

## The Invitation

*The Church must focus on delivering Jesus' invitation to join the Kingdom of God.*

.....*Luke 10: 1 – 24*.....

**"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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Go! I am sending you out like lambs among the wolves. <sup>4</sup>Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. <sup>5</sup>When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' <sup>6</sup>If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. <sup>8</sup>When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup>Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' <sup>10</sup>But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' <sup>12</sup>I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. <sup>13</sup>'Woe to you, Korazin! 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. <sup>14</sup>But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. <sup>15</sup>And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. <sup>16</sup>He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.' <sup>17</sup>The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' <sup>18</sup>He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup>I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. <sup>20</sup>However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' <sup>21</sup>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 was your good pleasure. <sup>22</sup>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.' <sup>23</sup>Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. <sup>24</sup>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.'"**

Whenever I travel to a big city, I have a bit of culture shock. Here, most of the time I live in a little bubble. I live on our street with neighbors who mainly share the same values. I drive here, to church, and then home again.

So, whenever I go to a place where there are many diverse lifestyles, I have to do a little bit of cultural realignment. The thing that I can't resolve, however, is realizing how little attention God seems to get in the busy-ness of city life.

This past weekend, for our son's wedding, we were immersed in the trendy cultural life of Columbus, Ohio. The 'old' downtown was beautifully modernized; it was very alive with people and activity. But I kept looking for evidence that God was being honored.

There were shops that specialized in '*spirituality*', but not 'Jesus.' There were 'Zen' shops, and some that seemed '*occult*'-ish. But I didn't see any that promoted '*Jesus*'. I kept wondering if Jesus were to send his seventy-two (72) messengers onto the busy sidewalks of Columbus, what message would he ask them to give?

This past weekend, our eyes were also on the news, hearing about Afghanistan and Haiti. It seemed a little wrong, that while we celebrated our joy at the wedding, so many were suffering. I've also been wondering, what message would Jesus ask the seventy-two (72) to bring to them?

While it is true that he sent those seventy-two (72) messengers out in a specific time and culture far different from ours, the message he had them tell is still the same. He sent them out on a mission to ***invite others*** to become part of the Kingdom of God.

It's only in the gospel of Luke that we hear about Jesus sending out this large group of disciples. Some versions of the Bible say that Jesus sent out 'seventy-two' (72), but other versions say that he only sent out seventy (70). The earliest Greek manuscripts even differ in which number is correct.

The confusion may go back to the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint. There, in Genesis 10, seventy-two (72) nations are recorded to have come from Noah after the flood. Other Old Testament manuscripts record seventy (70) nations.

The number, seventy (70), however, is the number of the elders Moses appointed to help him as leaders of the people in the desert. (*Numbers 11:16*) The number seventy (70) also stands for the offspring of Jacob who went into Egypt with Joseph during the famine. (*Deuteronomy 10:22*) Whether Jesus sent out *seventy* (70) or *seventy-two* (72), most scholars believe that the number is symbolic of Jesus sending disciples to all the nations of the world, beginning with Israel.

Jesus sent them out '***two by two***', not only for moral support of each other, but because Jewish law required that two witnesses be present to make a testimony legitimate.

The most fascinating thing to me is that the seventy-(two) (72) were just '*sent out*.' Today, we train missionaries and teach them how to be successful evangelizers. But these missionaries apparently had no training.

Jesus gave them a few instructions: like '*travel light*,' and '*stay focused*,' and '*be grateful for whatever your host gives you*.' He didn't seem to elaborate too much, however, on how they, as '***lambs***,' were supposed to defend themselves from the '***wolves***'

Jesus did, though, make these things clear as they set off: 1) Their mission was URGENT; 2) God's HOLY SPIRIT would provide what they needed; 3) They were to INVITE people to join the KINGDOM OF GOD; and 4) They were to pronounce GOD'S JUDGMENT on those who did not accept Jesus' invitation.

When the seventy-(two) (72) returned, they were amazed and overjoyed at what the HOLY SPIRIT had done through them. They had healed, cast out demons, and saw many hearts turn to receive Jesus as the King of the Kingdom.

Jesus rejoiced with them, seeing how God was expanding His Kingdom through ordinary people. Jesus knew how effective their ministry had been against the power of evil, and he said, '***I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.***' Evidentially, Satan was also caught off guard at what the power of God was able to accomplish through the seventy-(two) (72).

