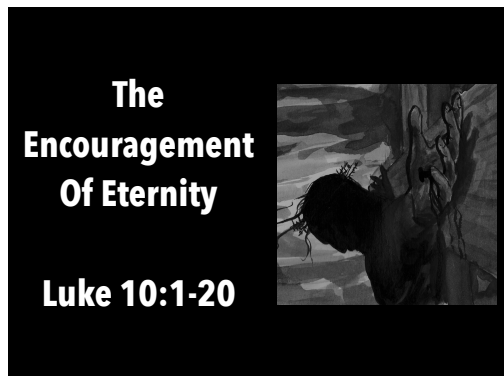


The Encouragement Of Eternity (Luke 10:1-20 December 9, 2017)



Friday's news was filled with triumphant images of rejoicing as the same-sex marriage bill became law.

But amid the triumphalism, one headline grabbed my attention. It read – “The 4 MP’s on the wrong side of history.”

This Tweet sums up the tenor of the article.



If you're ever wondering what the wrong side of history looks like ...

It is lonely to be lumped with those who encouraged slavery and the subjugation of women – those on the wrong side of history.

Truth is – too often I feel like I am on the wrong side of history.

I keep getting told – I am on the wrong side of history, of science, of social values.

I keep getting told the world has moved on and left me in its wake.

I share the gospel and I see the look – wow – you have given your life to the worship of a dead Jewish guy – man have you backed the wrong horse there.

So often I feel like the world is heading in one direction and I am fighting a losing battle.

I believe God created the world – everyone tells me – really – science has disproven that.

I believe death is not the end – everyone tells me – really – there is nothing after this life.

I believe the child of Mary is God become flesh – everyone tells me – really – He's just a man – if He actually ever existed.

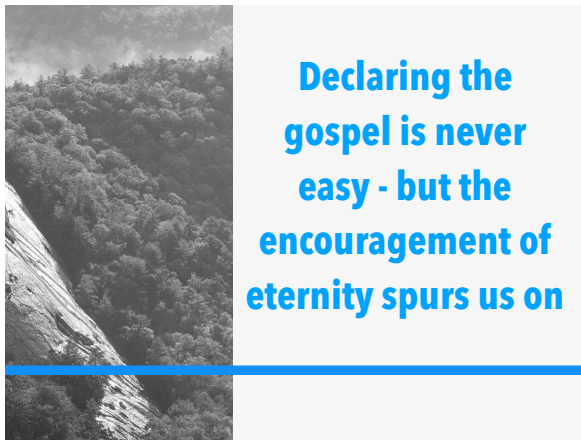
And perhaps the time of year I feel this most acutely is Christmas. There are more chances to share – but more chances to realise just how different my worldview is.

Every year at this time – the church celebrates God entering this world with a message of salvation – and yet – our world seems to be moving further and further away from accepting that message.

I feel it seems harder and harder to convey the message of Jesus.

But our passage this morning reminds us – don't be discouraged – that is exactly what we should expect – and it gives us the motivation – the encouragement we need to keep sharing amid the difficulties.

Our passage reminds us that:



Declaring the gospel is never easy – but the encouragement of eternity spurs us on.

The passage I want us to look at this morning is Luke 10:1-20.

Taking the gospel to the world has never been easy.

The world announced that Jesus – the only perfect man to ever live – was a criminal, declared Him an undesirable and sentenced Him to death.

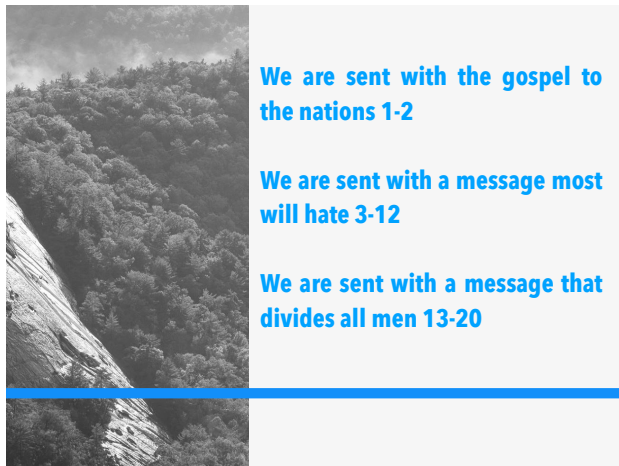
Jesus reminds us – we should expect nothing less.

He told us this:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. John 15:18.

But the other side of the coin is that this cannot deter us because we need to remember that we have the words of eternal life.

