



Sermon – October 31, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Luke 10:1 - 2

As you grab your seats, let me invite you to grab your Bibles and open them to Luke chapter 10. Luke 10 will be where we are this morning. And I hope you were blessed by Dudu Dusabi leading us in worship today. Weren't you? Man, we are thrilled to have Dudu with us over the next couple of months as a long-term interim opportunity for us here as we continue to seek God's man for our next worship minister. And if you're a guest with us this morning, whether in the room or online, welcome home. My name's Phillip Bethancourt. I'm the lead pastor here and our heart is to come to God's word each week and encounter Him by the Holy Spirit so that He may make us more like Jesus. And we're doing that over this journey of a several week period through a sermon series called Every Generation Reaching the Next Generation. And last week Jimmy Scroggins was with us to talk about if we want to be a church where every generation reaches the next generation it begins in the home through our parenting. And this morning, what we're going to find in Luke 10 is that if we want to be a church where every generation reaches the next generation, it extends beyond the home through our missions. In other words, if we want to be a church that lives on mission, that will mean that every generation is longing to seek and to reach every nation. I want you to know at the end of our message today, during the response time, I want to invite as many of you who are willing to come and join me at the step. We're going to pray. Today's message is about Jesus' prayer that there would be laborers who are raised up to reach the harvest. And we don't want to just hear His word proclaimed, we don't want to just hear this prayer called for. We want to do this prayer together ourselves. And so I encourage you as we look at Luke 10, verse 1, to even now ready your hearts to pray together as a congregation. Here's what Jesus says.

¹After 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. ²And 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.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment, would You turn our attention away from the things of this world and fix our eyes only on Jesus? Would You help us to see the harvest all around us more clearly and would you stir in our hearts, each one of us, a longing to join those fields as Your laborers. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, when our church, Central, began back in 1925 as the College Avenue Baptist Church, my guess is that when those first 81 people gathered at that first Sunday in the Brazos Valley Courthouse, and they gathered together to hear a sermon preached by a man who was a missionary in China that was back home. And they took up a missions offering on that first Sunday. They had no idea what lay ahead of them over the next few years. Because after our church was established in 1925, it was just a few short years later when the Great Depression came. And it ravaged society economically all around them. And yet even in the midst of the hardship, that didn't cause our church to abandon the mission, but to embrace the mission. As a matter of fact, I was looking through some of our historical documents recently and on our 7th anniversary as a church in 1932, there was a Southern Baptist leader named Charles Madrey who said this about Central. He said, "I express my genuine congratulation on your church's rapid and substantial growth in these first few years of its well-rounded development. Few churches within my knowledge have made such substantial gains during these years of material and financial depression." And how did this substantial gains happen? Well, there was another letter that came in during that time from a different Southern Baptist leader who explained how it is. He said this, "I am happy that you have believed in missions and while building your local organization and erecting your building, you have had a part in our missionary enterprises. I think this is just as God would have it and I am sure that as these years come, you will continue this Scriptural plan upon which God's blessings shall doubtless abound." And God's blessings have abounded through the life of this church. And so we followed that Scriptural plan. That Scriptural call to missions. I remember when I was a student here at Texas A&M 20 years ago, I watched students around me be raised up and sent out through our church. When I served on the college ministry staff back in 2005 and 2006, we put together something as a church we called our Harvest Fund. And we raised money to invest in short term mission opportunities for students to go out to the nations. We saw over 75 go in one year alone. This church has an amazing history of missions. And as we prepare our hearts for the next season, longing that every generation might reach the next generation, we're trusting that what God has done in the past, He wants to do it again.

So when we talk about missions and the future of this church, we're not going in some new direction, we're embracing an old dimension of who we are. And as we set our hearts ahead on where God is taking us as a sending church, it's going to be grounded here in Luke chapter 10. As many of you know by now, our former missions minister transitioned several months ago as we prepare to chart a new course for where we're heading as a congregation. And as we come out of COVID and as we get ready to take steps towards filling that missions minister role in the future, Luke 10, verses 1 and 2 has to be at the center of our hearts for the nations. Because if Jesus is not at the center of our mission, then we don't have a mission at all, do we. Think about this text here in Luke 10. This is the only time this story's recounted in the four Gospels. Jesus commissions the 72 and sends them out but look back at your Bible. The first phrase in verse 1 is: after this. That should raise the question, what had just happened that Jesus is describing now, what takes place after those things? Well, if you look back in verse 9, chapter 9, you'll see all sorts of amazing miracles from Jesus. You'll see the feeding of the 5,000. You see the

