

We're in a series in Luke called *Succession* seeing how the mission of Jesus is passed down from generation to generation. Last week we spent our time looking at what Jesus said is the cost of participating in God's succession plan; that we would deny ourselves, pick up our crosses daily, and follow him. We have to lose our life to live into the one he has won for us. The reasonable question after saying "I'm in." is "Now what?" And that's where many Christians get stuck.

I was a believer for a lot of years before I ever took a step forward and decided to get involved. I was insecure about what to do and I didn't want to give up (lose!) certain aspects of my life for Kingdom work. What about you? Have you said yes to Jesus but not yet said yes to his mission? What is holding you back? I believe for many Christians, we hesitate to step into the mission because of what boils down to three foundational questions. "How do I do it?", which expresses insecurity. "What can I expect?", which expresses fear. "Is it worth it?", which expresses doubt of fulfillment, or FOMO. If we don't have answers to those three questions, we'll hold ourselves back and miss out on the mission. Thankfully Jesus will give us those answers today.

[Luke 10:1-12] After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Jesus sends out another group of disciples. The key word here is "others". These are not the Twelve. They are a second generation of believers, spiritual grandchildren, who have trusted in Jesus and joined the mission of the Kingdom of God. **God's succession plan is working.** Jesus identified, invited, invested, and ignited the Twelve, and they, with Jesus, have done the same with these 72. When we get to the book of Acts, that number will be 100, and on the day of Pentecost, it will grow to 3000. Jesus did not focus on just the crowd. He invests in a few to get to a lot. It is why we are currently working on adjusting 20% of our staff's time to spend individually or with a small number of people because there are some things in discipleship that can only happen with a few that can't happen with many. **Our hope and prayer is that all of us would eventually have someone we are pouring into.**

Jesus answers the question **How do I do it?** He knows insecurity will hold us back. The mission can be summarized in three words: Go, pray, tell. They are sent to surrounding towns to proclaim the Kingdom of God has come near to them. This is more than a political message. It is a spiritual one. God's Kingdom has invaded creation. His reign and the exercise of his saving power has commenced, and it will begin to reverse the brokenness that started in the Garden,

overcoming evil and ushering in an era of peace for all who would receive it. Do you want to be a part of something like that? The disciples are also to pray. They are to pray that not only would others receive the Kingdom but that they too would join its mission. **There is more work than workers.** They are acting as both proclaimers of the Kingdom and recruiters to it.

We have been commissioned into the same work. We know more of the story, but our message and mission are essentially the same. Jesus has ushered in the Kingdom and defeated the evil of sin and death by dying on a cross and rising three days later. Whoever puts their trust in Jesus will be at peace with God, welcomed into the Kingdom, and commissioned for the same work.

Some of us will be called to go somewhere else, but all of us are sent to where we live, work, and play. A great exercise for you would be to list all of the people in your family, at your job, and in your neighborhood. That's your mission field. Imagine what would happen if every believer was as outwardly passionate about their Savior as they are about their candidate of choice, their favorite sports teams, or their dog. **There wouldn't be a person on this earth who hadn't heard the name Jesus.** We get to be a part of that. And, as we have said many times in this series, the call is to pass on what has been given to you. We tend to overcomplicate it, or claim we aren't qualified, and insecurity takes us out. But remember, these 72 were NOOBS! **Our job is to prepare hearts. God's job is to change them.**

We want to help prepare you for doing this in 2021. We will have a spring Evangelism Training Experience and are working on a discipleship pathway to give you guidance as you invest in someone else. But you don't have to wait! Give what you've been given, and trust God to use it.

Now, you may say "OK, Kurt, I'm willing to go" but have the question **What can I expect?** It's a good question because the unknown can produce fear. Jesus has an answer.

The first thing Jesus says is OPPORTUNITY! The harvest is plentiful, and it still is, but I don't know how many of us really believe that. We hear of the increase of the "nones", a decrease of those in church, growing persecution, and conclude no one wants to know. **But that's not true.** There are nearly 8 billion people on this earth, 6 billion who don't know Jesus and 2 billion who are desperate for someone to personally invest in their relationship with Jesus. And if those are too big to comprehend, just look at our church. There are a group of faithful young adults who are going against the trend in their generation and are committing their lives to Jesus. They need your help. I married a young couple last night who said they love this church and are fired up to be part of its mission. I know we've lost some people over the last couple of years but those who are here all in and ready to go. Plus we've had nearly 300 new people make themselves known since we started to regather in person. And God is not going to let something like a pandemic go to waste. Google Trends reports that, in 75 countries, for every 80,000 new cases of Covid, the number of searches for "prayer" double. This world is desperate to know and follow of someone who says "I am the way", "Peace be with you", "Love one another as I have loved you", "Do not fear", "I have overcome". I have to be reminded of that myself. I was recently talking to a friend who I didn't think had much interest in spiritual things...until he brought it up! You have the answer to the question many people are asking. **Do not miss this opportunity for the gospel!**

Will it be easy? No. Jesus says we'll be resisted and uses the graphic picture of lambs among wolves. He lovingly says this often because he wants us to be prepared. **But it's not a message of hopelessness. It's an opportunity to trust.** Why is it that in the places where the gospel is most resisted is where it most flourishes? The gospel is exploding in Iran right now. Why? Because those proclaiming it have counted the cost, picked up their cross, accepted the suffering, and made the person and mission of Jesus the passion and priority of their lives, regardless of what may come. What could be more compelling? God says over and over again, "Do not fear. I am with you." That doesn't mean we are protected from suffering. It means that whatever happens is allowed by God, but he redeems it all and bears fruit through it.

