

Struggles Moving Forward

In our message last week given from the Book of Luke chapter 9, we recognized that there will be struggles as we move on forward in our relationship with the Lord Jesus and in our service to Him. That while yes, the salvation that He so graciously provides to us is through grace and grace alone, completely free and requiring nothing on our part to receive it, the next steps, the steps of "discipleship" and of our obedience to Him as our "Lord" will be different. There is a "cost" to us as we take those steps.

Once you and I have joined our souls with the Lord Jesus in our salvation, an eternal relationship of service to Him is immediately set into place, beginning now, in these living years and then carrying on into an eternity in heaven.

As we've been studying in earlier messages, the first step in our relationship with the Lord Jesus is that we must become His disciple, a faithful follower, always learning of Him and becoming more and more like Him with each step that we take.

And as the precious words of these gospels remind us, we are also commanded to go forward and be the means by which other people become disciples just like us. That command to us given in Matthew 28 instructs us to,

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Earlier on, in chapter 9 of this Book of Luke, the Lord Jesus demonstrated the sending forth of disciples as He sent forth the twelve. Now here in chapter 10 Jesus is sending forth even more, this time seventy disciples. Listen and follow along as I read these words in Luke chapter 10 beginning in verse 1.

¹After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. ²Then He said to them, "The harvest truly *is* great, but the laborers *are* few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. ³Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. ⁵But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest

on it; if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. ⁹And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' ¹²But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. (Luke 10:1-12)

May I pause for a moment and remind us of a truth that we too often forget as we get about our busy daily employments and lifestyles. That truth is a simple one. It's that you and I and every other person on the face of this earth has been born into this life with a sinful nature living and thriving within us, guiding and directing our every thought, word and deed. And left unchanged, that sinful nature will bring only continual misery and strife while in this life, and ending with incomprehensible eternal sufferings in hell.

But thanks be to God, He is loving and merciful, not desiring that we should perish. And because of that great love, with great compassion, through His Son, the Lord Jesus, God has provided a way of changing our nature and our future by saving us and redeeming us from that pit of hell.

And in our scripture passage for today, we see Jesus carrying forward a plan to begin to make those real changes take place, beginning with the people of His day, in the towns and villages along His pathway towards Jerusalem.

But again, as I mentioned a moment ago, that plan and those efforts would not be without struggle and difficulty. Here, as Jesus sent these seventy disciples out ahead of Him, He warned them that although they were going out with good intentions and desires for the people they would encounter, their efforts would be met with resistance and fraught with hazards.

And that warning was not only intended for those seventy disciples then, it was also intended for any and all who dare venture forth to evangelize the world now in our day, even you and me.

The three great enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil will ever and always be in full battle array against the plans, the purposes and the people of God.

Anytime that anyone steps forward to offer the precious redeeming words of Christ, it must always be clearly understood that they will be stepping forward onto a battlefield, and will be met by a formidable enemy.

Here, in some of His first words, Jesus warned them,

³Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. (Luke 10:3)

I love the way that God words His scriptures. They are so meaningful and they present His truth so clearly. And these words are not only factual, they are also a visual “word picture” illustrating the imminent dangers so plainly that a child could understand them.

The Lord Jesus is here telling us that this calling to go and make disciples is a serious business. That while as we live each day here in our quiet southern town, danger might seem far from us, but it is not. The demonic realm is ever and always at work to find ways to cause us difficulty and harm.

As those disciples then, and as you and I would today step forward to give the precious truths of redemption, we truly are as defenseless as lambs surrounded on all sides by vicious, ravenous wolves.

Consider this word picture for a moment. We are not only the enemy of the “world, the flesh and the devil”, this word picture presents us as being the very sustenance that they need for their life.

And yes, those words do seem farfetched, especially as we might venture out into our local neighborhoods and into our familiar group gatherings to give a witness for Christ. But the farther we step forward from our quiet southern towns, the more harmful and violent that demonic realm tends to be.

And that simple truth is given to us in the words of John 10, where Jesus said,

¹⁰The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.
(John 10:10)

In those words of Jesus, the demonic forces of satan are here called by the name “thief”, and they are as ravenous as wolves who steal, kill and destroy.

Again, as we live quietly here in our southern towns, such violent concerns seem far from us. But they are not! And according to Jesus' warnings, that was especially so for the seventy disciples he was sending out that day.

And the word picture given to us here gives the understanding that not all of those wolves will be easily recognizable as being openly resistant and hostile. Some of them can, at first, seem to be friendly and open to the gospel. Jesus gives the warning here that their friendliness may only be used to distract and detour the missionaries from their path. And the missionaries must be careful to discern the true motives of the people. Verse 4,

⁴Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. ⁵But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. (Luke 10:4-6)

This word picture causes me to imagine that sometimes, the people might feed and house a missionary for a while, but only for as long as it takes to distract or discourage them from their purposes.

Note these words here in verse 5 carefully, that we need to be especially perceptive, because some people's reception of us will often be very subtle, a simple matter of quiet peace or the lack of it,

⁵But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. (Luke 10:5-6)

God guides and directs our steps in many ways. And the eyes of our heart must always be awake and watching for His presence. And I have no doubt that God's Holy Spirit was going ahead of these disciples to prepare the way for them.

