

Lambs in the Midst of Wolves

Introduction

The Text

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ²And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. (Luke 10:1–3)

The Outline

A. Our text this morning is composed of three verses and from these three verses I’m going to bring three things to our attention: (1) Kingdom Expansion (v. 1); (2) First Principles (v. 2); and (3) Eloquent Wounds (v. 3).

1. The first should go rather quickly, and we’ll spend the majority of our time on the last two.

(1) Kingdom Expansions (v. 1)

Every Saint Sent

A. If you’ve been with us for a little while now, hopefully you recall that we actually referred to these verses here in [Luke 10](#), back when we were in [Luke 9:1-6](#).

1. [Luke 9](#) deals with the commissioning and sending of the twelve apostles in particular out on mission for the kingdom. But here now in [Luke 10](#) we see that it is not just the 12 who are sent out by Christ, but “72” [or some manuscripts have 70] (v. 1) more.

B. The point I made then is the point I’ll begin with here again this morning. Ministry—engagement in the mission of God—is not just for the few, the proud, the professionals—it’s for the church at large. Every saint is sent. Every Christian is a missionary—a sent one of God.

C. So the question that confronts us immediately here in this first verse is: Have you been leaving the mission stuff, the ministry stuff, to the professionals, the pastors, the guys with seminary degrees, or whatever—whether from fear or from apathy? Or are you on mission for Christ, in your home, in your neighborhood, in your workplace, in the church, in the city, in the world? Do you have a heart for the harvest?

1. Listen to me: If you have been saved by Christ, then you have also been sent by Him: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” ([John 20:21](#)).

(2) First Principles (v. 2)

Going in the Right Way

- A. Now, it is not only Christ's concern that we go. He is concerned here that we go in the right way. As we move into [v. 2](#), this is precisely what we come to see. The sequence of thought is incredibly insightful. Did you notice it?
1. Jesus turns to His disciples here and says: ["The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore . . ."](#) ". . . What are you still doing here? There is great need for your help out in the field. Get out there already. Go!" That is the sort of thing we would expect. But we have to wait until [v. 3](#) before we get such a command: ["Go your way . . ."](#)
 - a. No, in between the great harvest need and the disciples' obedient going, Jesus inserts something else: ["The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore . . . pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest . . ."](#)
- B. Is He appointing them and sending them out into the harvest? Absolutely. But He knows they must get something straight before they go. He is establishing the missionary's first principles.
1. If you want to be fruitful in the harvest, you need first earnestly plead with the ["Lord of the harvest"](#).
- C. The idea with ["Lord of the harvest"](#) here is more than just that God owns the field. This is true. But it also includes the idea that He is the decisive factor in causing the harvest, in raising up and sending out laborers into the harvest, in making the whole missionary enterprise fruitful at all.
1. Listen to how Paul talks about his and Apollos' ministries utilizing the very same sort of imagery: [" ⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" \(1 Cor 3:5–7\).](#)
 - a. "Are we doing work here? Absolutely. But we are not decisive in this thing. God is the Lord of the harvest. We are mere servants, instruments in His hands."

The Secret of Abiding Prayer

- A. If we see the great harvest need and run ahead of God in attempt to meet it, we will spend buckets of sweat but see none of the fruit.
1. Such a thing, as noble as it may first seem, betrays a self-reliance, a misplaced faith in what we can accomplish, and God will need to slow that down and teach us the secret of abiding prayer.
- B. Jesus will have to return again and again to this with these disciples (and with us). As simple as it seems, it's so hard to get. We see this even in the immediate context of [Luke 10](#).
1. In [vv. 17-20](#), these 72 disciples return ecstatic about what they were able to do, all pumped by what they accomplished—even demons were doing what they commanded! And Jesus

has to remind them of first principles: “[D]o not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20).

- a. “Anything that you do or accomplish results from the One you know, rely on, and trust in.”
2. In the last verses of this chapter, vv. 38-42, Jesus is at a little dinner party with Martha and Mary. Perhaps you remember the story. Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to Him. And Martha is scrambling about the kitchen trying to serve Him. And she’s getting upset that her sister isn’t helping her. But Jesus responds: “⁴¹ Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41-42).
 - a. Serving Jesus, meeting needs—these are very important things, but they must not take precedence over the one “necessary” thing: sitting with Jesus, abiding in Him, listening to Him.

