

Engage Bible Study: Luke 10:1-24 – *The Mission of the Seventy*
December 12-14, 2011

This season of Advent is flying by, and Christmas is right around the corner. Since you did so well with Thanksgiving Trivia a few weeks ago let's see how well you do with Christmas Trivia!

What company was the first to use Santa in its promotions?

1. Coca Cola
2. Sears
3. General Electric

The answer is 1 – Coca Cola. They used Santa as part of a winter promotion in 1931. The image of Santa in that first promotion was used for the next three decades and helped set the standard for what Americans believe Santa looks like. Up until that time Santa looked many different ways – short, tall, fat, thin and even appeared as an elf.

Which Christmas Song was originally written for Thanksgiving?

1. Jingle Bells
2. Marshmallow World
3. Let It Snow

The answer is 1 – Jingle Bells

Jingle Bells was written in 1857 by James Pierpont to be sung at a Thanksgiving program at his Unitarian church in Savannah, Georgia. It was originally titled "One Horse Open Sleigh." The performance was repeated at Christmas due to its instant popularity.

Which country first used the Christmas stamp?

1. United States
2. Germany
3. Canada

The answer is 3 – Canada. The stamp came out in 1898. It was a 2 cent stamp. At that time Canada was part of the British Empire and the stamp said, "We hold a vaster empire than has been." Nice humble statement for a Christmas stamp. Excellent focus on Jesus.

What country banned Christmas in 1647?

1. England
2. Italy
3. France

The answer is 1 – England. The ban was reversed in 1660 when the Puritans lost power. They had originally banned it because it was wasteful and just too much fun!

In “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” what was the name of the elf who wanted to become a dentist?

1. Clarise
2. Hermey
3. Templeton

The correct answer is 2 – Hermey. He didn’t like making toys...which is a problem for a Christmas elf.

What famous actor narrated the 1966 version of the Christmas Classic “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”?

1. Vincent Price
2. Boris Karloff
3. James Earle Jones

The correct answer is 2 – Boris Karloff, whose real name was William Henry Pratt. He was best known for his horror roles, especially in the Frankenstein movies.

What did bakers make and hang on the first Christmas trees?

1. Gingerbread men
2. Pretzels
3. Hot-cross buns

The correct answer is 1 – Gingerbread men. According to the 2009 Guinness Book of Records, the world’s largest gingerbread man was made on December 2, 2006 by the Smithville Area Chamber of Commerce in Smithville, Texas at their annual Festival of Lights celebration. The gingerbread man weighed in at 1,308 lbs, 8 oz, and stood at over 20 feet.

How many “geese-a-laying” did my true love give to me?

1. Six
2. Seven
3. Eight

The correct answer is 1 – six. Eight Maids a Milking, Seven Swans-a-swimming, and Six Geese-a-laying. The song was first published in 1780. While the lyrics may have no meaning at all, some suggest that the song was actually a kind of catechism written for Roman Catholic children when Catholicism was outlawed in England. It’s been suggested that the five golden rings are the five books of Moses, the four calling birds are the gospels, the three French hens are the three wise men, the two turtle doves are the old and new testaments and the partridge in a pear tree is Jesus.

How did Black Friday get its name?

1. It described the heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic
2. It was the day that retailers begin to turn a profit, operating “in the black”
3. It was a negative statement about the excess of consumerism in America

The correct answer is 1 – it described the heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic of that day. The name originated in Philadelphia in the early 1960’s.

The red and white stripes on a candy cane are believed to represent:

1. Faith and hope
2. Christ’s blood and purity
3. The Old and New Testaments

The correct answer is 2 – Christ’s blood and purity. The first candy canes, which appeared around 1670, were pure white. The stripes were added about 50 years later.

Enough trivia. Let’s get back to Luke. Last week Luke’s gospel took a significant turn. Peter confessed his belief that Jesus was not just the forerunner of the Messiah, but the Messiah himself. From that point Jesus began to teach them what that meant, not just for the Messiah but for those who would follow him. It meant a life of daily self-denial and cross-bearing. Luke also let us know that the disciples didn’t get it, nor are they ready to take on Jesus’ ministry. They still lack faith, understanding, humility and the inclusive perspective of Jesus.

The Mission of the Seventy (10:1-12)

With the opening of chapter 10 we see that the training of disciples continues. Not long ago Jesus sent out the Twelve. Now he sends out 70. Let’s read 10:1-12 **[READ]**. As we’ve noted before numbers are often symbolic in the gospels, and that’s true here. Moses chose 70 elders to his helpers in leading the nation of Israel through the wilderness. But perhaps even more relevant is the fact that 70 is the number of nations in the world according to Genesis 10. The implication here is that the mission of Jesus and his disciples will be global...and reality that we see unfolding in Luke’s next volume, The Acts of the Apostles.