And while I don't fully understand God's intended meaning as He speaks about a "son of peace" abiding within those houses, I would suggest that He is speaking of a "Spirit of Peace" which can only come from the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And here, Jesus is teaching these disciples to have discernment as they minister, to know when they should remain and minister and when they should move on to another opportunity.

I'm reminded of one of the points of wisdom given in the Book "Experiencing God" by Henry Blackaby. Blackaby instructs us simply to "See where God is working and join Him there". The same would seem to be the instruction that Jesus is giving here in these words, that God's Holy Spirit always goes out ahead of us to prepare people's souls to receive His gospel.

But again, neither those disciples then, nor you and I now know ahead of time which of the people we will encounter are ready to receive the precious gospel and which ones of them are "ravenous wolves". And because of that, each of us must always be prepared with the proper defenses.

And God's provision for our defense is never lacking. He provides all the protection that we will need through the security of His "full armor", spoken about in Ephesians chapter 6.

And folks, with God's "Whole Armor", to protect and to equip us, a lamb is fully prepared to walk out onto any battlefield and not only do battle, but also to be assured of being more than a conqueror. Listen to these words from Ephesians chapter 6,

¹⁰Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

This is the perfect way for a lamb to go forward fearlessly onto the field of battle against vicious and ravenous wolves.

But again, as we spoke about a moment ago, a battle, any battle is not without suffering and consequences. The full armor of God is fully protective, but in the confusion of the battlefield, we can sometimes lose perspective and even lose sight of our leader, the Lord Jesus. And when we do that, we open ourselves up to be wounded. And those wounds will be very painful.

And the devil can attack and dissuade our efforts in so many different and varied ways. causing suffering to us physically, emotionally and spiritually, and often all three.

Our bodies are weak and susceptible to diseases, diseases that are not as common as we live in our quiet, secure southern towns here in America. I recall that as Lew and Brandi Johnson, missionaries that we support in Africa, ventured into their ministry there, they found that Malaria was often rampant, and they have suffered through several bouts of that kind of sickness and disease. And the proper healthcare is not usually as readily available as it is here in America.

And also, as another missionary that we support, Elizabeth Johnson, has found as she and her teammate, April, minister in the South Asian country of Laos. Even more powerful than physical disease is the distress that takes place when there is a daily interaction with a strong pagan religion, in their case Hindu.

I also recall how the very first missionary that we supported, Dave Goodman, went to serve in the country of Turkey. He was not their very long when suddenly a radical Muslim showed up at his door and shot and killed him.

We never know what God's plans are for our lives and when He will choose to allow us to die in our service to Him.

Again, as missionaries, we are as sheep among ravenous wolves. And in those pagan religions, the demonic beings spoken about in Ephesians chapter 6, become ever so real and active. And the constant pressure can easily cause a person to become discouraged. Many missionaries have been so discouraged and fearful that they have left the field to never return.

While it might not often be that missionaries are attacked and killed, they certainly can be distracted and dissuaded from their appointed calling. Some missionaries just get caught up in the daily affairs of life and lose their focus.

I recall, in reading the Book "The Pineapple Story", that those missionaries quickly became angry and frustrated with the way that the people in their Papua New Guinea village kept stealing their stuff, especially their newly grown pineapples. And they languished for years without any measurable ministry.

Yes, they did finally regain their ministry vision and were reasonably successful in their efforts. But the warning from God is that a good missionary, a good soldier, does not get caught up in civilian affairs. Those words in 2 Timothy 2:3,

³You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Timothy 3:3-4)

And again, as I spoke about a few moments ago, consequences are inevitable, both for the missionaries and for those that they minister too. As we allow that Full Armor of God to "sag", or as a missionary turns their backs on the enemy, they will surely suffer harm.

But, as we read in these words of our passage, the greatest of all consequences will be felt and suffered by those who refuse to receive the gospel of Christ.

Listen, verse 10,

¹⁰But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.'¹²But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. (Luke 1:10-12)

The words "that day" spoken about here by the Lord Jesus speaks about that great day of judgment when all men will stand before Him and give account. And we will all surely do that. Those words in verse 12,

¹²But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. (Luke 10:12)

These are harsh sounding words, and they are intended to be strong and demanding. How else will some people listen? Recall that Sodom was completely destroyed by fire from heaven, a direct judgment from God. And it will also be so for all those who refuse His gospel.

We're told that those last days will be as the days of Noah. Listen!

³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.
³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:37-39)

In those words, we can see so clearly that in the very last days of life on this earth, ordinary people will be going about doing ordinary things, without any thought of the coming consequences for their behaviors and lifestyles. But in only a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all life will be over and as we are told in Hebrews 9, "then comes the judgment".

But folks, again the precious redemption provided by the Lord Jesus through His death on the cross is full and it is free and for all who receive Him and welcome Him into their lives and into their homes.

But woe be to those who do not! For them, there will be no excuse.

And that is why those seventy then and why you and I now must go forward and minister the precious gospel of Christ to anyone who will listen and receive it. We are God's messengers, sent before the face of Jesus to give the good news of His salvation. And we must go!

Listen as we close, first in Galatians 6:7-8

⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

And in Matthew 28,

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Let's pray.