The Irony in Our Prayerlessness

- A. The irony in all of this (at least when I consider my own struggles with prayerlessness) is that it is often my concern for pragmatism that leads me away from prayer. I want to get things done. I want to cross things off my list. I want to see results.
 1. And, quite frankly, prayer just doesn’t seem that effective, that pragmatic. We don’t often feel like anything is happening. We don’t think any real work is being done.
- B. Let me just put you to the test on this for a moment here this morning:
 1. If you just lost your job and you need to find a new one, in a hurry . . . what do you think would be the most effective use of your time—an hour spent sending out resumes, or an hour spent in prayer to the Lord of all?
 2. If you are struggling with your singleness and you desperately want to find that significant other . . . what do you think would be the most effective use of your time—an hour spent perusing dating websites, or an hour spent in prayer to the Lord of all?
 3. If you are struggling with another person—maybe your spouse, maybe your kid, maybe someone at work or in your Home Group—and you really want to see them turn from a certain sin, or harmful habit, or whatever . . . what do you think would be the most effective use of your time—an hour spent planning what you will say when you see them next, or an hour spent in prayer to the Lord of all?
 4. If you want to see your family member or neighbor reached for Christ . . . what do you think would be the most effective use of your time—an hour spent talking with them about the truths of the gospel, laying out evidence for the faith, dismantling arguments raised against it, or an hour spent in prayer to the Lord of all?
- C. Now, I understand that we shouldn’t really pin the one side against the other—the praying and the doing. Both are important. But I am trying to get at what I think Jesus is getting at here—and that is that one of these things must come first. One is fundamental. Prayer.

1. Prayer should precede and then even permeate our doing. Prayer is often the thing we never get around to, but it is truly the thing we should be always giving ourselves to.
- D. I say our prayerlessness for the sake of pragmatism is ironic, because Jesus in our text is actually grounding His command to pray in the concern for pragmatism.
1. If you really want results, if you really want fruit in the field, you have to talk to the Lord of the harvest. Prayer is not contrary to pragmatism but critical to it. In other words: prayer works!
- E. Charles Spurgeon understood this: “Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) is known as the ‘prince of preachers.’ He was a Baptist minister in England who saw enormous blessings from God upon his ministry. It is not an exaggeration to say that thousands came to Christ through his preaching. Some of services drew as many as 10,000 people at a time!
- But Spurgeon never took credit for the success of his ministry. Instead, he always pointed to the hundreds of people who came before services and prayed for God’s blessing. He said any success he had came from God in answer to their prayers. Spurgeon was often fond of calling these prayer gatherings the church’s “boiler room”.
- In Spurgeon’s time, steam was the power source of the day. Boiler rooms were the powerhouses, the driving forces of everything from vast machines in factories to household heating systems. Boiler rooms, however, were not pleasant places to visit. They were functional, dirty, and hot; often tucked away in the basement. Likewise, Spurgeon saw the prayers of his people as the spiritual power behind his preaching and ministry.”
1. Is that how you see prayer? Is that how I see prayer? Is it the boiler room of our mission and ministry and life? Is it what keeps the heat up and the lights on? Or is it something we get around to when we have a moment here or there?
 - a. This is First Principles stuff! This is what Jesus wants His missionaries to understand before they even begin.

(3) Eloquent Wounds (v. 3)

As Lambs in the Midst of Wolves

- A. Having established this, we then come to v. 3 and the command to “Go your way . . .” But now we must notice the manner in which these disciples are sent, for it is not at all as we should expect: “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.”
- B. I’ve never played football before, but I’ve seen those movies where, it’s the night of the big game, the whole town has come out to see it, the bleachers are buzzing with energy and excitement, the players are still in the locker room, anxiously getting their last things in order, swigging their Gatorade or whatever . . .
1. . . . and then, with just a few minutes before they need to head out to the field, the coach gathers them together for a “pep talk”, right? The soundtrack picks up, the coach has these inspiring words, everyone’s heart is stirred, everyone’s spirit is lifted, even these big old

bruiser, meathead guys have tears forming in the corners of their eyes. And when the coach is done, they're ready for the game!

- C. Now, if I'm contrasting what I've seen there with what Jesus does here, can I just say it? Jesus' pep talk kind of stinks. He's sending these guys out into the big game, as it were, and He basically says: "Okay guys, om, when I was coming in earlier I happened to see the other team strapping up, om, there's really no easy way to say this. They've got arms the size of your thighs. They're taller than some of the redwoods I hiked in with my family last week. I heard their quarterback just signed with the NFL a few days ago. Let's just be real. When you walk out of here, you're going to be like boys going up against men—you're going to be like 'lambs in the midst of wolves'."

Hesitations and Objections

- A. Okay, now freeze the frame for a moment. If you're in this "pep talk" with Jesus and you hear Him say that, aren't you like: "Hold up, I'm out of here. I know I've been praying for this and all, but I didn't know this is what it entailed." Aren't you a bit hesitant at this point?
- B. Don't we want to object: "I thought you were the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. That's your job not mine. I want the whole 'we are more than conquerors' thing (Rom 8:37). I want the 'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me' piece (Phil 4:13). I want that side of it—Your triumph and Your victory. I don't want this side of it—Your suffering and Your shame and Your death. I thought You did all that so I don't have to? Why are You talking to us like this?!"
- C. I like what John Piper has to say on this point: "Christ died for us so that we would not have to die for sin, not so that we would not have to die for others. Christ bore the punishment of our sin so that our death and suffering are never punishment from God. The call to suffer with Christ is not a call to bear our sins the way he bore them but [a call] to love the way he loved. . . . Because he took my guilt and my punishment and reconciled me to God as my Father, I do not need to cling any longer to the comforts of earth in order to be content. I am free to let things go for the sake of making the supremacy of God's worth known" (Let the Nations Be Glad, p. 77).
1. So we are sent out "as lambs in the midst of wolves", then, not as an offering for sin, but as tangible re-presentations of the Lamb who so loved the world that He gave His life as an offering for our sin on that cross.
 - a. Our willing-to-die love declares to the world: Jesus is alive and He loves you!
- D. The point, I think, in all of this (and it's a tough one) is that self-sacrificial suffering in love for those we are trying to reach with the gospel, is a critical component of our mission and ministry.

