

Heralding the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is from Luke chapter 10 from verse 1 to 24. After this, the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

He told them, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals, and do not greet anyone on the road.

When you enter a house, first say, Peace to this house. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them. If not, it will return to you.

Stay there eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you.

[1 : 14] Heal those there who are ill and tell them, The kingdom of God has come near to you. But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you.

Yet be sure of this, the kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

Whoever listens to you, listens to me. Whoever rejects you, rejects me. But whoever rejects me, rejects him who sent me.

[2 : 25] The seventy-two returned with joy and said, Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name. He replied, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for this is what you are pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

[3 : 45] Okay, so we're considering, as we look at this central section of Luke's Gospel, we're considering what journeying with Jesus looks like.

The closing verses of chapter 9, they included a call to discipleship, a call to follow after Jesus, a call to be imitators of him, and live life according to his principles, which you'll remember a couple of weeks ago, that included a willingness to forgo luxuries, and even forgo what we would normally consider basic necessities, like a pillow to sleep on.

Well, chapter 10 continues the same idea, as Jesus continues along the road. But now that we see that as long as being called to be kind of disciples who follow after Jesus, Jesus' friends are also called to serve as heralds, to be those who go before Jesus, and who announce his coming, and who proclaim his message.

So verse 1, these 72 are sent ahead of Jesus into the places that he is going to go. They're sent out as heralds of the kingdom. And we're considering this morning the instructions that they're given, looking at the first 16 verses of chapter 10.

Now, if those verses sounded vaguely familiar, as Sarah read them for us earlier, well, there's a good reason why they sound familiar, because at the start of chapter 9, there is a very similar section.

[5 : 12] There, Jesus gave instructions as he sent out a group of missionaries. But back in chapter 9, it was only the 12, only Jesus' closest disciples, who were being sent out.

Here, there are 72 others. Now, by including these two incidents close together in his account, by having them both, Luke kind of signals an expansion of who is called to serve as Jesus' representatives.

Because serving as heralds of the kingdom is not the preserve of the select few, but rather to serve as heralds is a universal task. And all the evidence suggests it was rapidly seen as such by the early church.

It's always been a natural part of life, a necessary outworking of faith to go and to herald the kingdom. That's what it looks like to follow Jesus.

That means the principles we find in these verses are vital for all of us. If you want to be Jesus' disciple, then you're also called to be his heralds. So as we think about our calling to be heralds, I want to focus in these verses on two themes.

[6 : 21] Firstly, we see that in these verses, as heralds, we're called to be dependent on God. And then secondly, we'll see that these heralds here in Luke's gospel, and we as heralds today, are heralds of a significant message.

So heralds dependent on God, heralds of a significant message. First up, heralds dependent on God. This theme comes through in a variety of ways in verses one through eight.

Sorry, two through eight. As Jesus sends them out, verse three, he says that they go out as lambs among wolves. It's a dramatic picture, isn't it? It points to their inability to defend themselves.

A lamb, a lamb has no defense of any kind against a pack of wolves. The danger for Jesus' disciples is unspecified, but it is very real.

Whether it's from bandits along the road or rejection in the villages that they come to or whatever it might be that they face, Jesus is realistic about the danger for his heralds, just as he was realistic back in chapter nine about the cost of discipleship in that previous section.

[7 : 32] Maybe also identifying them as lambs should remind his heralds that their response to rejection, even their response to physical danger, that it ought not to be retribution, that it shouldn't be to seek to call down fire like James and John wanted to a few verses ago.

No, Jesus' disciples should be as gentle as lambs. Now, given that this danger is very real, given that in verse three, Jesus is warning them about it, you would think that the next step would be to advise suitable preparations.

Grab some weapons, you might get attacked, take plenty of food along, you don't know what kind of reception you're going to get. But Jesus' instruction, verse four, is the exact opposite.

They're not to carry a money bag, not even a change of shoes. Why? Well, because it demonstrates their dependence on God.

These heralds are dependent on God. When it comes down later on to verse 11, to the wiping off the dust thing when they leave the villages, we'll come to that later on.

[8 : 42] But when you get there, the commentators all say that this is what you might call an acted parable, physical behavior that makes a theological point. And I think the same is true here in verse four.

The point of verse four is not practical. This isn't travel light so that you'll be able to run away fast. It's not practical.

No, the reason you don't take these things is because it shows people that you are dependent on God. Even more importantly than showing other people that you're dependent on God, it shows you that you're dependent on God.

