

## “Laborers” Luke 10:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. <sup>2</sup> And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” <sup>3</sup> “Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> “Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. <sup>5</sup> “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’ <sup>6</sup> “If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> “Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. <sup>8</sup> “Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup> “But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> ‘Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ <sup>12</sup> “I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city.

### My Initial Thoughts –

Because “laborers” is linked to the harvest, it is a metaphor. The image conjures up hard and tireless work, a job in antiquity that is most definitely a dirty one. Laborers represent God’s people who work on His behalf. The first thing that comes to mind is the parable Jesus told about the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20). I also thought about Israel’s bondage to the Egyptians. As slaves, they were forced laborers.

### Some Research –

- The NASB lists the word “laborer” ten times in the OT. The only metaphorical usage is in Lamentations 1:1. The passage speaks of Jerusalem who has become a forced laborer. Thus, laborer represents slavery/bondage. “Laborer” is used eight times in the NT. Three times it is used in Matthew 20 (parable of the laborers in the vineyard). The imagery used is that regardless of when a laborer enters into the work, the reward still awaits them. Here in Luke 10, the word is used three times. One image is of “few laborers” (v. 2). The other declares that “laborers are worthy of their wages” and it seems to echo the parable. 1 Timothy 5:18 uses this same quote to speak of elders who deserve compensation for their work.
- *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (385) – “In the Bible the image of a hireling embodies three main meanings: deprivation, transience and self-service.” In addition, “hired servants were the lowest of three categories of servants – bondsmen (slaves with good family standing), servants (subordinates of the slaves) and hired servants (hired for the occasion).” “Hirelings had no job security” and “lived a hand-to-mouth existence on a subsistence wage.” Lastly, “they had no vested interest in the result of their labor.”
- *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (303) - Unlike their Egyptian and Mesopotamian counterparts, Palestinian farmers were not dependent upon irrigation to water crops; rainfall and dew usually sufficed (Deut. 11:10-11; 1 Kings 17:1). Naturally, ancient farmers contended with the elements, pests, and warfare, but the major enemy was drought (cf. Jer. 14:1-6). Farmers were occupied throughout the year with animal husbandry, and heavy field work never ended.

### **Image Exegesis of Laborers -**

Jesus says that the “laborers are few” and that we should pray for the Lord of the harvest to send “laborers into His harvest.” It should be pointed out that Scripture sometimes uses “laborers” in a negative manner, as laborers are forced into the arrangement by means of slavery. Furthermore, laborers often had no vested interest in the results of their labor, they only cared about their compensation. In contrast, Christian laborers serve their Lord voluntarily and do so, not for compensation, but for compassion of the lost. As a benefit, however, the Lord rewards the laborer (Luke 10:7; Matt 20 and 1 Tim 5:18).

A few other points are significant. First, in biblical times, laborers were lowly and lived day to day with no guarantee of steady work and wages. In a similar way, laborers for Christ are often seen as laughable characters who labor in vain for their “Savior.” Also, those in vocational ministry often earn weak wages and live paycheck to paycheck, with poor retirement plans. Faith plays a prominent role in laborers of the harvest. Second, laborers (farmers) who worked the fields did so year-round. The same should be said of those who labor for Christ. Third, the laborers of the harvest in Jesus’ day faced one major enemy – drought. It’s important to remember that Christian laborers also face an enemy, one who is out to destroy them. Finally, it is important to note the contrast between “plentiful” (harvest) and “few” (laborers). This seems to provide an imperative for more laborers who will take the risk (wolves) as they look towards the future joy (v. 17).