

**THE RADICAL RABBI:
“A RADICAL COMMISSION”
(Luke 10:1-24)
May 8, 2022**

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary defines “instructions” as: *detailed information telling how something should be done, operated, or assembled*. In our story today, we have Jesus sending a group of his followers out to tell people about him. But, before he sends them out, he gives them instructions on how to function during this particular assignment. He wants them to know what to do when different kinds of situations come up — and he wants them to be successful in what he is sending them to do. So as we get into this story, **let us also ask the Lord for instruction in a moment of prayer.**

TEXT

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 — Luke 10:1.

The first thing we see are the words, “After this,” which means there is a context here to consider. Previous to this moment had been an incredibly busy and active time in ministry: The 12 disciples had their first outreach. Next came the feeding of the 5,000. Then came the famous conversation between Christ and his disciples that established that he was, in fact, the Messiah — the Christ. Then came Jesus letting his disciples know what lay ahead for him at the hands of the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law — his suffering, and even his death, but then also his glorious resurrection, his coming back from death to life. Following that had been the transfiguration, when Peter, James and John saw Jesus in literally all his glory — along with seeing Moses and Elijah as well. And following that was the healing of a demon-possessed boy and a second detailing of what lay ahead in Christ’s future.

But the most impacting contextual setting for this moment was given us by Luke when he wrote: ***As the time came for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem — Luke 9:51.*** In other words, we are in the last few months of Christ’s earthly life. Time is becoming short for Jesus. The predicted suffering and death that he has been talking about is, with every passing day, closing in, even as each step brings them closer to Jerusalem.

And it is as he continues on that he commissions 72 of his followers and sends them out ahead of him as he is traveling south. Now while our focus during Christ’s ministry has understandably been on the 12 men he chose to be his disciples, there were other, unnamed, followers who were just as captivated by his words and works, and just as eager to be a part of Christ’s kingdom. So at this moment, when Christ’s recruiting call came, 72 guys stood up to be counted as his workers.

Now it is thought that, while Christ’s sending out of the 12 disciples likely occurred within the confines of Galilee, this outreach is very possibly occurring in Judea — the province that contains Jerusalem. And in both places, there was ongoing need. Despite almost three years of incredible words and amazing works, and despite the fact, as Matthew reported, that ***[n]ews about him spread all over Syria, and . . . [l]arge crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him — Matthew 4:24a, 25,*** there were still people and villages who had not heard about Jesus of Nazareth. So he sends these 72 guys out with a very specific mission in mind: He wants them to prepare the way for his arrival in these places where he is about to go, much as John the Baptist had been appointed to “prepare the way” for the coming Messiah. Jesus wants people to know he’s on his way.

And notice that he specifically sends them out “two by two.” According to Mark, the initial outreach by the 12 disciples had also been done in twos. There may have been a couple of reasons for this:

- 1) One may have been the OT precedent as given by Moses: ***A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses — Deuteronomy 19:15b.*** Having multiple witnesses would confirm both the delivery of the Lord’s message and the response of the audience.
- 2) There would be support one to the other as they both shared the mission together.

All that being said, he begins giving these followers his instructions: ***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” — Luke 10:2.***

First things first — Jesus tells the ones going out exactly what they are going out into, and why they are going out: “It’s harvest time!” There is a bountiful, abundant crop to be taken care of; in fact, the abundance is an absolute certainty — no guesses about that. But there is a problem — not with the crop but with the crew: not enough workers; in fact, as Jesus says, “The workers are few.” The numbers are little and they need a lot. So the Lord’s first instruction? Pray — pray for more workers to aid in the harvest. And notice that it is not people on the “sidelines” that are being asked to pray. Jesus is telling the workers themselves to pray for more workers. Who would know better than the workers how much more help is needed?

But also notice that Jesus has a very personal interest in this whole enterprise, and why not? It’s his harvest field. The workers, the field, the crop, the harvest, the results — it all belongs to him!

But the other thing that is happening here, by Jesus telling the workers to pray for more workers, is that he is inviting the workers to join their concern for workers with his. Why is that a big deal? Because it makes the workers of one mind, one heart, and one will with Christ. They are becoming partners with Jesus in the most important work they will ever do. How cool is that — that their will can be united by God’s infinite grace into his divine will through Christ.

