

Homiletics Analysis: Luke 10

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Luke 10 is a pivotal chapter in the central travel narrative of Luke's Gospel (9:51–19:44), in which Jesus journeys resolutely toward Jerusalem and the cross. The chapter moves through four distinct but thematically unified episodes: the commissioning and return of the seventy-two (vv. 1–24), the parable of the Good Samaritan (vv. 25–37), the visit to Mary and Martha's home (vv. 38–42), and an underlying thread connecting all three regarding what it means to truly receive the kingdom Jesus is bringing.

In the first movement (vv. 1–24), Jesus sends seventy-two disciples ahead of him in pairs — an expansion of the Twelve's earlier mission (9:1–6) that signals the scope of the kingdom's advance. They are sent as harvesters into a plentiful field, as lambs among wolves, with a stripped-down dependence that mirrors the urgency of the hour. Towns that reject them reject Jesus; towns that reject Jesus reject the Father who sent him. The disciples return with astonishment — even the demons submit. Jesus responds with a vision of Satan's fall, a word of caution about the proper ground for joy (names written in heaven, not spiritual power), and an ecstatic prayer of thanksgiving to the Father for revealing kingdom realities to “little children” rather than the wise and understanding. He then turns privately to the disciples and pronounces them blessed — they are seeing what prophets and kings longed to see.

In the second movement (vv. 25–37), a lawyer tests Jesus with the question of eternal life. Jesus redirects to the law itself, which the lawyer answers correctly: love God and love neighbor. When the lawyer seeks to justify himself by restricting the definition of “neighbor,” Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan — inverting the expected heroes (priest, Levite) and making the despised Samaritan the exemplar of mercy. The point is not merely ethical instruction but a diagnostic exposure of the lawyer's self-justifying question. The neighbor is not a category to be defined but a posture to be assumed: “go and do likewise.”

In the third movement (vv. 38–42), Mary sits at Jesus' feet in the posture of a disciple while Martha is distracted with much serving. Martha's complaint is met with one of the most compressed and consequential sentences in the Gospels: “one thing is necessary.” Mary has chosen the good portion — hearing Jesus — and it will not be taken from her. This is not a demotion of hospitality or service but a rebuke of the anxiety that crowds out sitting at Jesus' feet.

This Text — Intent

Luke 10 is not a miscellany of unrelated episodes. God is doing something unified through each movement: confronting every form of self-sufficiency and misplaced priority, and directing both disciples and the reader toward the one thing that is necessary — receiving what Jesus brings. The seventy-two must depend on Jesus’ authority, not their own effectiveness. The lawyer must stop defining his way out of self-examination. Martha must stop letting urgent service displace urgent listening. Underneath each episode is the same anatomy of the human problem: we manage, justify, and busy ourselves rather than receive. The intent is to expose that pattern, diagnose its root, and call the reader to the posture of the child, the Samaritan, and Mary — reception, mercy without calculation, and sitting at Jesus’ feet.

Subject Sentence: Kingdom arrival demands reception, not management — of grace, neighbor, and Christ himself.

Primary Claim: Jesus is confronting every form of self-sufficient posturing — whether religious performance, self-justifying definition, or anxious busyness — and calling His people to the one posture that receives what He brings: dependent trust, unguarded mercy, and attentive sitting at His feet.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Good Samaritan as ethical example vs. christological parable

The most significant interpretive divide in this chapter concerns the parable of the Good Samaritan. The dominant reading in popular preaching treats the Samaritan simply as a moral exemplar — “be like the Samaritan, help people in need.” This reading is not false, but it is incomplete in a way that distorts the text. The parable is occasioned by a lawyer’s self-justifying question, and Jesus’ conclusion is not “admire the Samaritan” but “go and do likewise” — a direct address to the lawyer’s failure of mercy, not a general humanitarian appeal.

A stronger christological reading, favored by some Reformed and patristic interpreters, sees the Samaritan as a type of Christ — the one who comes from outside Israel’s expected channels, crosses social and religious barriers, bears cost himself, and rescues the one left for dead. On this reading, the parable does not begin with ethics but with grace: we are first the man in the ditch, and the neighbor we must “become” is one modeled on the mercy Christ shows us. Edmund Clowney and others have pressed this reading convincingly. The Wesleyan/Arminian tradition tends to emphasize the volitional dimensions — the free choice to cross the road — without adequately anchoring the motivation in prior grace.

