you can pray, go and give without falling into pride or serving from wrong motives, and you can face the pain of rejection and the joy of acceptance, because you know it’s not about you it’s about what Jesus, the King, has done for you.