Jesus continues: ***“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves” — Jesus Christ, Luke 10:3.*** Wow, what a sentence! First is a single word, given in the imperative, the command, tense: “Go!” This is a direct order: Literally, depart, now! And then the warning: Consider yourselves to be lambs, and your destination to be wolves. In other words, Jesus is very bluntly telling his appointees that they are being sent out to a land filled with potential danger — a land of fierce, attacking enemies. And, as long as they are there representing their radical rabbi, they will be the target of aggressive, intimidating opponents.

And just to be clear, wolves had a strong presence in biblical lands. It is thought that they grew to a length of some four feet and could weigh as much as 100 pounds. They were known for the boldness and fierceness of their attacks — and also for the fact that they often killed more than they could eat. Why? The taste of blood often put them into a feeding frenzy. The picture is of attack with no mercy — and they still cause trouble for shepherds and their flocks right down to the present day.

So Jesus’ words don’t exactly sound encouraging, do they? Animals with no visible means of defending themselves being sent out into “wolf world?” There is not a wolf on the planet that wouldn’t be salivating at that idea: “Alright; the special on the menu tonight — lamb chops!” But looks can be deceiving. All those lambs are going to be accompanied by the “good Shepherd.” The way the Greek is constructed literally has Jesus telling us: “This is what I am doing; I am deliberately choosing to do this in this way.” So while there needs to be an awareness of the field into which they are going, there needs to be an even stronger awareness of Who is going into the field with them.

The fact is, these guys had been appointed to be ambassadors of the King. And as any ambassador knows, they are not placed in their positions to be alone. They are there with the total support of the King, and that support is not only found in the King’s throne room but in the King’s fields as well — wherever they are doing his work.

Also, there is a matter of focus to be determined. Is their focus going to be on the Master and his mission, or on the wolves and their menace? Their focus needs to be clear because this is going to be hard work, and a

huge job. “The laborers are few, the harvest is great. We need workers!” So, in other words, there is a lot to do, and not a lot of help to do it with. What must be remembered: Being in the Master’s field does not make the work less difficult — just more rewarding.

Jesus goes on: **“Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you” — Jesus Christ, Luke 10:3-8.**

As we listen to Jesus give his instructions, we get the impression that there is an urgency about this mission. As if to emphasize that, Jesus does not want them loaded down with extra baggage or be delayed in their travels. Just go as you are, with the clothing and sandals you have. And don’t get sidetracked with conversations along the way. I want you getting to these villages as soon as possible.

And this is also a mission to be carried out with trust: They are to trust God for providing them places to stay, and food and drink to sustain them on their way. They are to gladly accept these things as the equivalent of the wages they are earning for their work.

And then he tells them what their ministry will be: **“Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” — Jesus Christ, Luke 10:9.**

Theirs was to be a ministry of restoration. They were there as ambassadors to restore peace — bringing peace to the physically sick by the ministry of healing, and bringing peace via Christ’s “good news” to the spiritually sick, bringing relief with the same words with which Jesus had opened his ministry: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 4:17b.**

But the healing, the presentation of message, was also to be a ministry of identification — a call to all who watched and listened that something far more than any kind of human effort was at work here. “This is all about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is who we represent; the kingdom of God is why we are here. And Jesus of Nazareth is the only means of entry into that kingdom. Not religion, not ritual. Jesus.”

And then Christ continued with his instructions: **“But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘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.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town” — Jesus Christ, Luke 10:10-12.**

Back in the OT days of Joshua, when Israel came upon a city outside the boundaries of the Promised Land that still needed to be conquered due to its threat to Israel either militarily or spiritually (a center for idol worship, for instance), a peace offer was to be extended to that particular city. If the peace offer was accepted, the city would be spared destruction.

In a similar sense, this group of 72 was doing the same thing — extending a spiritual peace offer identified as coming from the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Their words, “The kingdom of God has come near,” would serve to tell a village and their people that they had been warned; God’s grace has given them opportunity.

