

## Seventy-Two Déjà vu

Luke 10:1-24

March 1, 2026

It's Nametag Sunday here at E-Free Bemidji. We're by no means a megachurch, but we're large enough that we're not all on a first-name basis. So thanks for wearing a nametag today!

Let's have some fun on this Nametag Sunday. After the service, while you're enjoying a treat in the Gym, or in your Sunday School class, or even later this week in your Life Group, ask someone how they got their name.

I don't want to embarrass my daughter—though I am convinced that's one of my responsibilities as a parent—but I'll share with you how Lydia, our youngest, got her name. While her older sisters were named after their great-grandmothers, we chose a biblical name for our thirdborn. One of my favorite people in the Bible is the Lydia found in Acts 16.

You don't need to turn there, but in that passage, Luke—the same author of the Gospel that bears his name—introduces us to a woman named Lydia that he and the Apostle Paul met during their travels. We read,

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message” (Acts 16:13-14).<sup>1</sup>

When we gave the name Lydia to our youngest daughter, our prayer was that one day, God might open her heart to the gospel, and that she might decide to follow Jesus.

This little story about Lydia of Thyatira in the book of Acts raises an important question: How is it that people are converted? Do people like Lydia choose to follow Jesus as an act of their will, or is it a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings a person to faith in Christ? When we read Acts 16, the answer is that both are true. In other words, the way a person comes to faith in Christ seems to be both a supernatural act of God in cooperation with a decision of the will.

God's sovereignty and our responsibility are two truths that run parallel to each other from Genesis to Revelation. Like two trains traveling along parallel tracks, these two truths run in perfect alignment from the beginning to the end of the Bible, never colliding with one another so as to bring about a contradiction.

The greatest example of this was displayed at the cross of Christ. The crucifixion was the decision of sinful men to put him to death on a cross, and at the same time the sovereign will of a holy God who sent his only Son to die as a ransom for many.

Today, I want to do three things in our time together. First, I need to start by defining my terms. What do we mean by *divine sovereignty* and *human responsibility*? Second, I'm going to quickly

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the NIV Bible (The Holy Bible, New International Version, © 2011 by Biblical, Inc.)

walk us through Luke 10:1-24 and demonstrate how these two parallel truths relate to the work of evangelism, another term I will define. Finally, I want this message to be practical, so we'll finish with four implications that we can apply as deeply devoted followers of Jesus. So, if you're ready, let's get to it.

First, let's define some terms. What do we mean when we say that God is *sovereign*? Simply stated, we mean that the God who has revealed himself in Scripture is in control of all things. Because he is triune—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the attribute of divine sovereignty—God's complete control over all things— applies to all three persons. For example, Colossians 1:15-17 declares,

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:15-17).

God is sovereign everywhere, over all things, at all times. Nothing and no one can match him. There is no god like our God. He's the King of the Universe. Though the devil's kingdom presently rules over creation because of sin, we've repeatedly seen in Luke's Gospel, that the Kingdom of God has come through Jesus Christ. One day, Christ's kingdom will fully arrive, and the dominion of darkness will be defeated.

This is what we mean by God's sovereignty.

But what about *human responsibility*? The Bible teaches that we are personally responsible and morally accountable to God our Maker for every thought, word, and deed. To the first man and woman God made in his image, he said,

“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

All people are accountable to God their Creator, and like Adam and Eve, all have willfully rebelled against him. That means that God is not only our King, but he is also our righteous and holy Judge. The Bible says in places like Colossians 3:5-6 that we are to

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:5-6).

Our rebellion against a holy God has earned us his wrath. This is the just punishment we deserve for our sin.

But here's the good news. Earlier I mentioned the word *evangelism*. Words like *evangelism*, *evangelist*, and *evangelical* come from the New Testament word that also gets translated as *gospel*. In other words, an evangelical is one who holds to the gospel of Jesus Christ. An evangelist is

one who preaches the gospel. Evangelism is the work of sharing the message of the gospel with another person.

But what is the gospel? On our church's website, under the What We Believe section, it says,

"The gospel is good news. That's what the word gospel means. The gospel is the message of good news about what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

But first, the bad news. No one likes to talk about sin, but we have to understand the bad news before we can fully appreciate the good news. The Bible shows us that all human beings are sinners and that we have all rebelled against the God who made us. Ultimately, God's judgment against our sin is death—eternal separation from a holy God.