These seventy disciples are sent out in pairs into every town that Jesus plans to enter. Kings would send out messengers to prepare an area for their coming. That’s what John the Baptists was doing, and that’s what these disciples are doing. They are preparing the way for the King. And Jesus commands his disciples to pray for even more forerunners so that the movement can spread. Those forerunners, of course, include you and me as we continue the mission of Jesus in the world.

Note the urgency of this mission:

- An abundant crop without enough harvesters means that a lot of crops will go to waste in the field.
- The disciples are being sent out as sheep among wolves. Those words would become increasingly true after the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD when real persecution broke out against Christians.
- Once again the disciples were to travel light – not just to show their trust in God but because they couldn’t afford to get weighed down.
- They were not to greet others on the road. They simply didn’t have time to be social. They had a job to do.

As was true for the Twelve when they were sent out, these seventy disciples were to rely upon the hospitality of others. It's interesting here to note that twice the disciples are told to eat and drink whatever their hosts provide. What's up with that? You may know that food became a major stumbling block for the early Church as Jews and Gentiles came together. That becomes very clear in Luke's second volume. Should Jewish Christians keep Kosher? Did Gentile Christians have to follow Jewish dietary laws? According to Jesus in this passage what a person ate was far less important than the mission at hand. It's hard for us to appreciate just how radical that was in the first century because God was abundantly clear about dietary laws in the OT, and these laws were some of the defining marks of a Jew in the ancient world. Along with their Sabbath practice it was how they defined themselves over and against the Gentiles.

And twice Jesus tells them that their message is simple and clear: The Kingdom of God is at hand, or near you, or in your midst – depending upon how you translate the Greek. The same message is to be proclaimed to those who receive the Seventy and those who reject them...which is what determines whether it's good news or bad news.

Notice also what Jesus says about those who reject the disciples. Not only are they to shake the dust off of their feet – a sign of separation, judgment and contempt. Jesus said that it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day. What does that mean? Sodom became a symbol of a world that had utterly rebelled against God. A lack of hospitality, injustice (especially toward the poor), sexual immorality and pride were all connected with Sodom. But as great as these sins are, the sin of rejecting the King and the Kingdom will be met with even harsher judgment. This is not a judgment that Jesus' disciples are to pronounce. This is judgment that God and God alone is to pronounce and enact.

Finally catch once again the connection between the proclamation of God's Kingdom come and the acts of power that back it up – in this case curing the sick. That same pattern holds true today. Some Christians still claim the power to heal, and that's a great gift. For most of us, however, it will be extraordinary acts of love and kindness that back up our claim that the Kingdom of God has come. Even Paul, when he thought about the many spiritual gifts that God gives, said that the greatest is love. That's why our service in the Mission Outpost, through spiritual care, at Echo Park and around the globe are so important. They are a part of our proclamation that the Kingdom of God has come. They back up and illustrate our words.

Woes to Unrepentant Cities (10:13-16)

Jesus' words about judgment lead into more words about judgment for those cities that reject the good news. Let's read 10:13-16 [READ]. The good news that Jesus brings includes a command to repent, to change one's mind and one's direction because the Kingdom of God is at hand. But we've already seen that some reject the good news and therefore do not repent. To them Jesus has some harsh words, and the first word is "woe". The word "woe" expresses deep sorrow as well as coming judgment.

Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities near Capernaum, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. As we know Jesus had concentrated his ministry in and around Capernaum, so we can assume that he proclaimed the good news there and backed it up with acts of power, though these are not recorded in the gospels. Tyre and Sidon were pagan cities in Phoenicia, the territory north of Galilee. They had a long history of rebellion against God and had been judged and punished for their wickedness and opposition to God's people by Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel and Amos. In Jesus' day they had become symbols of wickedness and rebellion. Yet Jesus said that as bad as they were if he had done miracles there they would have repented long ago.

The mention of *sackcloth and ashes* depicts mourning and repentance. A person humbled himself or herself by wearing only this rough cloth made of goat hair and sitting in a pile of ashes. Tyre and Sidon had not had that opportunity, while Chorazin and Bethsaida had been visited by the Messiah, who had done miracles among them; yet they rejected him. The punishment these cities would suffer *at the judgment* would be far worse than what Tyre and Sidon experienced. In other words, to whom much is given much is required! Capernaum, too, is indicted. Rather than being lifted up through their faith, their rejection of the good news will result in their being “brought down to Hades.” Hades was thought to be the place where the dead resided until the resurrection and judgment. In later Jewish thought it took on the connotation of being a place of torment by fire.