And then Jesus mentions Sodom. Remember that place — a city so incredibly wicked it got God’s personal attention? **[T]he Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah — from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities — and also the vegetation in the land. . . . [So] God destroyed the cities of the plain — Genesis 19:24-25, 29a.** Sodom had become a “poster child” of evil for Israel. Many times in the OT, Israel’s wickedness was compared to Sodom’s. And comparing the outcome of refusing the offer extended by these ambassadors of Jesus to worse than the outcome that occurred in Sodom should have clearly related the seriousness of rejecting the grace and forgiveness found in God’s kingdom.

In fact, the mere mention of Sodom drastically and suddenly changes the tone of the entire moment, as Jesus begins to mourn those who have already rejected his message: ***“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. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades” — Jesus Christ, Luke 10:13-15.***

Chorazin and Bethsaida were towns on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee; in fact, Bethsaida was the disciple Philip’s hometown. These were towns with a significant Jewish presence that had witnessed the power of God through Christ. Comparing them to Tyre and Sidon would have been seen as a gross insult; those were two Gentile cities notorious for their wickedness and idol worship who were used themselves as poster children of sin by the prophets of Israel — Isaiah, Ezekiel and Amos.

Yet Jesus is comparing them to highlight Israel’s present sinfulness — and this puts him in a state of mourning, of grief-stricken agony. Jesus is mourning both their sinfulness and their lack of response to his offer of rescue. How do we know this? The word “woe.” Woe used as it is used here is an exclamation of grief. And Jesus is mourning the fact that, if those two ungodly, immoral cities had seen what those two Jewish cities had seen, they would have been shattered into sitting in sackcloth and ashes — ancient and traditional displays of deep mourning and sorrow for their sin, and therefore profound repentance. It will be better in God’s eyes for Tyre and Sidon than for them. And Capernaum, the town that Jesus had made his unofficial headquarters during his Galilean ministry? Had their response to Jesus brought them to the kingdom of heaven? No; in fact, the exact opposite — “you will go down to Hades” — will be realized.

But then Jesus brought his ambassadors one more piece of advice, a perspective they could remember during their work: ***“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” — Jesus Christ, Luke 10:16.***

While they may experience rejection of themselves and, more importantly, the message they bring, they should not take that rejection personally. It is not a rejection of their mission; it is a rejection of their Master — which also means that the response to his message is not on them to consider. The time will come when the Master will give his response. The time will come when the Master will call those who reject him to account. But in the meantime, note that the Master mourns their rejection — not of him, but of the God who sent him.

So these 72 ambassadors went out on their mission — and then: ***The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” — Luke 10:17.***

They are rejoicing in how they were able to be used by Christ, and the power with which he blessed them. Who wouldn’t be excited by the blessing of participating in that? But in acknowledging that the demons bowed to their power in Jesus’ name, they understand that it was the gracious power of Christ given them that led to the victories of which they were witness, and no power in they themselves.

And Jesus rejoices with them, but also gives them a point of clarity and perspective: ***He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” — Luke 10:18-20.***

Jesus is genuinely excited for them; he is very aware of the victories they have experienced. And nobody knows better than him that the victories they are seeing over the forces of Satan in the cities in which they have visited are but battles in an ongoing war that has been going on since Satan’s rebellion against God in heaven. These victories were just a part of the process that will eventually defeat Satan completely. And while Satan will not give up, the same power they realized on their mission will continue to be available to them. But Jesus doesn’t want his triumphant followers overlooking the greatest victory they will ever know: the victory over sin, death and the power of the devil, documented and confirmed by the fact that their names are written in heaven.

And hear the assurance with which Jesus says that: “[Y]our names are (present tense) written in heaven” — *Jesus Christ, Luke 10:20b*. Literally, they have been written and they are written. The Greek word here that is translated “written” actually means, “to inscribe formally and solemnly.” This was the kind of writing that was used for the signing of a will, or a marriage document, or a peace treaty; it would also have been used for the enrolling of a citizen. That is our confidence in Christ; that is our security. And that, he reminds them, is the greatest victory of all — the promise of joy in the kingdom of heaven!

