

March 12, 2017

“The Mission Before Us - Part Two”

Matthew 10:16-25

FCF: Failure to be prepared for a difficult mission

PROPOSITION: (anchor) We are being sent in the name of Jesus.

(magnet) As we go, we should expect resistance.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“The Starving Time” of Jamestown was a terrible period during the winter of 1609-1610. There were about 500 residents at the beginning of that winter. But there were only 60 still alive by the time spring came. The reasons are simple. They had chosen a strategically defensible position on the banks of the James River. But it was also an area surrounded by swampland.

In fairness, the settlers had never planned on growing all of their own food. The idea had been to depend on trade with the local tribes which would hold them during the periods between supply ship visits. But tensions with those tribes were such that that idea proved unworkable.

In hindsight, they had failed to make the necessary preparations for a difficult mission. And the fact is that followers of Christ can do the same. May that not prove to be true of us.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 10:16-25](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

It’s tough to be a Russian ambassador these days. In December, the Russian ambassador to Turkey was assassinated. In recent weeks, there has been much coverage of contact between the Attorney General and the Russian ambassador to the U.S. during the presidential campaign. And now we have the mysterious death of the Russian ambassador to the U.N. It’s a tough gig.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines an ambassador like this ([READ quote](#)):

An official envoy; a diplomatic agent of the highest rank accredited to a foreign government or sovereign as the resident representative of his or her own government or sovereign for a special and often temporary diplomatic assignment.

Christians are ambassadors of Christ, resident representatives of the greatest of sovereigns.

This was true with the apostles, “the sent ones” going in Jesus’ name. We saw last week they were sent to carry out His priorities, with His message, and in His power. And they had to expect His reception - which was not necessarily always positive ([READ Matthew 10:24-25](#)).

In vv.5-15, Jesus was preparing them for a short-term mission to the Jewish people. In vv.16-25, Jesus is preparing them for something beyond that. In both, their ministry was to be an extension of His. Their reception would be an extension of His as well, one of opposition and resistance. And that holds true today. We are being sent in the name of Jesus. As we go, we should expect resistance. That comes out in three themes - awareness, provision, and division.

I. AWARENESS

First, we see Jesus would have us go with awareness ([READ Matthew 10:16-18](#)).

A) Where’s He’s Sending Us

Note where Jesus is sending us and what He would have us to know about that.

1. As sheep

We are being sent out as sheep, defenseless creatures utterly dependent upon the shepherd.

2. Into a wolf pack

Where? Into a wolf pack. Not just in the direction of a few wolves but into the midst of them.

B) How We're to Survive

This sounds like madness. How on earth are sheep to survive such a thing?

1. Opposing images

Well, Jesus gives us some opposing images. On the one hand, you have serpents - wise, shrewd, cunning, and crafty. On the other hand, you have doves - innocent, pure, and transparent.

2. Images combined

And those images are then combined. We are to be innocent but not ignorant or naive. We are to be wise but not perpetually suspicious or cynical. The best of each is to balance out the other.

C) What He Has in Mind

And what does Jesus have in mind with this? What does He envision?

1. Expanding ministry

An expanding ministry. Beginning in the Jewish community and the synagogue. And then into Gentile courts as they are dragged and delivered over. Which is just what the history shows.

2. Continuing testimony

It will be an expanding ministry and continuing testimony to those attacking them. Through the words and deeds of the apostles, a gospel-saturated life response, especially when under duress.

Jesus would have them to be aware of what they would be facing and why.

Illustration:

Almost like a self-defense instructor as he implores us to be aware of our surroundings. "Know where you are. Recognize the signs of trouble. And know how you need to respond."

Application:

We need to know where we are. Using some Old Testament imagery, we are no longer in Jerusalem - in a culture of shared values, priorities, and practices. We are in Babylon - a place of exile, where people not only do not share those things with us but where we will be opposed for them. That's where we are. And that should shape our expectations and minimize the surprises.

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II. PROVISION

So Jesus speaks of awareness. And His promise of provision (**READ Matthew 10:19-20**).

A) With the Challenge

The challenge was coming. It would be serious and potentially quite frightening.

1. Inevitable trial

Inevitable trials would come - not “if” but “when”. Possibly figuratively but certainly literally.

2. Thrust forward

They would find themselves thrust forward into a threatening environment. They would be called upon to explain why they refused to play along, to just be reasonable and to bow down.

B) Comes a Promise

And with that challenge also then came a promise. And this was critical.

1. His commitment to us

It's rooted in His commitment to us ([READ Matthew 10:25](#)). Though slandered, Jesus is said to be the true master of the house. And who is said to be in his household? His disciples are.

2. His care for us

Rooted in such commitment, we see His care. The same Spirit who guided and empowered Him will give us the words. Note that this is not an excuse for laziness or lack of preparation. It is not a promise for those who fail to prepare. It is a promise for those who are unable to prepare.

Jesus would have us to be both aware and to know of His provision. A real provision.

