



The harvest is plentiful

(Luke 10:1-12)

Why is it that the harvest seems to be coming in so many places in the world but just not here? I guess in truth I'd say the reasons are quite complicated why things have declined so much and we can point in different directions. I know that from my own fellowship where people reminisce and say how things were so much better years ago. Well, if things were so good, why is the church of God contracting so fast? And the truth is, that those of us who have lived long enough and have been Christians long enough are part of the problem because we were there and therefore the responsibility for that decline is ours too. As the church now it's our responsibility to deal with this situation too and I believe that it starts with our recognition of that responsibility and our repentance.

I believe that the "Growing in Power" event that you have here in the summer will bring you that challenge. We are going to be challenged. There's no question of that. Take the next few months to carefully prepare for it in prayer. Be ready for the Spirit of God to break you, to mould you, to remake you. But also be prepared to repent for that which in the past has blighted God's people in Norfolk and which continues to do so.

As some of you know I have a testimony in this area having come from Haringey in North London. The expansion of the gospel there in the late 90s had an Argentinean angle. Actually, I came in just after the City Reaching event with De Silvano and Victor Lorenzo. What I did see was the aftermath of a growing church and God's people making an impact on that community.

The downside of it was that apart from being repeated in one or two places, that move of the Spirit did not really leave the borough. As I ministered in Tottenham and lived in Walthamstow, I always had the feeling that I was literally moving from one country to another as I drove in every morning.

Start to pray for Growing in Power that it will be the start of a move of the Spirit that will not be contained in Heacham and Hunstanton. That would be my heart and prayer for you over the next few months. Part of the expertise of these guys was the way by which God used them in "city reaching" where large numbers would come to Christ - and they did. They have in Haringey. Let our vision be county reaching or even country reaching.

Which brings me to what I want to share with you. Let's read please from Luke chapter 10.

10:1 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. 2 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. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or

sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. 5 "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. 7 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. 8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' 10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 '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.' 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

16 "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." 17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

For me, this has been one of my most formative passages in recent years. It's about mission and the huge impact that the sending of the 72, or in other translations, 70 (what's two between friends?). Jesus sends these disciples out. Have a look at what He says:

Expectant

The harvest is plentiful

The harvest is plentiful but the workers few. That's my experience as a newcomer to Norfolk. To most of my congregation, Norfolk is a hard place. Is that the way you feel about it? 93% of people, probably more don't go to church and seem apathetic. It's easy to feel that we have been pushed out into a desert - a hard place. It doesn't help if we have congregations which are sluggish. But look again. The story is told of a British shoe company that wanted to explore possibilities of exporting to West Africa in about the middle of the last century. They sent a salesman out there to explore possibilities. But as he arrived he looked at people's feet, and saw they wore no shoes. Dejectedly he contacted London. 'There are few marketing opportunities here.' The Managing Director seemed concerned because that's not what he'd heard. So he sent out another salesman. As he arrived he looked at people's feet, and saw they wore no shoes. He quickly cabled London. "Send out all available shoes - there's a massive need!"

We live in a society where people know little about Christ. Does that make them impermeable, or do we have a generation of people that haven't been put off by the church? The harvest is plentiful, but the workers few. In my last church, one of my first tasks was preaching at a baptismal service. My senior pastor said to me: "we always preach the gospel at baptisms. Is that OK." "Fine" I eagerly said! "Oh", he added "and we always have an appeal for people to come forward at the end; is that OK"? "Mmm", I hesitated, "what if no-one comes forward". "If you've no expectation of someone coming to Christ, then why are you preaching the gospel?" was the reply.

Expectation. You are a mission group. What is your expectation of what God is doing or can do in Hunstanton and Heacham and the surrounding areas? What can God do? Look at Brazil, Argentina, Uganda, Ghana, South Africa and the like and see the huge move of the Spirit in these places. That's what God

can do. That's not something that's in our past - it's in our future. Perhaps one of our biggest tasks as church leaders is changing the expectations of our congregations to expect a harvest and not a drought! Have that expectation and pray this: *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*

● **Streetwise**

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves

Feeling fired up? Good, because now you get the next point. Do you know how tasty lambs are to wolves. No-one has said that reaping the harvest was going to be that simple. Go! And beware you're going to get eaten if you're not careful. We are called as a people to be streetwise. We are called to know the environment in which we are working. If you remember Hill Street Blues, the Sergeant always said after his morning briefing "Hey, be careful out there". Know your town, know your people, know their needs, but also remember that there is plenty out there that will devour us, be that people we are trying to reach or satan who doesn't want us to reach people. One of the biggest problems in the past has been that Christians have come to grief because they are scratching where it doesn't itch - which is a pity when you're scratching a wolf's backside!