Verdict: Both ethical and christological elements are present and must be held together. The moralistic reading (be like the Samaritan) without the christological ground (we were the man in the ditch) produces exactly the kind of self-justifying merit the parable is designed to expose. The Reformed reading holds: the parable first destroys the lawyer's self-justifying category-management, then points to grace-grounded mercy as the only adequate response.

Mary and Martha: Contemplation vs. Action

A Roman Catholic and broadly contemplative reading of vv. 38–42 has historically elevated the contemplative life (Mary) over the active life (Martha) as a higher spiritual calling. This reading imports more than the text warrants. Jesus does not demote service or condemn hospitality — the issue is the “much worry and distraction” (v. 41) that crowds out reception of Jesus' word. The contrast is not between two spiritual vocations but between anxious self-management and trusting attentiveness.

A Wesleyan/activist reading tends to rehabilitate Martha as the model of sanctified service and treats Mary as a corrective only for extreme cases. This reading moves in the right direction by rejecting the contemplative/active hierarchy, but it softens Jesus' rebuke too quickly. “One thing is necessary” is not a mild preference — it is a sharp reorientation.

Verdict: The Reformed reading holds that this episode is not about the superiority of contemplation over action but about the priority of receiving Christ's word over anxious performance. The text calls both disciples and the preacher to examine what crowds out sitting at Jesus' feet — and to name that crowding-out as a spiritual disorder, not merely a scheduling problem.

The seventy-two and the extension of mission

Dispensational interpretation sometimes reads the commissioning of the seventy-two as directly parallel to Israel's future missionary witness in the Tribulation period, with v. 9 (“the kingdom of God has come near”) read as a conditional offer now withdrawn. This reading requires importing a dispensational framework the text does not supply. The Lukan travel narrative context, the direct parallel to the Twelve's commissioning (9:1–6), and Jesus' own thanksgiving in vv. 21–24 all point to a unified kingdom advance that reaches its climax in Jesus' own mission. There is no textual warrant for treating the seventy-two's commission as a suspended or conditional offer.

Verdict: The Reformed reading holds that the commissioning of the seventy-two is the expansion of the kingdom's advance in and through Jesus, pointing forward to the post-resurrection mission of the church. The disciples' joy and Jesus' thanksgiving underscore the present, arriving reality of the kingdom — not a deferred or conditional one.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 6:1–13** — The commissioning of the prophet to a people who will “hear but not understand” — judgment falls on those who reject the Word; the same dynamic governs Jesus’ woes on Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (vv. 13–15). The pattern of rejection and remnant is canonical, not accidental.
- **Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Leviticus 19:18** — The lawyer’s summary of the law (v. 27) draws on the Shema and the love-of-neighbor command. These are not isolated proof-texts but the covenantal architecture of Israel’s life. Jesus does not contradict them — He exposes whether the lawyer actually inhabits them.
- **Micah 6:6–8** — “What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” — the prophetic diagnosis of religious performance divorced from mercy is the OT background to both the parable and the Martha episode. Sacrifice without mercy is not an innovation of Jesus — it is the standing prophetic charge.
- **Matthew 11:25–27** — The near-verbatim parallel to Jesus’ ecstatic prayer (vv. 21–22) confirms that this thanksgiving is not an isolated burst of emotion but a window into Jesus’ unique filial relationship to the Father and the hidden-wisdom character of kingdom revelation. The “little children” who receive what is hidden from the wise appear in both Gospels.
- **John 11:28–35; 12:1–3** — Mary of Bethany appears again — sitting at Jesus’ feet, anointing him, demonstrating by repetition that her posture in Luke 10 is not a one-time retreat but a characterological orientation toward Jesus. The canonical portrait deepens the exegetical weight of “the good portion.”

