IX. Conclusion

In Luke chapter 10 (vv. 1-16), our Lord sends out 72 disciples. He sends them out to go ahead of Him to every town where He will eventually go. He sends them out with simple instructions: 1) These "missionaries" are not to take a money bag, a supply bag, or their shoes. 2) Their purpose is to heal the sick and to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of God is near in Jesus Christ.

In Luke 10:17 we meet up with the 72 disciples just as they have returned to the Lord from this mission. The text says, "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'" Take note of the source of their rejoicing. They were impressed with their ability to drive out demons. They are not rejoicing because there were towns along the way that received them and the Gospel with joy. They are not even slightly impressed with the fact that the Lord provided for their every need while on their journey, especially since the Lord sent them money, food or even their shoes! Instead, they are puffed up and impressed with their newfound abilities and their apparent achievements. They focus on what they see as results of their work instead of the One giving the gifts. This would be similar to someone receiving one million dollars from a person who has designated the money to be used to help people and then the one to whom the money has been given boasts that because of his/her own generosity, people have been helped. That is a confused and sinful way to receive the gifts of God and take them to the lost.

And this is a big temptation in the church. We look around and see the numbers growing on Sunday morning and we puff up our chests and pat ourselves on the back saying, "We're doing a great job!" Or maybe we look around and see the numbers in decline and we think, "Preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments in faithfulness to Jesus' command just isn't working. We'd better try something else. I'm sure Jesus meant well, but I know a better way to get people in here." This kind of pride is a weapon wielded by the devil and used frequently against the church. In fact, Jesus spoke to this point in the Gospel of Matthew:

> Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (7:21-23).

In other words, these outward, visible achievements are no guarantee of what Jesus tells us is most important.

In the text from Luke 10, Jesus carefully and lovingly redirects His disciples from the sensational, outward achievements to the simple reality of the gracious Giver, Jesus, the One who makes it all possible. He directs their attention to the One who defeats the chief demon, Satan, by suffering death on the cross and rising victorious from the grave. It is here that our Lord sees "Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (v. 18). Jesus instructs His disciples patiently, saying, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in

heaven" (v. 20). In other words, we are to rejoice not in our own efforts, but instead we are to cling to Christ and that which He has accomplished and delivered by His promised means!

So now a question becomes visible in this account: Is it better to accomplish great things here on earth and to have authority over demons but to be unknown by Christ on the Last Day, or is it better to serve the Lord faithfully and to trust that He will care for our needs according to His gracious will for the sake of furthering His kingdom, especially our most important need of forgiveness of sins and eternal life with Him in heaven? The answer is clear. And we respond in faith, rejoicing that our names are written in heaven while moving forward in the mission before us, trusting that it is the Lord giving the gifts and sending us to give them.

God willing, many years from now, you will find yourself gathered together with the saints in heaven, rejoicing in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. It may be that an unfamiliar person approaches you from among the great cloud of witnesses gathered before the throne, and this person, with a gentle smile, will draw close to give an embrace. It will be an embrace that you recognize, an embrace from someone you have embraced before. This person will begin to speak a language that you heard many years ago while you were far away from home. Though this person is not speaking your native tongue, the perfection of heaven allows for you to fully understand the beautiful words pouring forth from smiling lips. This person will say, "Thank you for coming to my country. Thank you for your faithfulness to Jesus." And together you will give thanks to the Lord for His gracious work of salvation.

It is the fervent prayer of *YIM* that your preparation for service in the Kingdom will be strengthened by the materials in this handbook, and it is our hope that the opportunity to serve the Lord in a wonderful and exciting way will be visible to those participating. Though the road leading up to the project will be arduous and full of pitfalls set by the devil himself, the gracious word of our Lord through the Apostle Paul comforts and encourages us to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Indeed, take heart and know that your service in the Lord to these precious lambs is not in vain.

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.