transfiguration. You see Jesus bringing healing to a boy. In other words, you see the power of Jesus displayed through His miracles. And now, what we're going to find is that Jesus calls to declare His power through our mission. So here's what I want us to focus on this morning. If we want to be a church where every generation reaches every nation through missions, then we need to believe two things as a congregation. And I want you to notice the first one with me in verse 1. Our church must believe that every member is a missionary. Every member is a missionary. You see, you'll notice here in verse 1, these words of commissioning that Jesus is giving to the 72, that's not the first time He's done this. If you look back in chapter 9, Jesus gives the exact type of command to His 12 disciples. He sends them out ahead of them. But He does that with the 12 and now with the 72. Why? It's because the mission is not limited to the ministers. It's intended for the members, for the masses. The call to follow Jesus is a call to take the Gospel to others. And He sends out these 72 and as He does it, as He raises each one of us up where every member is a missionary, it has several implications for us in this text.

The first thing it means for us is that Jesus prepares each one of us as missionaries. That's why, if you'll look back at the beginning of verse 1, it says, after this the Lord appointed 72 others. That word, appointed, means to commission, to empower, and prepare. And it's not an accident that 72 others are assigned. That number, 72, matches the number, if you were to go all the way back to Genesis 10 in the table of nations where Moses recounts the nations and people of the earth, guess how many there are? 72. And now as, for the first time, Jesus commissions out His church. How many does He commission? 72. Why? It's because Jesus right here in Luke 10 is telling us that the whole church should take the whole Gospel to the whole world. He's preparing each one of us as missionaries. And if that's true, it should change the way that you see your daily life. So you may be able to be tempted to look at your job or your role a little bit like this. You think to yourself, "I'm Daniel, the oil and gas employee who happens to be a Christian." Or, "I'm Renee, the elementary school staffer who happens to be a Christian." Or, "I'm Luke, the freshman engineering major that happens to be a Christian." But if we get what Luke 10:1 is showing us that Jesus is preparing every member as a missionary that will upend and transform how we see the nature of our role. So instead of thinking yourself in that way, imagine if you went into your job tomorrow, or you went into school tomorrow, or into your home tomorrow, and instead, thought like this. "My name is Daniel and I've been prepared as a missionary by Jesus who happens to work at Pioneer leading the oil well services division." Or, "I'm Renee who has been prepared as a missionary by God to go into Rock Prairie Elementary who happens to serve as an assistant principal." Or, "I'm Luke who has been prepared by God to be a missionary to the campus of Texas A&M who happens to be a freshman engineering major." Do you see the difference between those two ways of approaching your day to day life? One sees your life through the lens of your role and tacks Jesus on the back of it. The other sees your life through this missionary lens and asks Jesus to show you how is He preparing the way for you just like these 72? Because you have been appointed to take the Gospel to the world around you. Jesus prepares us as missionaries.

But notice how the text goes on there. Because you'll see as the verse continues, He doesn't just prepare us, but He also sends us as missionaries. And look at how it says it there. It tells us: He sent them on ahead of Him. That word sent is from the same root word where we get our term apostle. It's to send out with a purpose. To dispatch on a mission. And this call to missions is embedded in the call to follow Jesus because Jesus sends those He saves. It's one of the reasons I love this church and the sending culture that God is cultivating in our hearts. Especially to

reach the campus of Texas A&M. Did you know that every week we send out mission teams on Tuesday and Wednesday to share the Gospel on campus? And on Fridays we've got a group that will set up a stand near the engineering school giving our free Bibles. This semester alone, we've given out over 500 Bibles on the campus of Texas A&M. One of those went to a woman we'll call this morning, Leslie. Leslie was familiar with Jesus. Had grown up around cultural Christianity. She took one of our Bibles but she didn't just take that Bible, she began to come to Central and she started meeting with some of the women in our church. And through those conversations, she came to know Christ in a saving way. You see, what had happened is those that were prepared were sent out and God worked through them in our community. That's what Jesus is speaking of here when He commissions the 72. And He sends each of our members out as missionaries. He is sending us on His behalf to take the Gospel to the nations. But notice what the text does. Because Jesus doesn't just prepare, He doesn't just send, but watch this. Jesus uses us as missionaries. That's what it says at the end of verse 1. Look at how it finishes:

two by two, into every town and place where He Himself was about to go.