Aim: To expose the multiple forms of self-sufficient posturing that crowd out reception of Christ — in the church’s mission, in ethical self-justification, and in anxious service — and to call the reader to the singular posture of dependent, attentive, mercy-extending discipleship.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	Jesus appoints seventy-two and sends them in pairs; harvest is plentiful, laborers few; pray for laborers	Expansion of 9:1–6; number may echo 72 nations of Gen 10 (LXX), suggesting universal scope
3	“I am sending you out as	Vulnerability and

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	lambs among wolves”	dependence; no illusion of self-protection
4	No moneybag, knapsack, sandals; greet no one on the road	Radical dependence and urgency; travel light, travel fast
5–6	Greet households with peace; peace rests if a son of peace is there, returns if not	The disciples carry real peace — it is not a courtesy but a covenantal offer
7	Remain in the same house; eat and drink what is provided; worker deserves wages	Dependence on hospitality; no marketplace shopping for better accommodations
8–9	Eat what is set before you; heal the sick; proclaim “the kingdom of God has come near”	Kingdom arrival is both embodied (healing) and announced (proclamation)
10–11	Towns that do not receive them: wipe the dust; know the kingdom has come near	Even rejection does not negate the nearness of the kingdom — it judges the rejector
12	Sodom will fare better than that town on judgment day	Severity of rejecting the kingdom’s messengers exceeds Sodom’s guilt
13–15	Woes on Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum — more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom	These towns witnessed miracles and still refused; judgment is proportionate to revelation
16	Whoever hears you hears me; whoever rejects you rejects me; rejection of me = rejection of the Father	The chain of representation: disciples → Jesus → Father; rejection is never merely social
17	Seventy-two return with joy — even demons submit in Jesus’ name	The disciples’ amazement is genuine; the power exceeds expectation
18–19	Jesus: “I saw Satan fall like lightning”; authority over serpents and scorpions given; nothing shall hurt you	Jesus’ vision of Satan’s defeat; disciples’ authority is derivative and real; protection is assured
20	“Do not rejoice that spirits	Corrective: source of joy

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	submit; rejoice that your names are written in heaven”	must be covenant standing, not spiritual power or effectiveness
21	Jesus rejoices in the Spirit; thanks the Father for hiding these things from the wise and revealing to little children	The ecstatic prayer — kingdom revelation operates by inversion; the Father’s will is good pleasure
22	All things delivered to Jesus by the Father; no one knows the Son except the Father, and vice versa; mutual knowledge revealed by the Son	High Christology; the Son’s unique filial relationship grounds his authority and mission
23–24	Blessed are those who see and hear what you see and hear; kings and prophets longed for this	The disciples’ privilege is eschatological — they stand at the hinge of redemptive history
25	A lawyer stands to test Jesus: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”	The question itself reveals a performance-oriented framework for salvation
26–27	Jesus redirects to the law; lawyer answers: love God, love neighbor (Deut 6:5 + Lev 19:18)	The lawyer knows the answer — the issue is whether he inhabits it
28	Jesus: “Do this, and you will live”	Not ironic — the standard is real; the lawyer’s self-examination is the goal
29	Lawyer asks “Who is my neighbor?” seeking to justify himself	Self-justification by category restriction — defining “neighbor” narrowly to limit obligation
30	A man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho falls among robbers — stripped, beaten, left half dead	The victim is anonymous; presumably Jewish; a universal everyman
31–32	Priest and Levite each see him, pass by on the other side	The expected helpers — religious professionals — fail; their reasons are left unstated

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
33	A Samaritan sees him and has compassion	The reversal: the despised outsider is the agent of mercy; “had compassion” is the pivot
34–35	Samaritan binds wounds, oils and wines, sets on his own animal, brings to inn, pays, promises more	The extravagance of care: progressive, costly, personally borne
36–37	Jesus: “Which was the neighbor?” Lawyer: “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus: “Go and do likewise.”	The question is inverted — not “who is my neighbor?” but “to whom must I be a neighbor?”
38–39	Jesus enters a village; Martha receives him; Mary sits at his feet listening	Two postures in the same house — receiving Jesus into the home vs. receiving his word
40	Martha distracted with much serving; complains to Jesus; “don’t you care? Tell her to help me”	The complaint reveals anxiety displacing attentiveness; she has made the guest work for her
41–42	Jesus: “Martha, Martha — you are anxious about many things; one thing is necessary; Mary has chosen the good portion”	The double name = tenderness + seriousness; “one thing” collapses all distraction to a single priority

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–16	The Mission of the Seventy-Two: Sent, Dependent, Representing
2	17–24	The Return and the Correction: Joy Reoriented and Revelation Received
3	25–37	The Good Samaritan: Self-Justification Exposed and Mercy Demanded
4	38–42	Mary and Martha: The One

Division	Verses	Label
		Thing Necessary

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Kingdom arrival demands reception, not management — of grace, neighbor, and Christ himself.