Illustration:

Let me tell you of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, in 155 A.D. He had been a disciple of the Apostle John and was eighty-six at the time of his death. It was a season of violent persecution. Polycarp's friends begged him to leave but he refused. Eventually, he was found, arrested, and marched into the city. Officials met him and said ([READ quotes](#)), “Come now, where is the harm in just saying, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ and offering the incense, and so forth, when it will save your life?” Their pleas fell on deaf ears and Polycarp was led into the arena.

There he faced the governor, who also urged Polycarp to recant: “Have some respect for your years...Swear an oath ‘By the Luck of Caesar’ - Own yourself in the wrong, and say ‘Down with the infidels!’” Polycarp indicated with a sweep of his hands the assembled crowd around him and growled, “Down with the infidels!” The governor's patience was at an end, and he pressed him once more: “Take the oath, and I will let you go,” he told him. “Revile your Christ.” But Polycarp would not relent: “Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?”

The governor continued threatening him with devourment by wild beasts and then being burned at the stake. But Polycarp was steadfast: “The fire you threaten me with cannot go on burning for very long; after a while it goes out. But what you are unaware of are the flames of future judgment and everlasting torment which are in store for the ungodly.”

And with that, displaying great courage and deep joy, Polycarp was chained and burned alive.

Application:

What would this hero of the faith surely say to us today? “You must know that what I did in that moment was not by my might but Christ's mercy, not by my power but His provision.”

And, my friends, the longer you serve, the longer you follow Him, the firmer your stance for your King, the more likely you will find yourself facing trials. And He is surely faithful.

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III. DIVISION

So we have awareness and provision. And then division ([READ Matthew 10:21-23](#)).

A) Terrible Animosity

Jesus speaks here of terrible animosity, of walls and enmity between people.

1. Relational rifts

We learn of relational rifts, natural bonds tested, strained, broken, and eventually shattered.

2. Cause of hostility

An intense hostility universally experienced. The cause? Allegiance to Jesus over all else. And that is deemed to be intolerable by those insisting upon tolerance. It's an old story made new.

B) Eventual Judgment

And, terrible as that may be, there is something beyond even that - eventual judgment.

1. Debated meaning

There is debate as to the meaning of v.23. It's likely a reference to the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., which was just a few years away. So the idea is, "Keep going. Keep moving. It's coming. Don't get swept up in it." And historians speak of the terror of those days.

2. Greater significance

But, as terrible as those days were, they pale in comparison to the judgment to come - spoken of later in Matthew's Gospel. The destruction of Jerusalem was a sign for what was on the horizon.

And Jesus wants us to know of this as well, this great division that exists.

Illustration:

Of course, people today will complain, "Our nation has never been so divided." Not to downplay the fractures we see, but I want to say, "Have you never heard of the Civil War?" That was a time of brother against brother, sometimes literally. And an estimated 650,000 deaths.

Application:

A time of terrible division. But, back to the division of which Jesus speaks, why the hostility and hatred? Why the anger and animosity? Ultimately, it's because Jesus refuses to play along with our pluralism. He refuses to be listed among all the lesser gods we would serve.

He stands over and against our cultural gods of freedom and our rights of expression. He stands over and against our individual gods of personal peace and affluence. His is a jealous love for hearts that are rightfully His. And it is a compassionate love as well. For He knows the outcome. He knows these gods are false and less. And that we become what we worship.

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CONCLUSION:

Jesus promises that the mission will be difficult, not always easy. We're assured of the greater ultimate outcome, but not always given the details. Sometimes, we're just told to go.

I relayed an excerpt from C.S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair* last week, one of the books in the Chronicles of Narnia. Let me share one more with you. The great Aslan appoints Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum the Marshwiggle to find Prince Rillian and free him from the spell of an evil

witch. They were given four signs. They have missed the first three but the fourth still remains. They would recognize the prince by his asking them to do something in the name of Aslan.

As the story unfolds, they find themselves trapped in a room with a knight said to be insane, his ravings so violent he has been tied to a silver chair. Our heroes witness one of these ravings. They are pleas for help. The knight says he is not insane but under a spell by day and bound to the chair by night. He begs them ([READ quotes](#)), “If you have any pity, cut my cords and set me free....By the bright sky above, by the great Lion, by Aslan himself, I charge you.”

Is that it? He asked in Aslan’s name. Is it the fourth sign? “If only we knew,” Jill cried.

“I think we do know,” Puddleglum replied.

“Do you mean everything will come right if we do untie him?” asked Eustace.

“I don’t know about that,” said Puddleglum. “Aslan didn’t say what would happen. He only told us what to do. That fellow may kill us once he’s up. But we must still follow the sign.” So they set the knight free and found that he was Prince Rillian, the object of their quest.

Again, this mission is not necessarily easy. Frankly, it can be quite difficult, often forcing us to walk by faith and not by sight. But this faith in which we are to walk, this trust we are to have, is never a blind faith. It is in the One who has already shown His great goodness, wisdom, and power. It is in the One who has assured of His better purposes and plans, in the One who has sealed His deep love for us not only with His example and teaching but with His life’s blood.

We are being sent in Jesus’ name. As we go, we should expect some resistance. It is a shared resistance tied to the continued ministry of Jesus, the master, in and through His disciples.

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