And notice Jesus’ final words here. Rejecting the disciples’ message is the same as rejecting Jesus and therefore God. Acceptance has the same chain reaction. Just as rejection or acceptance of an ambassador is the same as the rejection or acceptance of the King. The issue isn’t whether people like the messenger. The issue is what people do with the message, and that would have been comforting to the Seventy as they prepare to head out. That’s important for us to recognize as we become more adept at planting seeds of God’s love into the lives of others in our community.

The Return of the Seventy (10:17-20)

The Seventy go out in pairs and do the work that Jesus gave them to do. Luke doesn’t report anything from the mission but in verses 17-20 he does record what the disciples report back to Jesus. Let’s read that now [READ]. The mission appears to have been a great success and the disciples are very excited by it. What seems to thrill them most is that when they cast out demons in Jesus’ name, the spirit obeyed them. Remember that casting out demons in Jesus’ name may mean his literal name or it may mean in alignment with Jesus’ heart and intentions. In Acts 19 Luke lets us know that simply using Jesus’ literal name does not suffice.

Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" – Acts 19:13-15

In any event the disciples are excited. Perhaps there’s even a little pride in their choice of words, “...the demons submit to *us*.” Jesus’ response to the disciples is interesting. At the highest level what Jesus is saying is two-fold. First, Satan’s power is failing in the face of Jesus’ power. And since that power has been passed on to the disciples they can step on scorpions and handle snakes and not be harmed since both represent evil. Second, what should really bring joy to the disciples is that their names are written in heaven. The phrase “written in heaven” is a way of saying that they belong to the Kingdom. Both the Old and New Testaments talk about God’s book of life into which are written the names of those whom God accepts. But what does it mean that Jesus saw Satan fall? There are at least three possibilities.

First, it could be that Jesus *saw*, as in a vision, Satan falling *like lightning from heaven* (that is, from a place of power) during the ministry of these disciples—Satan suffered a notable defeat as these thirty-five pairs of men went around the countryside casting out demons.

Second, it’s possible that Jesus had seen his ultimate victory over Satan at the cross. One of the ways in which the implications of the cross are explained is that Jesus’ death and resurrection won a great victory over the devil and the powers of evil.

Finally, a third view says that Jesus was telling of the fall of Satan and was warning his disciples against pride. Some interpreted a specific verse in Isaiah as saying that Satan had been an angel but had fallen because of his pride. This final interpretation would make sense given the implication that the disciples were already beginning to claim power instead of pointing to God's power working through them. And let's not forget that not long ago the disciples had been arguing over who would be the greatest. Humility was an issue for them!

Jesus Rejoices (10:21-24)

The disciples are not the only ones who rejoice at the success of the mission of the Seventy. Jesus shares that joy. We'll close this session by reading verses 21-24 [**READ**]. As far as I know this is the only place in the gospels in which it is said that Jesus is filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. And what is it that brings Jesus joy? It's that "these things" have been hidden from the wise and intelligent but have been revealed to infants or "little ones". What does that mean? In this context "these things" seems to refer to the evidence of God's reign over evil spirits. This has at least two implications. First, it's part of Luke's theme of the great reversal. It is those who trust in God and not in themselves to whom God reveals the reality of the Kingdom. And the real truths of the Kingdom are revealed, not thought through with human intellect. God's plan does not resonate with human logic. Second, this also says that Jesus is not walking into Jerusalem to be defeated. Instead his journey to Jerusalem and to the cross is wrapped in power. It is a journey of victory, not defeat or resignation.

Finally Jesus reminds the disciples that what they are seeing and experiencing are the very things that King David and the prophets of old had foretold and longed for. All the messianic hopes and expectations that filled their Scriptures are standing before the disciples.

Conclusion

And this is the One whose birth we celebrate in less than two weeks. Amid all the cards and cookies and parties and gifts and bows let's remember the remarkable gift that God has given us: the Savior, the One who has conquered sin and death and the devil. We don't yet see the fullness of what God has done, but one day it will be fully and completely revealed. So our celebration this season is one of faith. And we celebrate not just that the Savior is born, but like the disciples we celebrate that our names, too, are written in the book of life. This is what God has done for us. God so loved that God gave his Son. I think sometimes that some of us have been Christians for so long...perhaps all of our lives...that we've forgotten at heart what this faith means. And so we take it for granted. We grow cold to it. The good news no longer moves us. And so our Christmas celebrations can become more than a little hollow. So it's my hope and prayer that Luke's gospel points you again to the gift, and stirs your heart to gratitude, and to action. Like the Seventy we've been given a mission to announce and reveal the Kingdom with our words and with our lives.