But the Bible also shows us that God is merciful, gracious, and wholly loving. It wouldn't be just or loving for God to merely excuse our sin and to look the other way. Instead, God in his justice and love made a way of forgiveness in order to bring about our reconciliation with him.

God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, a life that we should have lived. Jesus died the death that we should have died as the just punishment for our sins. He was put to death on a cross, bearing the wrath of God in our place as our substitute.

The Bible says that the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation is for all who repent—those who turn away from sin and return to God—and who place their trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ made on their behalf."

That's a long enough introduction, so let's quickly dig into Luke 10:1-24 and see how these two parallel truths—God's sovereignty and our responsibility—run parallel to each other, particularly in the work of evangelism.

When we read the first half of this passage, verses 1-11, you may feel like you're experiencing déjà vu. In early January, when we looked at the first part of chapter 9, we read about Jesus sending out his twelve disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. The Twelve were to go from village to village and proclaim the gospel. They were instructed not to bring extra supplies; rather, they were to depend on God's provision. Jesus told his disciples that they could expect some hospitality, but others would not receive them or their message.

Now, in the first part of chapter 10, we read that

"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" (10:1).

Luke doesn't specify who these seventy-two followers were, but we know that Jesus had other disciples beyond the twelve apostles. Just like the Twelve in chapter 9, these seventy-two

followers were sent out to proclaim the gospel. Like the apostles, they were to go with minimal provisions, trusting that the Lord would provide. They were to enter a house, and if they were welcomed, they were to enjoy the hospitality offered there. Once they found a person of peace, they were to remain in that place for the duration of their visit. However, Jesus warned them that there would be people who would not receive them or the gospel they preached.

While the accounts in Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 are not exactly the same, they share a number of similarities. But Jesus said something to the Seventy-Two that he had not said to the Twelve when he sent them out. Look with me at verse 2.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (10:2).

Here we see a great example of divine sovereignty and human responsibility running parallel to one another. **God is the sovereign Lord of the harvest, AND he sends his people out as workers into his harvest field (vv. 1-11).**

In verse 2, Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor to describe the mission of his followers. He described the men and women the Seventy-Two would meet as a harvest field ripe for responding to the good news. Even though Jesus warned these followers that he was sending them out “like lambs among wolves” (v. 3), and that there would be places where they and their message were not welcome, these seventy-two disciples must have been encouraged to hear Jesus say that “the harvest is plentiful” (v. 2).

We also see these parallel truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility running side by side in Jesus’s call to prayer. Notice again in verse 2 that though the “harvest is plentiful,” Jesus also said that “the workers are few.” Therefore, these followers of Jesus were to pray and “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers [or laborers] into his harvest field” (10:2).

Certainly, the Lord of the harvest, the King of the universe, does not need our help to rescue lost people. God could use miraculous means to get the gospel out to the nations. Yet, God chooses to call and send out men and women into his harvest field.

The harvest was indeed plentiful, and many people will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, but in the second half of this passage we see that many others will choose not to repent and believe the gospel. Beginning in verse 12, Jesus speaks about those who would not only reject the Lord’s harvest workers, but who would also resist the announcement that the kingdom of God had come near. Let’s look at verses 12 to 16.

“I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the

judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (10:12-16)

Once again, we see the sovereign rule of God running in parallel with the will of men and women to either repent and follow Jesus, or reject the Lord and refuse to hear his gospel. In these verses, we see that **human beings are personally accountable to God for how they respond to him, AND no one can come to Jesus apart from God’s grace (vv. 12-24).**

We might find it hard to believe that the citizens of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—villages in Galilee that witnessed many of Jesus’ miracles and heard his teaching—that these places would mirror their sister cities of the Old Testament that refused God’s call to repentance, and rejected his offer of salvation. Was the ministry of Jesus not evidence enough that God’s kingdom had come, and that they needed to come to him in faith?

Jesus makes it clear that men and women are without excuse if they refuse to repent and they reject the gospel. At the end of history, when the Lord returns to judge all people, those who refuse to repent and believe will remain under God’s wrath.