Primary Claim: Jesus is confronting every form of self-sufficient posturing — whether religious performance, self-justifying definition, or anxious busyness — and calling His people to the one posture that receives what He brings: dependent trust, unguarded mercy, and attentive sitting at His feet.

Applications (Five)

1. Examine what you are trusting when you serve (Mind/Belief) The seventy-two were sent without resources precisely so they would know the source of the power they witnessed. Every ministry leader, small group teacher, and church volunteer faces the same temptation: to attribute effectiveness to preparation, skill, or spiritual gifting rather than to Jesus' authority delegated to them. The corrective Jesus gives is not modesty but clarity — your names are written in heaven, not in the results column. Examine today what you are actually trusting when you serve: your competence, or the one who sends you.

2. Let the parable ask you the lawyer's question — from the inside (Mind/Belief) The lawyer asked "who is my neighbor?" to shrink the field of obligation. Jesus inverts the question: not "who qualifies?" but "to whom will I be a neighbor?" This is not merely a lesson in generosity — it is a diagnostic of the self-justifying mind that manages obligation rather than extending mercy. Ask yourself not "have I fulfilled my duty to those I consider neighbors?" but "from whom am I crossing the road?" The narrowed definition reveals the idol — the idol of a manageable moral life.

3. Receive grace before you extend mercy (Affections/Worship) The Samaritan's mercy is only intelligible against the background of grace already received. We become capable of crossing the road to the beaten man only when we have stopped calculating our own righteousness — when we know ourselves to be the man in the ditch, rescued at a cost we did not bear. Let the worship implication land: the next time you extend mercy to someone inconvenient, costly, or socially awkward, let it be an act of gratitude to the one who crossed every barrier to reach you. Mercy that does not flow from worship becomes moralism that eventually burns out.

4. Name what is crowding out sitting at Jesus' feet (Affections/Worship) Martha's distraction is not laziness — it is misdirected devotion. She is working for Jesus while missing Jesus. The application is not "serve less" — it is "identify what has become your

‘many things’ that displace the one thing.” For some it is church programming; for others it is family management, career performance, or even theological production. Whatever it is, Jesus names it with tenderness and seriousness: “you are anxious about many things.” The anxiety is the diagnostic. Where are you anxious in your service to God? That anxiety is telling you something has displaced the good portion.

5. Go and do likewise — specifically, not abstractly (Will/Behavior) “Go and do likewise” is not a general humanitarian appeal — it is a directional command given to a specific person about a specific failure of mercy. The application demands the same specificity: Who is the person currently lying in the ditch in your life — beaten, bypassed, socially or racially or economically outside your category of “neighbor”? Name the road you have been crossing. Name the cost of going back. Then go. This is not a principle to admire but a concrete next step to take before the week is out.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Luke 10 presents Jesus as the inaugurator and embodiment of the kingdom of God, whose arrival demands a particular posture from every person it encounters. The chapter reveals God’s deliberate inversion of expected wisdom: He hides kingdom realities from the self-sufficient and reveals them to the childlike, places the exemplar of mercy in the body of the despised outsider, and declares that the single most important thing a person can do in the presence of Jesus is to sit and listen to him. The chain of representation in v. 16 — “whoever hears you hears me; whoever rejects you rejects the Father” — establishes that encounter with Jesus is encounter with God himself, making every response to his kingdom messengers a theological act, not merely a social one. The Father’s “good pleasure” (v. 21) grounds the entire mission not in human effort but in divine sovereignty, and the Son’s unique filial knowledge (v. 22) anchors the disciples’ authority and the preacher’s proclamation in something more than moral instruction — it is the self-disclosure of God in the Son, received through the Spirit.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Luke 10 is a sustained case study in the doctrine of grace contra self-justification. The lawyer’s question (“what must I do to inherit eternal life?”) is the paradigmatic works-righteousness framework — eternal life as something achieved by right performance of a correctly defined set of obligations. Jesus does not soften this framework but exposes its bankruptcy through the parable: the lawyer cannot define his way out of the demand of mercy, and he cannot meet that demand from within his own moral resources. The Reformed reading insists that this parable does not function primarily as an ethical model but as a law-work that drives the reader to grace — the Samaritan’s mercy is only the model for those who have first received mercy themselves. Similarly, the Martha/Mary episode resists the works-righteousness pattern: no amount of