The Kingdom of God had '*come near*' and the invitation to join was now, not later. Their invitation was a '*limited time offer*'. If those who heard did not accept Jesus' invitation to follow him, their rejection would have serious consequences. Jesus warned that the coming Day of Judgment would be '***unbearable***' for those who refused the Son's invitation to join the Father in His eternal Kingdom.

Based on what I see prevailing in the current American culture, I have to believe that most people are either 1) Postponing thinking about that 'Day', when their faith will be examined by God, or 2) They believe that neither Jesus nor his forgiveness of sin is necessary to enter Heaven. Until they experience a real crisis, most people seem happy with a 'pot-luck' faith, that they themselves have designed and are content to call 'truth'.

While the way we '*do*' life has changed significantly since Jesus sent out his first disciples, the urgency of his invitation remains the same. Because our culture has embraced religious diversity, we too have neglected how important it is to extend Jesus' Kingdom invitation.

I too am guilty of wanting to enjoy a friendly chat over coffee without causing controversy over Jesus. I also want to enjoy family gatherings without getting into religious preferences. But if we believe Jesus' invitation IS truly URGENT, then shouldn't we be focused on how best to deliver it?

***But, how*** do we do it? In Jesus' day, '*shalom*' was a common greeting on the street among Jews. But in this setting, the '***peace***' of God was more than a friendly '*hello.*' It would be like knocking on a door and saying, '*God has sent me to bring you His grace.*'

We aren't accustomed to opening our front doors to strangers saying things like that, are we? In our neighborhoods, when we see people going house to house, two-by-two, we tend to hide behind closed doors. How then, do we ***BE*** Jesus' ambassadors today in a way that doesn't turn people off?

First of all, Jesus still gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who creates opportunities and gives us the ability to share his Good News. When we are willing to step through God's open doors, we too, like the seventy-(two) (72), are filled with joy and amazement at how God uses us, the broken clay pots that we are, to build His Kingdom.

Even if we haven't had '*training*', we will be amazed at what the Holy Spirit will do through us for the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit, when we trust Him, makes us bold to say what God puts on our hearts in a way that our hearers will receive it. We can trust the Holy Spirit to give our words the kind of emphasis that our hearers need. Some people respond to a gentle invitation; other

people need a more firm approach. God knows what is best; we just need to follow where He leads.

Without Jesus' invitation, people don't know how to receive eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Without knowing, they can only grope along, sorting through the myriad of popular options, just hoping they find the right way.

As individuals, and as a church together, we need to be focused on asking God how best to extend His invitation to people right here, in Burgettstown. We also need to, '**Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers into his harvest field.**' Someone's eternal salvation depends on it.

I personally react positively to people who are kind and not pushy. I believe that in our culture, kindness and concern for others makes Jesus visible. So, how we act makes a huge difference in our witness to Jesus.

Our recent '*Produce Give-Away*' days have brought many people from the community to us. I have to think that it is because people need food. What would God's Holy Spirit be able to do if we did more of the same? What if we would offer a free meal once a month? Don't you get excited to think about what God could do with that kind of opportunity? How many people could He introduce to Jesus through us?

I think about the Christians in Afghanistan right now. Most of them were raised in the Islam faith until someone invited them to meet Jesus. There is no other way they could have known about him.

Right now, they are truly like '**lambs among wolves**'. We pray that the Holy Spirit strengthens them in faith and provides what they need in this time of extreme trial. We pray that the Holy Spirit reinforces in them the certainty of God's promises, reassuring them that while their mortal lives are in danger, they are secure in the hand of Almighty God.

It is so important that we give Jesus' invitation when the Holy Spirit prompts us. We may not have another opportunity to deliver it and we do not know how many will have a place in heaven because of it.

We cannot be complacent about delivering Jesus' invitation. It should be our main focus as a church. Yes, Sunday worship is vital, but praising God should make us look outward. Not to build up our church, but first and foremost to build up God's Kingdom.

Jesus is very clear that people who reject Jesus as the only way into the Kingdom of God will not be part of it. Many people, and many nations, believe that they, like Capernaum, '**will be lifted to heaven**' because they have '*done*' what they thought was adequate to glorify God.

Church membership or doing '*good deeds*' does not qualify anyone for the Kingdom of God. Only submitting to Jesus as Lord of your life and King of your heart opens the gates for you.

When we say 'yes' to Jesus' invitation to join him in the Kingdom of God, the '**peace**' of God comes and settles in us. We have '**peace**' in knowing that through good and bad, we belong to God and are able to '**rejoice**' that our '**names are written**' in God's Book of Eternal Life.