Notice the pattern here. Those He prepares He sends. And those He sends He uses. And He sends them out two by two. Why? Not just for the practical reason of mutual encouragement; but for a theological reason. In that time period, the testimony of a witness could only be validated if there was two parallel testimonies. He sends them out as pairs to testify to the truth of His Gospel in order to make His name known to the community around us. Jesus sends those who He uses. And where does He send them? You see that phrase there, every town and place where He was about to go. It was a holistic strategy. It wasn't a micro-target of focus in one territory, one region. Everywhere He was about to go He was sending them on ahead. And that should give us a picture of what our hearts should be as a church as we seek to follow Jesus in the mission strategy He's called us to. Because not just here, where it says every town and place, but also in Acts 1:8 when it speaks of sending us forth to Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. He is giving us this global picture of God's heart for the nations. That God wants to use us both within our community and beyond our community. And this call of Christ to reach every town and place reminded me of a couple of conversations I have had recently. I had a friend of mine who lives here locally call me out of the blue and he said, "Hey, Phillip, I want to call you to tell you a story that's going to make you a proud pastor." I said, "Alright, what was going on?" He said, "Our family was having some car trouble and so I had to get an Uber to take me back to my house. And the Uber driver came and picked me up." You never know what to expect in those conversations, right. Is it going to be shooting the breeze, talking about Aggie football? You didn't know what was going to happen. But a short time into the road trip back to his home, this Uber driver began to share the Gospel with him. And to tell him about Jesus. And shortly into it, he told him, "Hey, man, I'm so glad you shared that with me but I'm a fellow believer too and I'm just so happy to see you being intentional living on mission in this setting. What church do you go to?" And this driver responded that he goes to Central. And here's this guy who drives buses in our community, who picks up people in Ubers who doesn't just see that as a job but an opportunity. An opportunity to be used by Jesus to take the Gospel to every town and every place. And that ought to be true right here in the Brazos Valley, but it's also true through the work going on here around the world. You see, I talked to Joel Bratcher not long ago who leads our Baptist Student Ministries and he was telling me about some amazing ministry that's happening amongst international students. Not only are there students that come to A&M to study, but professors from around the world who are known as

visiting scholars. And there were three of them in the past year who set foot on A&M's campus to study for a season and they thought they were coming here to learn more about their area of specialty, but guess what? They learned about Jesus for the first time while they were here too. And three of these professors from mainland China heard about Jesus and believed the Gospel. And now they have been sent back to their home country, not just to teach in their disciplines, but to be sent and used as Jesus speaks here; to take the Gospel to the nations. He says, every town and every place. That's why I was gripped when I was looking back to these old letters this week, from another one from 1932, on the 7th year anniversary of our church. The person who led the entire international mission board of the Southern Baptist Convention at that time wrote this about our congregation. He said, I congratulate you heartily upon the remarkable progress the church has made through these years of its brief existence. You have made yourself felt, not only in your local community, but in the worldwide touch of our denomination. Do you hear what he praises? The local community and the worldwide touch. Every town and every place. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth. Jesus is painting this picture for you and for me that we're called to live on mission. Recognizing that every member is a missionary who has been prepared, sent, and will be used by Jesus. That's the first things we need to recognize in this passage.

But I want you to notice something else here in verse 2. You'll see second that our church must also believe that every day is a missionary opportunity. Every day is a missionary opportunity. Notice what he says.

²And 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 the harvest.

We need to realize that the kingdom of darkness never takes a day off. Think about it like this. As the world population continues to grow, one of the things that that means, statistically speaking, is that yesterday more people died without Jesus to face an eternity in hell than any day in world history before it. That same reality will happen today and then tomorrow, the next day, and so on. Did you know that in our world right now there are 2.8 billion people who have never even heard the name of Jesus. Put this in perspective. When we go to Kyle Field this coming Saturday and it's filled to capacity with 102,000 people, do you know how many Kyle Fields it would take to fill every seat in that stadium with every person in the world that has never heard the name of Jesus? Over 27,000 stadiums. 27,000. And that's a reality not just around the world, but that's a reality right here in our community. We're surrounded by a Bible belt community where people have grown up around cultural Christianity. Just close enough to know about it but not actually believe in it. The Bible belt is a kind of place where people have to get lost before they can get saved. So they can realize they need salvation. Right here on our doorstep is this campus with 70,000 students, probably at least 60,000 of them that have never walked with Jesus. And of that population, 5,000 of them coming into our country from other countries, many of which have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ before. Of the top 5 sending countries to Texas A&M, 3 of the top 5, China, India, Iran. God is bringing the nations to our doorstep, including from these places where it's almost impossible to take the Gospel to them. And yet they are coming to us, longing for connection, longing to know what life is all about. And the question that Jesus is raising before us is, do we see the missionary opportunity right here in our midst?