Our passage divides up like this:



We are sent with the gospel to the nations 1-2

We are sent with a message that divides men's hearts 3-11

We are sent with a message that divides men's eternity 12-20

Let's look at this first point:

We are sent with the gospel to the nations 1-2

Verse 1:

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

Depending on the version you have in front of you – in today's text we find Jesus appointing seventy – or some say – seventy-two – others – to proclaim that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

I believe this number is significant.

Initially Jesus sent out the twelve and they were sent to the twelve tribes of Israel.

The first time Jesus sent them out – it was just to the Jews – not to Gentiles – not to Samaritans.

But, from this point – Luke 10 on there is a marked change. The emphasis moves from Jews only to all nations.

At the end of Luke 10 – the hero of the parable is the *good Samaritan* – not a Jew.

In Luke 17 – ten lepers are healed but the only one to return to give thanks is a *Samaritan* – his faith saves him.

In Luke 24 – Jesus commands the disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to *all nations*.

The sending of the *seventy* marks this change.

The early manuscripts are split on whether the correct reading is seventy or seventy-two – so some translations like the NASB say seventy and others like the ESV say seventy-two.

Now is not the time to go into how we ended up with these two numbers – but for what it is worth I am fairly sure the correct number is seventy. Seven times ten – a number of perfection.

Again, it would take too long to trace this – but seventy is a number that occurs in the Bible indicating the movement of the gospel to all the nations.

Back in Genesis 10 – we have the record of God giving the nations their inheritance.

If you count the number of nations recorded in Genesis 10 – there are **seventy**.

In the flow – one man – Noah – had become **seventy** nations.

Then, from one of those nations – one man is taken – Abraham – who we are told in Genesis 49 – becomes a nation of **seventy**.

Then from that nation of **seventy** – one day – one man will come who will bless **all** the nations.

The point is that the sending of **seventy** disciples indicates that the gospel was always intended to be for more than just the Jews – it was always meant to go to every nation and tribe and tongue.

But Jesus knew that this task would be enormous. The number of workers taking the gospel to the nations would always be few.

Verse 2:

And 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.”

Sometimes we read this and think – phew – all I have to do is pray – and ask God to raise up more goers.

No! – Jesus is speaking to those who are already going – and He says – pray for more to join you.

We are not just to pray for missionaries – we are to be missionaries – and pray for more to join us.

I am probably showing my age – but I love Keith Green. Many years ago at one of his concerts in the States – he paused and said this:

There is a command in the Bible that says, “Go ye into all the nations and preach the Gospel unto every creature and make disciples of men.” We like to think, well, that was for the disciples. You know, that was for the apostles. That’s for the missionaries. That’s for humanitarians. That’s for real Christians. I mean, really, they’re so spiritual they can’t stay in society, so they’ve got to go overseas and bury themselves in some tribe somewhere down in the Amazon.

But I’ll tell you what, folks, the world isn’t being won today, because we’re not doing it. It’s our fault. This generation of Christians is responsible for this generation of souls on the earth ... I don’t want to see us stand before God on that day and say, “But, God, I didn’t hear you call me.” Here’s something for you to chew on. You didn’t need to hear a call -- you’re already called! In fact, if you stay home from going into all nations, you had better be able to say to God, “You called me to stay home, God. I know that as a fact.” Unless God tells you otherwise, you are called!

The point is we are all missionaries – we have to go and pray for more to join us. Jesus has given this task to the church – to us – to take the gospel – the words of salvation – to a needy world.

And He tells us pray for more to join us.

Then in verses 3-12 Jesus gives us a warning.

We are sent with a message that divides men’s hearts 3-11

Don’t think this task is ever going to be easy.

There is no neutral ground with the gospel. Don’t think everyone will rejoice that we come with good news.

They will love it or they will hate it. The gospel divides men’s hearts.

When I first became a Christian I really struggled with why all of these people I shared with weren’t thrilled to hear the gospel.

It was so clear, so glorious, so necessary.

I forgot that only a short time before – I hated the gospel and Christ.

I hated it because I wanted to be my own god – I was Captain of my own destiny.

No one was going to tell me how to live my life – right and wrong.

I believed it is up to the individual to decide how to live – who to have relationships with – what moral compass to follow.

I did not want anyone telling me – Thou Shalt Not!

And I really did not want anyone telling me – I need to accept a King over my life.

And I was brutal on those who shared Christ with me. I was a wolf and there are many wolves.

Look at verse 3:

Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

Jesus never sugar-coated it. You have to say – this is **not** the most stimulating pep talk before being sent out evangelising.

