

“A Coming Attraction”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
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 Texts John 10:1-3; 17-24

**He who hears you, hears Me and he who despises you despises Me and despises Him who sent Me.** (Luke 10:16) These words were spoken by the Lord to the seventy who went forth in pairs into every city where the Lord himself would appear. They were very like advance agents for some momentous event. And that event was this: the coming of the king of Israel, Jesus, of the line of David, the Promised One who would ascend the throne of an everlasting kingdom as promised to David. So they had news: the king is coming. Or, **the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news (gospel) of God.** (Mark 1:15.) This is the message that John the Baptist preached, and these are recorded as the inaugural words of Jesus’ own ministry.

The first thing to observe about this mission of the seventy is this: it came after the mission of the twelve (Luke 9:1-6):

**9 And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. 2 And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. 3 And He said to them, “Take nothing for *your* journey, neither a staff, nor a [a]bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have [b]two tunics apiece,**

**4 Whatever house you enter, stay there [c]until you leave that city. 5 And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” 6 Departing, they *began* going [d]throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.<sup>1</sup>**

They were to preach the kingdom and to perform healings and they had been **granted power and authority over all demons** (Luke 9:1) A significant difference between the mission of the twelve and that of the seventy is this business of **power and authority over demons/devils**. Note that the power to heal, perform miracles (the so-called signs and wonders) is plainly not restricted to the twelve apostles—it is as if that was never the intention. The deliverances, healings and the preaching were all about being the “the signs of Jesus’ messiahship.” It was never about the twelve apostles, or the seventy heralds of the coming kingdom of God! Isaiah prophesied that healings would accompany the advent of the messiah, so these miracles attest to Jesus. I am unconvinced that this function of the wonders and

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes

- a. Luke 9:3 Or *knapsack* or *beggar’s bag*
- b. Luke 9:3 Or *inner garments*
- c. Luke 9:4 Lit *and leave from there*
- d. Luke 9:6 Or *from village to village*

signs has ever ceased, or that they were primarily about the credentials of the twelve founders of the church. There is no evidence that this was the case, and some evidence that it wasn't.

Now between this first mission (of the twelve) and second mission (of the 70, or perhaps 72), there were two momentous events, the miraculous feeding of five thousands heads of household and the transfiguration of Jesus—a moment in time when the disciples (Peter, James and John) were privileged to see both events with their own eyes, Jesus in his divine glory. Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah—who were also in a glorified state and yet were recognizable to the disciples—and discussed the upcoming events in Jerusalem. God sealed the significance of this conference with the words: **This is My beloved Son, listen to him!** (Luke 9:35)

The twelve relate their activities in Luke 9:10 and uniquely in Luke 10:5-16; 17-19, a fuller report on the mission's success is given—demonstrating Luke's claim to have thoroughly researched the ministry of Jesus, consulting sources outside the gospel witnesses purview. Like a good historian would do. (See Luke 1:1-4.) I am not suggesting that this information was not *apostolic*—it jolly well could have been. I believe it actually was.

What is striking, too, is that the prior success of the missionaries, the seventy, stands in unique contrast to this stark failure which is recorded upon Jesus' descent from the mount of transfiguration. (They tried and could not deliver him!) There, a boy possessed by a mute, deaf and murderous demon could not be exorcised except by **fasting and prayer**. Jesus cites the disciples' **unbelief** as the explanation. ***That admission of defeat substantiates the reliability of the scriptures to my mind—a fabricated narrative would exclude such an admission of the disciples' inability: Lord, why could we not deliver him?*** (Matt. 17:19, the parallel account)

**The Kingdom of God is at hand.** These heralds were proclaiming that the Messiah had arrived, that he was making his way toward Jerusalem to assume his rightful place to be enthroned as David's successor and as king over an everlasting kingdom. That was the political agenda as we might say. But Jesus, knowing that His kingdom was not of this world was quite aware that His triumphal entry would result in a crucifixion rather than a coronation. His own people would reject Him and lose the present possibility of living under his rule in the Kingdom of God on earth! What was really going on transcended the imperial business of Rome. While the people were earthbound, fixated on their cultural and social predicament—as a vassal state in a pagan demonic empire—Jesus was appearing to overthrow the demonic stronghold that Satan established over the whole sinful world. The unbelieving Jews and pagans were enslaved to Satan, in a demonic bondage to evil and so remained imprisoned in their sin and darkness.

The power of Satan had to be broken; Christ had come to set the captives, sinners, free by defeating Satan. For the universal bondage of mankind far

exceeded the horrors and the limits of their sojourns in either Egypt, or centuries later in Babylon! It wasn't selfishness, although people were selfish. It wasn't the absence of good, as some like to suggest. It was a personal, prevailing power of evil, headed up by Satan and his demonic minions that opposed God, oppressed God's people and, in general, sought the destruction of mankind and of creation—such was Satan's hatred of Father God and of God's children, us.

Satan desired for himself, the worship which properly only belonged to God. He sought stolen glory, false splendor—he wanted us to commit sin, the idolatry of worshipping him instead of the Creator. When it is said that Satan was a liar, a thief and a murderer *from the beginning*, what was being labeled for us was the legacy of revolt, rebellion and sin which characterizes his dark kingdom.

Jesus had come to take on the enemy of our souls, to die as a sacrificial victim, in order to pay the penalty of our sin, to ante up for the pardon of all lost sinners who would believe and trust in the work of salvation that he was sent to accomplish. And this he did accomplish by shedding his blood (by which we are washed clean from sin) and, then, by dying for us so that death would have no more dominion—when he rose from the dead!— so that the era of resurrection life would be inaugurated by his own victorious rising from the dead. Well, that, or something very like it was the message that followed the cry, **Repent and believe the gospel for the Kingdom of God is at hand! For Jesus repeatedly told his followers what was to happen to him and why!**

***What has this to do with us?*** Well, as it turns out, plenty—many are in bondage still, many are burdened by guilt and shame, many are lost and without hope.. The **harvest** (of souls) **truly is great, but the laborers**, that would be soul winners, you and I, **the laborers are few. The harvest is His harvest!** So we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would send us forth into His harvest.

We are to declare that the Kingdom of God is near, that Christ is coming—the day of His appearing is much, much nearer than when we first began! We are to invite others home! Those who hear us are hearing Him. And the greatest of all sinning is the sin of unbelief, or of rejecting the invitation to come to Him, to be forgiven by Him and restored by Him to the grace, power and presence of Almighty God. With the urgency of a Noah, summoning those who would be saved to the ark—or the urgency of the master of feast when all is ready for all the invited guests to come and dine. **Come now, for all is ready.**

**Amen.**