So here in verse four, it's not really about the equipment that you lack, but it's about the attitude that you are to embody. Now, 12 chapters later, Jesus asks his disciples, when I sent you out without purse or bag or sandals, referring back to this incident and to chapter nine as well, when I sent you out without these things, did you lack anything?

Nothing, they answered. He said to them, but now if you have a purse, take it and also a bag. And if you don't have a sword, well, sell your cloak and buy one. That means that the key lesson of going out with nothing here in chapter 10 is that it shows that they will still lack nothing because God makes provision for them.

[10:11] Therefore, for you and me, if we're called to be heralds, does that mean then that we need to go and sell everything and live a monastic life or travel as nomads with nothing but the clothes that we stand up in?

Well, I think we can take from these verses his confidence that if God does call us to do so, then we will lack nothing. Go read a biography of George Muller sometime. But the second passage, that question in chapter 22, that shows that God normally doesn't call every disciple to make no provision for our practical needs, but rather calls us to make sensible, practical provisions.

So if we're not kind of taking it as a practical advice, what are we left with? Well, we're left with that attitude, aren't we? We're left with that confidence that God can provide, that God does provide for his children, that the cattle on a thousand hills are his, that everything we have comes from him.

The confidence we're left with, the confidence that as we obey him, he will give us all that we need to achieve his purposes. That's the first dimension of dependence on God.

The second one comes in verse seven. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

[11:35] So for these disciples sent out, having been offered hospitality in one home, they are to be grateful for what they are given. They're not to feel uncomfortable about allowing others to meet their needs.

That's part of what they should expect. But also, don't keep looking over your shoulder to see if there's a better deal to be had. That's the point here of do not move around from house to house. It's not saying it would be impermissible for the burden of hospitality to be shared. It is saying that you, as the visitor, you're not supposed to be looking and thinking, ah, but that family over there, they've got a pool.

Wouldn't it be nice to stay with them this hot summer? Oh, but that house has a really comfy bed. Maybe, maybe I'll go, oh, but that guy's the butcher. I'd get some good meals if I stayed there.

No, no. Be content. Don't suppose many of us will spend a significant portion of our time as itinerant ministry missionaries, directly dependent on the generosity of others.

[12:41] But it doesn't take a huge amount of imagination, does it, to extend the principles that are here into my day-to-day life and yours. From start to finish, the Bible teaches us the value of contentment, of a willingness to accept what we have.

It starts early. You're familiar, I imagine, with Exodus chapter 20. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

And it runs on through to the end as well. Here's Paul, for instance, writing to the church in Philippi. I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances.

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

So you might get that promotion at work, but you'll soon be looking to the next advancement, if you don't first learn to be content, whatever the circumstances, in dependence upon God.

[13:49] So Jesus' heralds demonstrate their dependence upon God. Secondly, we see in these verses that Jesus' heralds have a serious message to proclaim.

We saw already in verse 4 that the heralds go out unequipped, but we kind of skipped over the stranger instruction that they are not to greet anyone on the road. Sounds a little bit rude, perhaps, doesn't it?

But like the lack of equipment, again, the point here is to express a principle, to take action that shows their attitude, and to make clear in their own minds, in this case, the urgency of the task.

See, they couldn't wait, chapter 9, to bury family members or to go and say goodbye to people, and today, chapter 10, nothing can be permitted to distract them from their mission, not even to stop to greet people on the road.

So yeah, it seems likely that the greeting we're talking about is more involved than just a wave and a shout of good morning, but that's not the point. The point is that the message is so serious, and the task is so urgent, that nothing can distract them from it.

[15:03] Nothing at all can take them away. So what's this serious message that they must focus on? Well, verse 9, tell these towns the kingdom of God has come near to you.

Here in verse 9, the proclamation is accompanied by the healing of those in the town who are ill.

Verse 9 here, the proclamation of the kingdom, this is seriously good news, isn't it?

Everything that the Jewish people have been waiting for, here it is. The kingdom has drawn near.

The promised Messiah has arrived. Hope, joy, celebration, life everlasting, all that and more is encapsulated in this phrase, the kingdom of God has come near to you.

This is a serious message that they proclaim. This is seriously good news. But that isn't the whole story though, is it? Verses 10 through 15 present the alternative.

Interestingly, interestingly in verse 11, when they're not welcomed, these heralds are to say the same words. The kingdom of God has come near. But at this point, at this point, those same words, that same proclamation, is no longer a joyous celebration of good news.

[16:20] Instead, this is now a solemn warning. The coming of the kingdom is an objective fact. It has come near to these towns.