Our results will also vary. Our message is an offer of God's peace, but it must be accepted. If it is, that person becomes a son of peace, God's peace abides with and in them, and they now carry the same message. **They are a successor.** Others will not accept the offer, so God's peace will not abide with and in them. That leaves them under God's judgment. Jesus says to shake the dust from their feet and move on. When Jews returned home from a Gentile country, they would shake the dust off their feet to signify breaking ties with the Gentiles. This is freeing for us. Rejection may frustrate us and convince us we need to try harder. If we get there, we start to rely on our own power instead of God's, and we spend our time with someone who already rejected our message rather than moving on to someone else who may be open to it. **Results are up to God. You are his harvesting tool. You be faithful. God will determine how it's fruitful.**

Jesus instruction may seem harsh. Sodom was a wicked city destroyed by God's judgment in the Old Testament. We may be hesitant to share anything like that, but it's the reality for those who do not trust in Jesus and accept the peace he offers. **Our message is good news because it is in light of the bad news.** The Bible says the wages of sin is death, that we are all separated from God by sin, and it's only through Jesus that it's made right. The destination for those who reject him is hell, but we struggle to talk about that because we understandably don't want to sound judgmental or unkind. But you wouldn't hesitate to warn someone about an unhealthy lifestyle or try to prevent someone from trying to cross a busy street. The call is not to go all fire and brimstone here. **The call is to lovingly offer the peace that Jesus provides in order to avoid the judgment that is due all of us.** If they open the door to talk more, walk in. If the door remains closed, Jesus tells us to move on. But we can keep praying for that person and keep showing them the values of the Kingdom without having to talk about it. You never know what God will do. If you'd like to talk about how to have peace with God, please come to talk to me.

So, you understand what to do, you now know what to expect, but you may still be asking [SLIDE] **Is it worth it?** The answer is an abundant yes.

[Luke 10:17-24] ¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" ¹⁸ And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." ²¹ In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²² All things have been

handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”²³ Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Is it worth it? The 72 return and it is a joy-fest. Their mission has been successful. They proclaimed the Kingdom of God in the name, power, and authority of Jesus, overcame Satan’s power, and witnessed many accept God’s offer of peace. The Kingdom of God is taking ground in this dark world and they were overjoyed to be a part of it.

Do you want more joy in your life? I think churches should stop inviting people into volunteer opportunities and should instead invite their people into joy opportunities, because serving in the power and authority of Jesus will result always result in joy. It’s one of the great privileges of my life to see people awakened to the call of God in their life, serve in his name, and say “I didn’t know it could be this good.” The same opportunity is available to you.

But Jesus also checks their response because **ultimate joy is not to be found in what we do but in who we are.** We can’t place the work of the Kingdom above the King. I am always grateful for this passage because it reminds me of my temptation to do that. I love to be on mission, but I can forget that the only reason I’m on that mission is because I belong to the Messiah. Ultimate joy comes from knowing that, if you have trusted in Christ, your name is written in heaven. Luke uses a word that means “census”. If you are at peace with God, you are counted in the heavenly census. And when we are on mission, we remember it’s because we belong to the Messiah.

Is it worth it? Yes. You know who else is full of joy that your name is written there? Jesus. He’s joyful for you and joyful for anyone who may come to him through you. That means you can be the catalyst of joy for your Lord and Savior.

Is it worth it? Yes. Being a part of God’s succession plan is ultimately a privilege. Jesus said for centuries God’s faithful waited for God’s Kingdom to arrive. It did with Jesus, and those of us who are witness to it and workers in it are blessed. If we see it that way, succession becomes a get to, not a have to. Is it worth it? Only if being invited into partnership with your Savior and offering your life to bring his Kingdom more fully into the world is a good thing. There is no greater cause, no greater mission, no greater movement, than that of the gospel, of God’s Kingdom, and we get to be a part of it. **IT. IS. WORTH. IT.**

Determine what is holding you back and pray for the harvest.

Spend some time this week asking God to show you if insecurity, fear, or doubt are keeping you from joining the mission. He does not want to shame you. He wants to show you what is going on in your heart and show you what you are missing out on. And pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers. You first, then the person God wants you to engage. Just think: there is someone, or “someones”, God has for you to invite into the Kingdom and to raise up in their relationship with Jesus.

I want to close with an email I got this past week that I pray is the heart response of all of us.

“I was sharing with my group regarding the impact I am experiencing with your most recent sermon series. I have become challenged over the past month that I need to explore the possibility that God desires me to pour out myself into the lives of others. I'm not sure what form it will take, but I am feeling the Spirit's prompting in this area. Please pray for me and if something comes your way that you feel would be a fit for me, I would welcome a call with you to discuss it.”

That's where it all begins. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just need to raise your hand and say you want to be used by God. He will direct you, and we want to help you figure out what that might be. Say yes, ask for God's grace to overcome what is holding you back, and let's get to work.