Notice how He talks about this. When He lays this out, Jesus gives us both a missions observation and a missions opportunity. And you'll see the observation there in the first half of verse 2 when he says to them, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. So what's His observation? The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are absent. The harvest is great, but the laborers are gone. The harvest is full, but the laborers are few. What is Jesus saying here? See, the challenge for people like you and me who are, who are living in a modern culture, we often miss the significance of this language because we are disconnected from our agrarian roots. But just this past week, I had a chance to take Daniel Patterson, our brand new Executive Pastor, we travelled up to Aimes, Iowa to spend some time with a church there called Cornerstone Church. It's doing amazing college ministry on the campus of Iowa State through their campus ministry, The Salt Company. And as we were up there, it was harvest time in Iowa. You could look out on the fields all around you, the corn and the soybean and see nothing but a sea of life. And as I was gathered there with the people that were surrounding me, there was all this conversation about what the harvest time was like in those days and in that place. See, even the students that come away to school will often be called home for a short period of time in order to reap the harvest. They need all the hands they can get. Why? Because the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. The time window is narrow. They must act decisively in the moment if they are to make the most of the harvest. And that's precisely what Jesus is challenging us about here. He tells us, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. So what are we going to do about this Central? I came back from that trip from Iowa with a question ringing in my head that their senior pastor, Mark Vance, raised to our group that was with him. He said, "When you go back to your church, you need to ask yourself the question, do we want to become a marginally better megachurch or do we want to become a multiplying movement?" In other words, do we want to be a little bit bigger, a little bit better, a little bit richer, offer a little bit more? Or do we want to be a part of something that is so great, so amazing, in seeing the harvest be reaped by laborers raising up that only God could explain? What kind of church do you want to be? Where do we want to go? I could tell you my heart as your pastor. My heart is to watch a sending culture continue to grow in this church. My heart is to plead with God to raise up laborers in our midst to send us out into the harvest. It's one of the things my friend, J. D. Greer, often says, the measure of a church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity. And that's what Jesus is driving at here when He tells us the laborers are few. That's the heart He is raising up in front of us. And how can that happen? How can those laborers be raised up? It's by seeing the need and leaning into this Luke 10:2 reality that every generation is called to reach the next generation.

And I want to tell you about one practical thing that we're going to do 2 weeks from today. 2 weekends from today on November 14th. That's going to be something we're going to call our Get in the Game Sunday. And it comes at a perfect time because that's also on the weekend of our Central Family Tailgate. We're just going to make it a game themed weekend. And we're going to enjoy some fellowship on Saturday as we watch the Aggies beat Ole Miss. But then we're also going to have an opportunity to cast a vision for what it looks like to get in the game as laborers right here at Central. I'm going to invite you to wear your favorite team's sports gear, whether that's the Aggies or somebody else to just symbolize when the way that we look at each other that we are calling each other to get off the sidelines and to get in the game for the sake of Jesus. When there's a harvest to be reaped, everybody has different jobs to perform. And there are all sorts of needs in this church and beyond this church in this community. And I'm trusting that through our Get in the Game Sunday in two weeks, God will use that to start

raising up even more laborers right here in our midst in the same way Jesus observes here in Luke 10:2. But I want you to notice how this text finishes. Because Jesus doesn't just raise an observation, He lifts an opportunity. He lifts an opportunity to see every day as an opportunity for missions. And the way that He does that in the second half of the verse is by saying this.

[Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.](#)

Notice this. One of the few times that Jesus ever makes a prayer request in the Gospel appears right here; and what is it? Does Jesus pray for more harvest or does He pray for more laborers? He doesn't pray for more harvest; He prays for more laborers. In other words, He's telling us, the harvest is ready, it's here, it's plentiful. What I need are the workers who will set aside their own priorities in this life and run hard after the harvest. Who will lay it all down to tell others of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of the forgiveness of sins that can only be found in Him. And I want you to notice the way He calls us to pray. It's an earnest prayer. You see the way it says it there?

[Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest](#)

There's this idea of begging, pleading. There's a sense of desperation. God would You do this in our midst? There's this hunger and passion that's there. It's not a complacency, but an urgency. That He's saying should grip each one of our hearts and we're praying to the Lord of the harvest knowing that He alone is in control. He alone can open hearts to believe in the guilt of sin and the transformation that can only happen through the blood of Jesus Christ. It's an earnest prayer, but it's also an active prayer. Because you'll notice He says there to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest, to send our laborers into the harvest. It's an active prayer because Jesus first calls us to pray, but then He calls us to act. Look at the pattern here. He says, ask and then act. Pray and then proclaim. And here's what should trouble us this morning, Central. I came across a survey not long ago that talked about the patterns of churchgoers like you and me. In terms of how often we pray for evangelistic opportunities and how often we actually follow through on them. And here's what it said. 55% of us, a little bit over half, pray for an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone every week. We're doing exactly what He says here; to pray for laborers, pray for that opportunity. But get this. Even though 55% of us pray each week for that to happen, only, there are over 56% of us who when surveyed, said they had not shared the Gospel even one time in the last 6 months. 55% pray each week, but over half haven't shared the Gospel even once. What does that mean for us? Would you just pause right now and ask God to bring those opportunities in your life, to raise up laborers around us. And there's one specific way I want to challenge us to do that over the next two weeks, and it's going to require taking out your phone for just a minute just like me. I'm going to do this along with you. Our friends in Iowa, that we just visited, have started doing something in their church that I want to challenge us to do over the next few weeks in the lead-up to this Get in the Game Sunday. Open up the alarm app on your phone. And here's what they have done as a church. They put out a challenge to their people that I'm putting out to you; for the next two weeks for you to set an alarm at 10:02 each day. It repeats each day. You can pick morning or evening; whichever one's better for you. But at each day they alarm goes off at 10:02 A.M. Why? Because this prayer for laborers is in Luke 10:2. And so what that does is when that alarm goes off at 10:02 A.M., all I want you to do is pause what you're doing in that moment and pray for laborers. It doesn't have to be long, but it ought to be earnest and active in the way that Jesus

speaks of here. And my hope is, when I'm up here preaching next week and it hits 10:02, I see somebody's getting some advanced practice there, I hope when 10:02 happens in this congregation that I have to pause my message because there's too many alarms going off. Just that daily reminder to pray for laborers. Will you do that with me for two weeks as we get ready for the Get in the Game Sunday? And what could it look like if we could see, not just an abundant harvest but a moment where the laborers finally aren't few. Where they are abundant as well. I've got some good news for you. You're going to get that opportunity to see it tonight at the Fall Festival. Because there will be a candy harvest in abundance to be reaped this evening, won't there. You're going to come out from 5 to 7 for you families that also want to Trick or Treat, do like us and do the double-header. Come hit this first, 5 to 7, and then when it gets dark, go out and Trick or Treat afterwards. We're going to enjoy the bounce houses, the free food, the prizes, the giveaways. But at the heart of it, there will be candy. And each week before the Fall Festival, our staff gets together and sorts out the candy for this day and there was probably over 10,000 pieces of candy that we prepared for the thousands of people that will come tonight. But let me tell you something. By the time this Fall Festival is over, every single piece of candy will be gone. Why? It's because you'll have Spidermen and princesses and dinosaurs and cowboys who have just been waiting for this moment. Finally, the moment has come. This is my chance to reap the harvest of hyperness. It has arrived! And I will not miss my moment. There will be an urgency that drives them to the harvest until there is no more harvest to reap. And I'm just saying to you this morning, wouldn't it be amazing if that was our heart for the lost? That God would crush our complacency and replace it with the kind of urgency that Jesus prays for here. If we want to be a church where every generation reaches every nation, it has to be grounded in these twin truths; that every member is a missionary and every day is a mission opportunity.

Let's take a moment to pray towards that end even now. And before we pray, I just want to ask you in the quietness of your own heart, are you ready to commit to regularly praying for laborers? Are you ready to commit to being a laborer in the harvest yourself? Are you ready to see Central not just become a marginally better church but a multiplying movement? If you're heart is resonating with that, would you just raise your hand with me today to declare that before God, that that's the longing of your heart for yourself and for this church? I want to pray especially for those of you who have signaled that commitment today in this moment.

Father, we're coming in this time. Lord, we know that apart from Jesus, there is no hope of salvation. And so often our hearts are prone to wander. We feel it. We're distracted by the cares of this world and I pray that You would use this text, use this message to reignite a fuel in our hearts to see Your Gospel go forward through our lives and our church and our community and all around the world. Lord, if there are people in the hearing of my voice that have never met Jesus in a saving way, I pray that today is the day of that salvation. And that You will raise up the men and women in this room to be a force for Your kingdom that sets the trajectory for a sending culture in the life of Central in the years ahead. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.