Think about the picture here.

What kind of shepherd gathers his most vulnerable little lambs and says – OK I am sending you into the paddock with the wolves – but you need to go anyway.

Lamb versus wolf never ends well for the lamb.

Jesus knows those precious lambs are going to be devoured.

I want Jesus to say:

Go your way; behold, I am filling you with the power of the Holy Spirit such that I am sending you out as wolves in the midst of lambs.

I want to be a wolf not a lamb.

I want Jesus to say – I am sending you to the outermost parts of the world and you are going to crush it.

Their arguments, their objections, their morality, their wisdom – it will crumble before My gospel.

They are going to know they are sinners and be hanging out for those beautiful feet of the gospel to arrive.

You are going out there with conversion power and you are going to cut a swathe through them and the lost will not know what hit them.

But that is not what Jesus says.

Lambs in the midst of wolves. That is our lot.

I am sending you out there and you are going to be slaughtered.

You are going to walk into your workplace with a gospel that says – there is a guy who was convicted for treason and killed on a cross – He is your only hope of avoiding hell – so trust Him.

And the wolves are going to eat you for breakfast.

They are going to laugh at you, your Jesus and your wasted life.

I think most of the seventy would be thinking – not what I was hoping to hear.

And then Jesus' instructions get worse. Verse 4:

Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.

As if it isn't hard enough – He says – take no provisions and don't try and make friends on the way.

Surely we should travel in well supplied, large groups.

No.

The point is that they had to learn to trust the Lord.

Gideon had to go with just the 300 men against the might of the Midianites – why? – so he didn't rely on his own strength and might.

The seventy went out with nothing but the gospel – a gospel that is foolishness and weakness to a lost world – so that if anyone does listen it is entirely due to the power of Christ.

If this were a job advertisement – I doubt there would be takers. Lambs to the wolves and no earthly help.

But – just when they are thinking it is all gloom and doom – Jesus gives them – and us some hope.

Some of those wolves will listen.

Verses 5-9:

Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer

deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

They were to enter each village – go to the homes – and offer the traditional greeting – 'Peace be to this house!'

This is an offer of peace – peace with God.

Jesus says – this offer will divide men's hearts.

Many will reject it – but some will welcome it.

If those in the house welcome the offer – if they are a son of peace – then let your peace – your blessing – rest there. Enjoy their hospitality and eat the food they give you – and share the gospel with them.

And as a sign that 'the kingdom of God has come near,' heal the sick.

But, verses 10-11:

Whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

Every Jew recognised the practice of shaking the dust from the soles of their feet. It was a sign of a curse.

They had rejected the only way of salvation and there was no other hope.

This is the drowning man who pushes the life preserver away.

It was a sign to the people of that town that the kingdom had come near. The words of eternal life had come to them and they had said – no.

This passage is a picture of the two responses men and women have to the gospel.

Whenever you share Christ – the kingdom of God draws near to them – and some will choose to accept it and some will choose to reject it.

Now, remember Jesus is not saying that 50% of those you share with will accept and 50% will say – no thanks.

I wish.

Remember, Jesus had said the main response is wolves devouring the lambs.

Most will have nothing to do with the gospel.

Matthew 7:13–14:

For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Jesus preached to thousands – most refused to listen even to Him.

Paul was stoned and cast from towns. They ridiculed his message.

Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards – even in the great seasons of revival and harvest – the most common response was scepticism and denial.

It is so hard to not get discouraged when we share with relatives and friends and neighbours – and the response is – talk to the hand – or can't you accept the truth of science – or just keep your fairy-tales to yourself.

But Jesus is clear – yes most will reject you – **but** God has His people – and if we are faithful – some will welcome the message of peace.

If we don't keep knocking – we won't find them.

Our task is to keep going and sharing and proclaiming.

And we are not to be surprised that most call us fools and bigots and intellectual sell-outs. We should never be surprised that the world tells us we are on the wrong side of justice and equality and history and science.

The message of Jesus divides the hearts of men.

The gospel does not allow a neutral response.

It is all or nothing.

You embrace it with everything you have – or you dismiss it as foolishness.

You have seen this.

You have shared the gospel – looked into their eyes and seen the response – they wonder how someone can believe this stuff. It seems such utter foolishness.

But, from time to time you share the mists part and the light grows and they say – tell me more of Jesus.

But there is one final truth:



We are sent with a message that divides men's eternities 12-20

What is the motivation to keep going out there as lambs among wolves?

The motivation is that the eternal destiny of those men and women depend on it.