Whether they like it or not, it is near at hand for good or for ill. And the verses that follow on, that name these various cities, all of them serve to underline the seriousness of this warning.

Maybe you're familiar with the destruction of the city of Sodom that's described in Genesis 19 with the burning sulfur that rains down from heaven. And everybody knew.

Everybody knew that the fate of that city on the last day, the consequences of final judgment for Sodom, it will be similar. On that day, Sodom will be destroyed for good.

And here Jesus says, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for cities that reject Jesus' messengers. Now, when Jesus says this, it's not so much offering hope to Sodom, but rather it's saying that the situation now, because Jesus has come, the situation now means that rejecting his messengers is even worse than the wickedness of Sodom.

[17:35] See, so you and I were often tempted to think that judgment and, you know, fire and brimstone and all of that. We often think that if it exists at all, well, that's a punishment reserved for the obviously wicked, which the city of Sodom wants.

We perhaps imagine a fiery hell for the scum of society. But Jesus says, it isn't only that open, visible sin that condemns souls.

What makes the difference in these verses between a city to which the kingdom draws near with hope and a city to which the kingdom draws near in a warning of judgment?

What makes the difference? It's simple. Do they welcome Jesus' heralds or not? Because as Jesus says in verse 16, the response to his heralds demonstrates the response to him.

And to reject Jesus is to reject the father who sent him. In other words, in other words, your entire attitude to the God who created the universe, your whole attitude to that is encapsulated in this simple question.

[18:49] What will you do with the message of the kingdom of God? To stand condemned before God on the last day, you don't have to do something dramatic.

It's not just for the murderers and the rapists. To stand condemned, all you have to do is nothing. All you have to do is ignore the message and refuse to hear the proclamation of God's kingdom.

All we have to do to be condemned is to stop our ears and remain cold and indifferent and unmoved and unaffected. All we have to do is ignore the message that offers hope and our final destination will be in hell.

That there's no sin less dramatic than unbelief. Nothing with a lower profile. And yet, there is no sin which will more surely condemn the soul to hell.

Woe indeed to Horazin and Bethsaida, verse 13. All they did was ignore the miracles that Jesus did. Miracles that would have convinced sceptical foreigners like the cities of Tyre and Sidon to repent would have convinced them to turn to God.

[20 : 09] Well, those miracles left unmoved those who should have known better. Those who should have readily recognised their coming king. Woe to Horazin. Woe to Bethsaida.

Woe to New Mills and to Darville and to Glasgow and to Edinburgh and to London and to New York. Woe to any city that thinks that for any reason it will stand in the judgement that thinks like Capernaum, verse 15, that it will be lifted up to the heavens no, no.

The city that thinks it has triumphed will be brought low. Woe to the city that does not listen to the heralds of the Messiah. Woe to the city that rejects Jesus because it has rejected God himself. Woe to such cities. And let's not leave matters at that impersonal level. Woe to such people as well. Yes, these verses picture a corporate response with the cities in some sense kind of rejecting or accepting the messengers together as a whole. But none of us can afford to suppose that we are set right with God by any means other than our own personal rejoicing that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

[21 : 24] that is the serious message that these heralds go out with. But please, please, please recognize that whilst there is a need for warning, the fact that the warning is offered means there is hope.

If this is all sounding very scary to you this morning, well, it should. But the reason these cities were being warned, the reason why you are being warned, the reason for the warning is that there is hope.

There's no point in a warning if there's nothing you can do about it, is there? You don't close the door after the horse has already bolted. What should the residents of these cities have done? When the messengers wiped the dust off their feet, they should have cried out, come back, come back, tell me everything about this kingdom, tell me about this Messiah. They should have welcomed them into their homes with open arms.

And the warning is the same today and the hope is the same today. That is the serious message that we need to recognize. And it's also the serious message that we are called to proclaim.

[22 : 35] Remember, we began this morning by recognizing that those who are called to be Jesus' disciples are also called to be his heralds. And that means you today, if you're following Jesus, if you're seeking to be his disciple, then you're called to proclaim this serious message.

I don't suppose it was a pleasant experience for these missionaries to go and to shake the dust off their feet at these cities as a warning. I don't suppose it was pleasant for them to proclaim doom and destruction.

It wasn't pleasant for them and it won't be for us. Folks, we go out as sheep among wolves. It won't be pleasant. But it is required of me and it is required of you because as disciples we are heralds. Heralds who are dependent upon God and heralds of a serious message. May God have mercy on us all. Amen. Amen.