

Imagine this: you roll into work tomorrow morning, get your coffee, get settled in, open your email and see one from your boss. It's short and to the point. "We want to send you on a business trip. Stop by my office for more details."

Curious, you head to your boss's office. Your boss gets right to it, "We've been hoping to wedge our way into the Chicago market more and we want you to go start laying the ground work for a new office in Chicago. But here's the thing... You have to go right now, there's no time to go home and pack a bag, just work with the clothes you've got. This is a time sensitive thing, there's no time to explain where you are going to your co-workers and no time to say goodbye to your family.

"Oh, and you should probably know, things might get a little dicey when you get to Chicago. There are a few competitors who aren't too happy about us nosing into their market, so expect a hostile welcome.

"One more thing... leave your wallet. You won't be needing it. Not because we're giving you a generous per diem or anything like that. Oh, yeah, and now might be the time to mention we won't be flying you there, or paying for a rental car, or covering hotel expenses. We don't have the budget for that, but I'm sure you will find people who will open their homes to you. Just live off of their support while you are there."

How's your imagination doing? Sounds like the dream business trip, right?

It's absurd. It would never happen that way in the business world. But what is absurd in the business world is apparently perfectly normal in Jesus' world. Do you see where I'm going with this? That absurd business trip is exactly the trip Jesus had in mind for the 72.

Jesus, like we talked about last week, has resolutely set out for Jerusalem for the "big show" – he is about to suffer and die for the sins of the world. On his way he sends these anonymous 72 ahead of him with these bizarre instructions:

**Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves** – I am sending you out into a scary and hostile world with little to defend yourself other than trust in me.

**Do not take a purse or bag or sandals** – don't do any of the normal preparations for a trip, just trust that you will be provided for.

**Do not greet anyone on the road** – in Jesus' day, formal greetings could sometimes take hours because it included things like sharing family histories, Jesus makes clear this is a time-sensitive mission, there is no time for time-consuming formalities.

When you get to the towns I'm sending you to, **eat whatever they give you** and **stay in one place** – as you live off the generosity of others, I want you to be content with what you get, whether it is a feast or porridge, five star accommodations or a dump.

I want you to take care of those towns physically and spiritually. I want you to deliver physical peace by healing the sick, and I want you to deliver spiritual peace, I want you to proclaim that **the Kingdom of God has come near** – I want you to tell the people about me, and the peace I'm offering them, and that now is the time to get right with God through me.

Some people will welcome you. Some people will reject you. Give peace to those who welcome you and give a warning to those who reject you.

There it is: Jesus' interesting business trip for those 72 disciples.

And they go. In groups of two they go on this absurd trip of trust and evangelism – trusting that God would protect and provide for them as lambs among wolves, and sharing the *evangel* (Greek for *good news*), spreading the peace of God.

Jesus sends them off with these instructions and right away Luke tells us how their trips went. They come back filled with joy because their absurd mission trips were a rousing success. They come back excited and Jesus gives that awesome description: **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** And then Jesus reminds them that their work would continue. He had given them this call and this authority (**to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome the power of the enemy**), and it was still theirs. **"Nothing will harm you,"** he promises.

Luke 10 is a crazy little chapter in the ministry of Jesus. Luke is the only one who mentions these 72 and they are never mentioned again. They are these unnamed, long-forgotten followers of Jesus. And a good and important question is: what in the world does this whirlwind mission trip have to do with us?

The first answer is: not much.

Those 72 had a very specific and special mission – to be at the end of Jesus' life what John the Baptist was at the beginning, missionaries sent by God to prepare the way as Jesus finished his mission.

Jesus was not talking to you when he said, "Go!" He doesn't expect you to quit your jobs, leave your bank accounts to gather dust, abandon your clothes in your closet and be part of this time-sensitive mission of trust and evangelism.

He hasn't given any you the ability to heal the sick or cast out demons.

He hasn't promised you the ability to walk all over snakes and scorpions. He hasn't promised that nothing will harm you – in fact, with what we've talked about the last couple weeks, he's promised you the opposite (following Jesus will mean denying yourself, and daily carrying cross and suffering; and just like he doesn't have a place to lay his head, you might not either).

Most of that account from the beginning of Luke 10 is a specific set of instructions for those unnamed 72 believers for that special time in history.

So, what does this account have to do with us? Not much... but that doesn't mean I'm going to say amen just yet...

While much of Luke 10 is a specific set of instructions for this crazy mission trip, there are a handful of parts that do apply to us. I want to spend a bit more time on two of them.

One is at the very beginning and one at the very end.

First: **The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**

Jesus didn't have you in mind when he doled out this specific mission of trust and evangelism, but that doesn't mean you are off the hook when it comes to trust and evangelism.

The metaphor is pretty straight forward. When God looks at this world he sees a whole lot of people who desperately need what he is offering (whether they realize it or not). He sees a whole bunch of hurting people that he would love to gather into his barn, into his arms, into his heaven. **The harvest is plentiful** – there are a bunch of people out there that are ripe for the love of God and he wants them brought in.