But their joy also moves him deeply: *At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” — Luke 10:21-22.*

Jesus rejoices not only in his Father’s gracious plan of salvation, but also in how he has revealed himself to the world. It is not the wise and learned who have been granted this revelation, but “little children.” This was a revelation not based on the pride of strength but rather on the humility of weakness; the apostle Paul made the same point in his first letter to the Corinthian church: *God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong — Paul, I Corinthians 1:27.*

And then we close this story with one more piece of precious perspective from Jesus: *Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it” — Luke 10:23-24.*

All the authors of the scriptures they knew, all the heroes of their faith, all of those remarkably faithful men and women had been looking forward with great anticipation to the very days which the disciples were living! What a privilege it was for the disciples to be alive right then — to listen to the Messiah’s words, to watch the Messiah’s actions, and to realize that, of a complete and total certainty, the kingdom of God had indeed come to live among men. And they were witnesses to every glorious moment of it. They were indeed blessed!

APPLICATION

Christ makes some great points in this time of preparation for this crew of 72. So what translates to our time and place today? Several things:

One thing we see is that, for Jesus, it is all about the mission. Notice that he first tells his ambassadors to go; then he tells them about the wolves that await them. There’s significance in that order, in two ways: (1) First, it is important to realize that Jesus is more than aware of what awaits these guys. It’s not like one of them could say, “Hey, Jesus, did you know about (whatever)?” He knows — which leads to (2) Second, if he is the most powerful force in the universe, why should a mangy bunch of wolves cause anybody concern anyway? Jesus knows about them, and is more powerful than them. What’s left?

Now, the only reasons that somebody would hesitate on getting into the field for Christ is that either they really don’t want to go anyway, or they really don’t believe that Christ is everything the Bible says he is. Now the main reason for not wanting to go anyway is that they hold something in this world of greater value than their life and service to the Master. Whether that be family or safety or economic security or whatever, Satan has a multitude of ways of making this momentary world seem far more attractive than Christ’s eternal one.

Now, whether we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is everything the Bible says he is is one of those “rubber meets the road” issues. One of the reasons that Jesus came to earth was to show “God-stuff” in an earthly setting. Nobody could turn blind to sight — but he did. Nobody could turn a few loaves and fishes into a

banquet for thousands — but he did. Nobody could walk on the waves of a violently turbulent body of water — but he did. Nobody could command a demonic spirit to leave — but he did. Nobody would let themselves be touched by a leper — but he did, and then healed them as well. And nobody could command death to become life — but he did. The point is: Isn't he the same guy today that he was back then? If he did all those things in the world of 2,000 years ago, isn't he just as capable of showing that same power and ability today? Exactly what is it we believe about Jesus of Nazareth? Ultimately, that's the question!

The reality is that, in our own strength, we are lambs — lambs who in ourselves have no means of defense. And yet we are simultaneously commanded to go into a world already and fully inhabited by wolves — wolves trained, as Paul detailed, ***according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience — Paul, Ephesians 2:2b (NASB1995).***

But it is precisely because of this seeming inequity — incredible weakness going up against what appears to be incredible strength — that we are invited to claim what David wrote with such confidence: ***Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God — David, Psalm 20:6-7.*** No guessing — we can know that victory will come because there is nothing more powerful on this planet or in the entire universe than the victorious power of God's right hand!

Details such as resources and shelter for the journey are just that to God: mere details. As these 72 realized and then rejoiced in, we will be met with everything we need, in every conversation and in every confrontation, whenever we are seeking to bring news of the kingdom and the coming King to the hearts and minds of whatever people cross our paths.

CONCLUSION

And one final thing as we close: If our goal is to be remade into the image of Christ, for the glory of his name, then we should be overwhelmed with his grief in the face of the sinfulness of our time. “Woe!” The call is clear. “I am in grief; I am saddened beyond measure at their lack of repentance — because their decision is not the end of their story.”

How do we feel at the lack of repentance? Does it grieve us? It grieved Christ. It is a particularly important issue now, now that the issue of abortion has once again become front and center in our society.

Our culture is trapped into a situation predicted by the prophet Isaiah some 2,700 years ago: ***Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight — Isaiah 5:20-21.*** That's our world; that's the “field” to which our Master has called us — a field complete with “wolves.” What is our response to his call?

This isn't theory, folks; this is real-world stuff. There really are sinners, there really is wickedness — and there really is a solution to it all, in the name of a Savior named Jesus. And he is calling us to declare his word — right here, right now, right in 2022 America. What's your answer to his call? And guess what? Your answer matters. Let's pray!