anxious service constitutes the “one thing necessary.” The good portion — hearing Jesus — is received, not earned. And the corrective Jesus gives the seventy-two — “rejoice that your names are written in heaven” — is a direct appeal to the ground of justification rather than the fruit of ministry. Throughout Luke 10, the gospel does not merely appear as background; it actively dismantles every performance-based substitute and calls the reader to the posture of the dependent child, the mercy-receiver, and the attentive disciple.

Main Takeaway

You cannot manage your way into the kingdom, justify your way out of mercy, or serve your way past sitting at Jesus’ feet. Every episode in this chapter exposes a different form of the same self-sufficient posture — and Jesus confronts every one of them with the same call: receive what I bring. Receive your mission as delegated authority, not your own competence. Receive your neighbor as a claim of mercy, not a category to be defined. Receive me — sit down, stop the noise, and listen. The one thing necessary has not changed.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the Good Samaritan as pure ethics without the diagnostic frame.** The most common error in this passage is reducing the parable to “be kind and help people in need.” This strips the parable of its occasioning context (a lawyer seeking to justify himself), its inverted structure (the expected helpers fail; the despised outsider succeeds), and its conclusion (the question is inverted — not “who is my neighbor?” but “to whom must I be a neighbor?”). The ethical demand is real, but it lands on a self-justifying person and must function as law before it can function as model. Preach the parable as a law-work before you preach it as a life-model.
- **Treating the Mary/Martha episode as a contemplation-vs.-action hierarchy.** Preachers who come from more contemplative traditions will use this passage to privilege inner devotional life over practical service. This is not what Jesus says. He does not rebuke Martha for serving — he rebukes her for being “worried and troubled about many things” while one thing is necessary. The target is anxiety and misplaced priority, not hospitality or practical ministry. Conversely, preachers who over-correct by rehabilitating Martha entirely soften “one thing is necessary” into a mild scheduling suggestion — which does equal violence to the text.
- **Missing the unity of the chapter by treating the four episodes as unrelated.** Luke 10 is frequently preached as three or four separate sermon topics (missions, ethics, devotional life) without recognizing the single diagnostic thread: every episode exposes a form of self-sufficiency and calls the reader to reception. Preaching the

chapter without this unifying thread produces a miscellany rather than a proclamation.

- **Extracting v. 20 (“rejoice that your names are written in heaven”) as a generic encouragement without its corrective function.** Jesus is correcting misdirected joy — excitement at spiritual power rather than covenantal standing. This verse is not a general word of assurance to be offered to all audiences; it is a specific reorientation of disciples who are being tempted to build their identity on ministry results rather than on their standing before God. Preach it with the corrective force the context demands.
- **Over-reading the christological Samaritan typology at the expense of the ethical application.** Some Reformed preachers, eager to avoid moralism, run so hard to the christological reading (Samaritan = Christ, wounded man = us) that they arrive at v. 37 (“go and do likewise”) with no adequate way to issue the actual command Jesus gives. The christological reading illuminates the ground of mercy — it does not eliminate the call to extend it. Hold both: we are first the man in the ditch; having been rescued, we go and do likewise.
- **Failing to preach the high Christology of vv. 21–22 at all.** These verses are among the most explicit statements of Jesus’ unique filial relationship to the Father in the Synoptic Gospels, paralleling John’s language of mutual knowledge. Preachers who treat Luke as less theologically rich than John routinely pass over these verses with a brief comment on prayer. This is a significant loss — the disciples’ privilege (vv. 23–24), the authority of their mission (v. 16), and the ground of their joy (v. 20) all rest on who Jesus is in relation to the Father. The Christology here is not background — it is structural.