Have you had the emails, the advertisements, the spam calls telling you that if you want to change your life – invest in Bitcoin?

They tell you – it has already gone from 7 cents to \$22,000 and it is only getting started. Don't miss the boat again.

Maybe. Maybe not.

Even if Bitcoin goes to a million dollars – it can only buy you a bigger house and better car – it can't save your soul.

But if the claims of Jesus and His gospel are true – then all of your sins and failures can be washed away – there is hope beyond the grave – there is eternal life.

This is the reason we cannot let discouragement and disappointment shutter our mouths – is because the gospel is too important.

Eternity – heaven and hell literally hang on the response to our gospel.

The kingdom draws near – the offer of eternal life is made – and men accept it or reject it.

First, Jesus deals with those who reject the truth of His gospel. He does not soften the blow – He tells it like it is.

Verse 12:

I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Really? Worse than Sodom?

Sodom – Idolatrous, homosexual, sinful Sodom. Destroyed by fire and brimstone Sodom.

Will those Sodomites be better off on the day of judgment than any that reject the messengers sent by Jesus?

Yes.

If the kingdom comes that close and they reject the gospel – their condemnation is great indeed.

Jesus makes this same point again with some incredibly strong words.

Verses 13-14:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities who were proverbial in their wickedness and idolatry and opposition to God. They were up there with Sodom.

They were denounced by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos and Zechariah.

The prophet Ezekiel took up laments against them in chapters 26-28. Listen to a few verses that describe the fate of these cities.

Ezekiel 26:3-21:

Behold, I am against you, O Tyre ... I will make you go down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the world below, among ruins from of old, with those who go down to the pit. ... I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more. Though you be sought for, you will never be found again, declares the Lord GOD.

You wonder how much worse it could be.

Sidon fared no better. Ezekiel 28:22-23:

Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon. (You will be) a bare rock. A place for the spreading of nets. Never to be rebuilt. Going down to the pit, to dwell in the world below. A dreadful end. Sought for, but never found. Pestilence, blood, falling by the sword.

Again that sounds awfully bad.

Yet, Jesus says that in the final judgment it will be more bearable for Sodom and Tyre and Sidon than for those who fail to listen – like Chorazin and Bethsaida!

What does He mean?

It is possible Jesus is just using hyperbole to show how bad it is – but I think in some way their fate will be worse because they rejected a greater revelation – the truth about Jesus.

Sodom and Tyre and Sidon rejected a message of a Messiah to come – but those in Jesus' day and in our day – we reject the truth that the Messiah has come.

These towns had Jesus' messengers performing miracles in Jesus' name and carrying the message of Jesus – and still – they turned away.

Jesus Himself performed miracle after miracle of untold power – and preached in and around Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida. He performed miracles that identified Him as Messiah – yet they refused to accept Him as the Messiah.

These Jewish cities awaiting a Jewish Messiah – had seen the miracles – heard the teaching and still rejected Him.

This means that on the final day of judgment – even Sodom – even Tyre and Sidon – cities renowned for wickedness – even they will be better off than Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida.

In Ezekiel – we are expressly told that Tyre will go down to the pit and dwell in the world below. They are going to hell.

So how much worse can it be for Sodom and Chorazin and Bethsaida? What worse punishment can there be than hell?

I don't understand all the nuances of this – but a little later in Luke 12 – Jesus tells a parable about a servant who knew his master's will and did not do it who receives **greater** punishment than one who did not know his will. Both were punished – but because one knew more – he received more lashes.

While we aren't told exactly how – it seems that the more revelation you have – the more you know about Jesus – the more truth you have – and to reject this truth – this greater light – somehow brings greater punishment in eternity.

The tribesman in outer Ghana who never hears the gospel is still condemned eternally for his sin against his conscience and the general revelation he has.

But, if someone in Holland Park has us knock on their door, hears the gospel, contemplates it – then after the kingdom draws that close – it came right to their door – and they choose the world over Christ – somehow their punishment eternally is greater.

Verse 15:

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

Capernaum – the hub of Jesus' ministry – where so many miracles were performed, where so many lessons were taught – and so few repented – their condemnation is great.

What does this mean for us?

Australia has churches in every city.

It is legal to preach the gospel.

Shopping centres play hymns at Christmas time.

The majority of people in our land have heard some version of the gospel.

It makes our rejection all the worse.

Verse 16:

The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.

Jesus makes it clear how all this ties together.

We go forth with the gospel of the kingdom. We go in the name of the King.

When the King's messengers draw near – the kingdom draws near.