Unsurprising

- A. Now such a thing, while tough, should not be so surprising to us. For it seems whenever Jesus grabs a hold of a person and sends them out on mission for Him, He always informs them of the suffering that such a task will entail.
1. For one thing, this is the point of all that Jesus has been saying in the verses prior to our text this morning. This is hinted at there in v. 1 of our text: "After this . . ." After what?

- a. After Jesus' discussion of His journey to Jerusalem to die; after His call for any who would be His disciple to take up his cross and follow Him; after His encounters with those three men we saw last week where He calls them to count the cost, go all in, put hand to the plow and don't look back. He's trying to get them to settle on this before He sends them out because He knows the mission will claim their lives.
 2. But furthermore, do you remember Peter's commissioning there after Jesus appears to Him by the Sea of Galilee in John 21. Three times He tells Peter: "Here's what I want you to do: 'feed my sheep'" (vv. 15-17).
 - a. But then, before sending him on his way, Jesus just kind of nonchalantly drops this line: " ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me'" (vv. 18-19). In other words: "The mission of feeding my sheep is going to cost you your life. You're going to be like a lamb in the midst of wolves. You're going to bear your own cross, even as you speak to others of Mine."
 3. Or do you remember Paul's commissioning there on the Road to Emmaus, where the risen Lord appears to him in glory and sets him on a completely different path?
 - a. When Paul is still shaken up from the experience, Jesus sends Ananias to minister to him. And He says: " ¹⁵ "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:15-16). "He will not only preach the cross, He will re-present it in his own life and death as well."
- B. This is why Paul would later write to the Colossians: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church . . ." (Col 1:24).
 1. To help you understand what I think Paul means here, do you remember Thomas, doubting Thomas? "I will not believe your words about Jesus being risen from the dead until I can see and touch His wounds myself. Then I'll know." So Jesus shows up to Thomas and says: "Here, see, touch!" And Thomas falls on his face in worship.
 - a. That's what we are to be in our suffering for others. Christ is no longer here in the flesh. His physical presence is "lacking". The Thomas' of our day can no longer touch His wounds. But we the church are His body. When the world says: "I will not believe your words about Jesus being risen from the dead", we say: "Here, see and touch. Trace in my wounds the reality that Jesus is risen and He loves you!"
- C. That's why we are sent like "lambs in the midst of wolves". That's what Jesus is calling us, is making us by His Spirit, to be.

- D. So let me just stop and ask you for a moment: Are you willing to be this for other people? Do you see suffering as a hindrance to your mission or as a means of advancing it? Do you spend all of your resources and energy trying to avoid it? Or do you so spend all your resources and energy in love for others that you can't help but encounter it?
1. At the end of the day, all true love will call for your suffering—as you move towards the person, bear their burdens, endure their sins and weaknesses, forego your own needs to meet theirs, etc. Are you willing to be a lamb pointing to the Lamb?!

Conclusion

- A. Let me close by just showing you what this Lamb-like ministry might look like in your life:
1. It's flowers brought to the neighbor who just lost her husband—even though you know she's been bad-mouthing you to others on the block.
 2. It's an open wallet for that family member who's fallen on hard times—even though you are barely getting by yourself.
 3. It's a warm embrace of that homeless man who often camps out on the sidewalk in front of your office—even though you know he's dirty, and perhaps his stink is going to get on you, but you want him to know that Christ loves him, even in that place.
 4. It's a meal shared with others around your table—even though you know they have different religious, political, ethical perspectives than you. You just want to serve them, to listen to them, to love them towards Christ.
 5. It's walking or running (as I hope many of us will do with RealOptions on May 12) in concern for the unborn—even though we know our coworkers, and our neighbors, and even some of our own family will deride us for doing so.
 6. It's hearing and answering the call to go. Over 3 billion people according to the Joshua Project, unreached with the gospel. And you say: "That's it! I've got to leave this comfortable bay area, California lifestyle and go." ["How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" \(Rom 10:14\).](#)
- B. This is how the cross of Christ gains traction in the lives of those we are hoping to reach. We bear our own cross in the preaching. We bleed as we speak of His blood. They know He is alive because we die in love for them every day.
1. Christ give us the strength for such a call: Lambs in the midst of wolves!