At the same time, Jesus makes it clear that no one can come to him in faith apart from God’s sovereign grace. Luke 10:1-24 begins with Jesus’s call to his followers to pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers. Here at the end of the passage, after the Seventy-Two returned from their mission, Jesus offered up his own prayer. More than likely, Jesus prayed this aloud for the benefit of his disciples. Look at how this passage ends in verses 17-24.

“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it” (10:17-24).

Jesus's prayer reveals that we cannot come to the Son in faith apart from the Father's sovereign grace. And yet, this scriptural truth runs parallel to what we saw in Jesus's words of rebuke in verses 12-16. Each of us is responsible to God for how we respond to the gospel of the kingdom. We are personally accountable to God for how they respond to him, AND no one can come to Jesus apart from God's grace.

Admittedly, I don't know that I could fully explain how these two truths go together. What I can tell you is that God's sovereign will and our own human responsibility run parallel to each other from the beginning to the end of the Bible, and right here through Luke chapter 10. It is a bit of a mystery, and yet we can be confident that the trains that run along these two tracks will never intersect so as to cause a derailment.

In light of this, I want to finish with four implications from this passage that we can apply to our lives, particularly with respect to personal evangelism and sharing the gospel.

First, the pattern we see in this passage in Jesus sending out the Seventy-Two is that sharing the gospel is not an activity reserved only for certain disciples. This passage suggests that every Christian is to be an evangelist. Every disciple is to be a disciple-maker. Yes, you may know someone who is more comfortable speaking about Jesus than you are. Some Christians show a particular giftedness in sharing their faith. God does uniquely call and equip some believers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. But these examples do not excuse any of us who claim to be deeply devoted followers of Jesus from proclaiming the good news. Over time, a Christian can grow in both confidence and competence in sharing their faith, but no Christian is exempt from the call to go and make disciples.

Second, when sharing the gospel, whether the message is received or rejected, it is loving and good to tell others that God is King and he is Judge. Certainly, a gentle and tactful approach should be taken when speaking about hard biblical truths such as sin, wrath, and God's judgement. And yet, we ought to take note of Jesus's tone in this passage. The world in rebellion against its creator may not be interested in hearing about moral accountability and final judgement, but to leave these things out of our evangelistic conversations is at best an incomplete gospel, and at worst a failure to warn a lost world about the wages of sin.

Third, seeing divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Scripture, though they are challenging to fully comprehend, can help us avoid misunderstanding our role and responsibility as disciples. Have you ever felt frustrated or even guilty because your efforts to share Christ with someone did not lead them to faith? Perhaps you've tried repeatedly to show someone true things about Jesus, but they remained unconvinced. Maybe you've wondered if their failure to turn to Christ was due to some shortcoming in your presentation. Folks, the Lord simply calls us to be faithful gospel witnesses; we are not responsible for how, when, or if someone chooses to respond.

Finally, when understood in faith, these two parallel truths—God's sovereignty, and our responsibility—can bring us blessing and joy. When the Seventy-Two returned from their

mission, they joyfully reported to Jesus that “even the demons submit[ted] to [them] in [his] name” (10:17). They were ecstatic to see evidence of the kingdom of God overtaking the kingdom of darkness. On one level, Jesus agreed. It’s hard to know exactly what Jesus meant when he said in verse 18, “I saw Satan fall like lightning,” but regardless, his point was that Satan and the demonic realm were on the way out.

But take note of Jesus words in verse 20:

“[D]o not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”

Oh, how quickly we lose the wonder of basking in God’s sovereign, amazing grace! In focusing on their mission, Jesus did not want the Seventy-Two to lose sight of the splendor of God’s sovereign grace. In the same way that Jesus called them to rejoice that their names were written in heaven, Jesus, too, rejoiced in the Holy Spirit that the Father was revealing the Son to those who would otherwise be lost apart from his sovereign grace.

The next time you come to a railroad crossing, think of these two important biblical truths: God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. Like a pair of train tracks running alongside each other, these two truths run parallel to each other from beginning to end of the biblical story. Though we may not fully grasp how they work together, we can be confident that these are in perfect alignment according to the will of our sovereign King, our holy Judge, and our gracious Heavenly Father.

Let’s pray.