● **Focused**

Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road

Be focused in your task. Don't carry your baggage with you and don't be diverted. We are called to be a missionary people. The last words of Jesus were missionary words - Go. The trouble is that so often we become preoccupied with other things. You don't reach people for Christ by being preoccupied with buildings, by being preoccupied with arguing doctrinal points, being preoccupied with church affairs. Generally being preoccupied with things that maintain our churches. We're preoccupied with our baggage, we pass the time at meetings and fellowship evenings. Worse, we are preoccupied with "worship". And missions? The keenies do that now and again. The Great Commission was Jesus' last earthly command. It's funny how we mostly don't obey it. We've been waylaid in the street.

We're called to be witnesses. That's the mission of the church. Do you want to obey Christ? Is it your desire to please Him - then obey His commands.

So here are the disciples they are off into the villages and they become travelling preachers and it was quite normal in those days for visiting preachers to be honoured by having a welcome and accommodation whilst they were in the town or village.

How did they actually reach people?

■ **Friendship**

5 "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.

We want to reach people in our towns and villages? Good. How do we do that? Hold meetings? Door to door? Open airs? Did you know that most people become Christians because a friend or family member introduced them to Christ? The next members of your church are the people you live next door to, the ones you work with, close members of your family, people you meet socially.

Or people that come to things at your church - mother & toddler, children's clubs, youth work, old people's lunches. What I find remarkable is that so often we provide these "services" but have forgotten why.

5 "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.

Let's be people that pray peace on people's houses. Perhaps that's where you should start with your neighbours - by praying peace on their houses and that you will have opportunities to speak peace to them. If you've ever been involved in a Lighthouse of Prayer program you would have probably started here.

■ Getting alongside

7 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. 8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.

This point answers that question why. as we make friends, we come alongside. In the olden days, what we did was get people into our churches and then preached at them. I guess most of us still do. that's a good reason for most non-Christians to give it a miss. As we make friends, we come alongside them as friends. There's no concept of preaching in these verses I just read. The disciple was to get to know and accept the friendship of people they were with.

Too often non-Christians are "targets". Let's see them as God sees them - desiring our friendship because we are us. Let's make genuine friendships and accept people as our friends. Too often, the only people Christians get close to are other Christians because we don't desire the company and friendships of non-Christians.

If we want to see the harvest reaped, I believe we need to get out of our exclusiveness and get alongside people in friendship and love and that love must be genuine as Christ's love always was for us. Let me say that most people spot insincerity a mile off - so let your love be genuine.

■ Meeting felt needs

9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' Matthew adds drive out demons to this. The disciples met felt needs. In fact, people's attitudes are different when they see the presence and power of God in their lives. A good start point is always pray for people (preferably with their knowledge) and if we can help we should - which we would do anyway out of friendship. Do you want to witness effectively? Then do as a friend does and meet their felt needs because:..

■ Proclaiming the Kingdom

... as we meet them in their needs we are able to share Christ with them. They healed the sick and then shared the message of the Kingdom. It's a basic principle of evangelism. It's why over the years that churches have social outreach programmes. The problem is that sometimes those programs take a life of their own. We meet people's felt needs but we don't share their real need. The bottom line is, that we are here to proclaim the kingdom.

Failure in the witness of churches comes because they short circuit the Luke 10 process. They try evangelism without friendship. They try to minister to needs without friendship or without proclaiming the Kingdom.

■ Having God's perspective

10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 '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.' 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

16 "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

How long do you persevere with people who are difficult or with situations that are difficult? The message to the disciples were clear, if you're not welcome, walk on and shake the dust of your feet and leave people with a warning. God's perspective is that when people reject Christ, they reject Him, not us.

Another piece of perspective we need to recover apart from our expectations is that sometimes we need to be prepared to move from our normal constituency to where the harvest actually is. What do I mean by this? One observation I have of many more established churches is that we usually have a bevy of fringe people who have a questionable Christian commitment. Churches can invest much time in them in trying to draw them into the mainstream of the church. And they don't come! And then we come to the conclusion that people are hard towards the gospel where we are and expectations drop. Has it ever occurred to you that this crop is not ripe?

Let's see this with God's perspective. There is a massive ripe crop in our towns and villages - people moving and re-evaluating life, people in crises who need a deliverer, people who are sick and need a healer, families in turmoil that need a peacemaker, lonely people that need a friend, older people who to be brought hope, people who are weak or have failed and need an encourager or people caught in addiction who need a deliverer.

And Jesus fits the bill - and they are waiting for that touch of the Holy Spirit. The only thing is that someone needs to bring them that message of hope, forgiveness, salvation, freedom. And that's you and me. And what are we doing? Missing them out because we invest our time in those that have heard the good news countless times and remain almost untouched.

In the end, they are responsible to Christ. By all means pray and try to reach them, but remember, there is a massive crop out there to be harvested and by the grace of God it is ready to be brought in. Let's see God's perspective and see fields white to harvest. Open your eyes look at Heacham, look at Hunstanton, see the people as God sees them hungry, needy, ready to hear about Jesus. That's the reality of Norfolk today.

Prayer of Repentance

Prayer of Commitment



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