**The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.** God wants to love those people whether they realize it or not, and God needs workers to help them realize it. God has chosen to effect this harvest through workers, through believers John and Jane Doe, through unnamed and often forgotten believers (like the unnamed 72) who share the love of Jesus in their corner of God's harvest field. God looks at all the people who need to know his love and says there are not enough workers.

God's response to this worker shortfall is two-fold. First, pray that God would send more workers. Second, be one of those workers. That's what he does with the 72. He tells them to pray for more workers, and then he sends them as partial answers to their own prayers on their specific mission of trust and evangelism.

And God's view of the world – as a ripe harvest, lacking workers – is the same today. And God makes clear in other places in his Bible that he wants the same response from us: to pray for more workers and to be a partial fulfillment of our own prayer as we work in our corner of God's harvest field.

You don't have to leave your purse, bag, and sandals at home. You don't have to refuse to greet people on the road. You may not have the ability to heal the sick or drive out demons. But you still have a God-given mission of trust and evangelism.

God would have you look at all the people amongst whom you work and live and play and see all those people as so many stalks of wheat who desperately need to be brought into God's barn, into his loving embrace. God would have you see the harvest field in this community, in your neighborhood, at your work, in your family, people ripe for the love of God, and he would have you pray and get to work. God would have you share his love and his peace every day in your corner of his field.

Which means you actually have to talk about Jesus with the people of your life, right?

Trust me, I get how intimidating this work can seem. I know that for most of us this requires stepping way outside our comfort zone.

You and I both know that another similarity between Luke 10 and today is that not everyone appreciates being told how much they need God to save them. You and I know how awkward things can get when you bring up Jesus (you should see the reactions I get when people ask me what I do for a living when we are making small talk and I say I'm a Christian pastor, a lot of times you could cut the awkwardness with a knife).

But God's call is clear. There are a lot of people who need to know how much God loves them. There aren't enough workers. Pray and get to work, eternities are at stake.

That is the first passage from Luke 10 that I wanted to talk about. The second is at the very end.

I don't know about you, but for me there is a lot of guilt associated with my God-given mission to be a worker in my corner of his harvest field.

There are people (I can picture them right now) who God plopped right in my path, he planted them right next to me, and I botched it. Often by simply keeping my mouth shut, or sometimes by putting my foot in my mouth, I have often not been the trusting evangelist God wants me to be. There are real people I can think of right now who needed to know that Jesus loves them, but I didn't go to work for Jesus. Some of these people I've carried around in my conscience for years.

God's call to share what we know is a command that can produce a lot of guilt.

But did you know that's not how Jesus wants us to feel?

Guilt is not something Jesus wants us to carry. That's why he resolutely set out for Jerusalem in the first place, right? He did all this so that we could know the absolute joy and relief of having guilt removed – because he went to that cross to forgive us. And if we are forgiven, then there is no reason for guilt to linger. Paul said it best, one of my favorite passages, **"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Jesus came so that guilt could be removed, which is crazy because the Bible makes clear that I have *plenty* legitimate reasons to be crushed with guilt. And yet in spite of that truth Jesus says to me and to you, "I do not condemn you. You don't need to feel guilty in front of me."

Guilt is a horrible burden to carry, *and* it is a horrible motivator. I think in the past, both for myself and for fellow believers I'm supposed to be encouraging as God's harvest workers, I have let guilt become too big of a thing when it comes to our God-given call to trust him and share his peace. Both for myself and those around me, I've felt guilt-tripped into working in God's harvest field.

If you haven't heard it before, let me be the first to tell you: Don't let anyone hold guilt over your head about not evangelizing enough. In Jesus, all your sins are forgiven; including your failure to work perfectly in your corner of God's harvest field.

This guilt tangent brings me to the second passage from Luke 10 that I wanted to talk about. If guilt isn't what should motivate us to work in God's field, what will?

Jesus tells us.

When the 72 come back and they are all excited because of the crazy success they had. Jesus rejoices with them, but then he reminds them what the best motivation for joy and life and harvest work is. It's not guilt, and it's not outward success as a harvester in God's field (as the 72 might have been tempted to think).

**Do not rejoice that spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**

Your names are written in heaven. When it comes to God's harvest, you are already in.

That phrase is not only the removal of guilt, it's also some pretty good motivation.

Here's Jesus' vision for you as a worker in his field: the more he teaches you about his love, the more he tells you that you are forgiven, the more he reminds you that all guilt is removed, the happier you will become. This is why you get to rejoice: your names are written in heaven.

Jesus knows the more you understand his peace, the happier you will be. Jesus also knows the more joy you find in his peace, the more you are going to want to go to work in his field so that others can know what you know. Jesus knows the best and most natural evangelists are those who are filled with joy because their names are written in heaven.

Jesus' crazy plan for you is that you would rejoice that your names are written in heaven – rejoice so much that you can't wait to share the reason for your joy in your corner of his harvest field.

And that is where the absurd trip of the 72 meets Jesus' plan for you.

Friends, rejoice! Your names are written in heaven. In that joy, let's pray and go to work.

Amen.