If anyone accepts them – they accept Christ who sends them and His Father. But – to reject them is to reject the Christ who sent them and God the Father.

To reject you – is to reject God and His Son.

This is sobering. Sobering for everyone in our city who has heard the gospel – at school, at church, from a neighbour – those given a Gideon Bible – those who come to a church and heard the truth – and then in the studied face of all of this grace – they choose to reject it – their condemnation is greater.

So pray hard. Plead for souls. Heaven and hell hang in the balance.

And what is more, if anyone claims Christ, then chooses to turn from Christ to sin and the world – they sin against the greatest light possible – if they refuse to repent – their condemnation is unthinkable.

Jesus tells us this so we know the seriousness of rejecting the gospel – not to deter us from taking the gospel.

We have to look at our world and see fields ripe for the harvest. We have to see lost souls sheep without a shepherd. Sinners doomed before a holy God.

The King sends us:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

We have to pray hard – plead hard – live godly – and keep sharing.

And we have to know that heaven and hell ride on our words.

And here is the real encouragement – to keep sharing – some hear the gospel – and respond.

There is no buzz like seeing a lost soul saved.

Look at Luke 10:17:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”

Jesus sent them out with the gospel – the words of life that can save souls.

They came back – but what really got them amped up was this power – the gospel triumphed – even over the power of demons.

But Jesus said – what you should be amped up about is the salvation of men’s souls.

Verses 18-20:

And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

The miracles are nothing in and of themselves. They demonstrate that the King has come – Satan will be defeated – salvation will come.

The authority to tread on serpents and scorpions – proclaims the coming of the One who will crush the Serpent’s head. The One who will free men from the slavery of sin and save their souls has come.

Here is the truth – Lamb versus wolf actually ends with the absolute triumph of the Lamb.

We are sent as lambs among wolves – all they can do is kill us – nothing can hurt us eternally – our names are written in heaven.

Rejoice in this – the coming of the King – the defeat of Satan and that your names are written in heaven.

The greatest miracle of all is that anyone is ever saved.

Consider a few of the miracles necessary to save you.

- God had to become man.
- The God man had to die.
- Death had to be conquered.
- The gospel had to reach Australia.
- And perhaps the greatest miracle of all – your hard, unbelieving heart had to be broken.

But God is in the business of miracles.

It might look like evangelism is impossible.

They don't want to hear.

They tell us we are on the wrong side of history.

But – Jesus says – what matter is that we are on the right side of eternity.

The Lamb wins – so the lambs of Christ win.

When Jesus says – I am sending you out as lambs among wolves – we might paraphrase that – I am sending you out as lambs of the Lamb among wolves – and as Revelation makes clear – the Lamb and His lambs ultimately triumph.

Not necessarily in this life – but in eternity.

So – never forget – the gospel we bear is what enables other names to be written in heaven.

That is the encouragement that should keep us sharing. Most wolves will refuse to listen – but God has His people – and some will listen – and the kingdom will grow.

A little later – in Luke 13:18-19:

Jesus said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

Jesus came into a world that hated Him – opposed Him – and finally killed Him.

But His resurrection inspired these ones He sent into the world to take the gospel to the outermost parts.

Yes, they were lambs among wolves. The task was daunting.

But Jesus will build His church.

They were persecuted, imprisoned and killed.

Few listened.

But they had the power of God. They were faithful. They told others.

They kept looking around at the fields white for harvest – and they took up the sickle of the gospel and went to work.

And Samaria heard the gospel. And Syria heard the gospel. And Asia Minor. And Africa. And Europe. And the Americas. And Australia.

But the very fact that Jesus has not returned means the job is not done.

So now, the gospel sits with us – you and me. And the Lord of the harvest calls to you and to me:

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.

I know it isn't easy. Few want to hear. We are lambs among wolves. The cost is great.

Our parliament passes laws opposed to God.

Our friends don't want to listen.

They think we are fools.

I know every Christmas we share the real reason for the season and people snigger.

But we can't let that stop us.

We hold in our hands the words of eternal life. Heaven and hell. The very truths that saved us.

Because of Jesus the names of sinners **can** be written in heaven. Because of Jesus, we are saved and we can see others saved.

Our task is not easy – but it is the only thing that truly matters. So keep sharing – keep praying – keeping bringing the kingdom of God near – and let the motivation that we bear the words of eternal life inspire you to persevere.

And know this – ultimately – it is not the wolves that triumph – it is the Lamb – and those who are in the Lamb. His kingdom will come and those whose names are written in heaven will reign.