

THE RADICAL PRAYER - PART 4

Encountering Radical Challenges

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Luke 10:3
Subject:	What we experience when we are thrown out in the harvest
Complement:	we feel like lambs among wolves.
Exegetical idea:	When we are thrown out into the harvest, we feel like lambs among wolves.
Homiletical idea:	Jesus will never leave you or forsake you!
Purpose:	To warn my hearers about the challenges that lie before them when they are thrown out into the harvest.

Introduction

Have you prayed the radical prayer? Because the harvest is great, but the laborers are few, Jesus appeals to us to pray a radical prayer: to cry out to the Lord of the harvest to throw out laborers into His harvest and to give Him permission to begin with us!

Whenever you pray this radical prayer, giving the Lord of the harvest permission to throw you out into His harvest field, get ready for the adventure of your life! However, I must warn you that you will also encounter radical challenges.

Let's turn to the words of Jesus that we have been studying together. Luke 10, beginning with verse 2. "....." But then Jesus gives this warning, recorded in Luke 10:3: "Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves." Lambs among wolves! That sounds dangerous. Jesus is painfully honest with us. When you cry out to the Lord of the harvest to throw you out into His harvest field, you need to be prepared to face radical challenges. We will discover in our study today that those radical challenges will be both internal and external.

An immediate internal challenge that many of us must confront is our lack of maturity and experience in the work of God. We are just "lambs". Sheep aren't known to be the most intelligent or the strongest members of the animal kingdom. I doubt if anyone here got up this

morning and said, “I’m feeling as strong as a sheep today!” Or “I’m feeling as courageous as a sheep today!” Or “I’m feeling as wise as a sheep today!” We talk about being as strong as an....OX. Or as courageous as a....LION. Or as wise as an OWL. I never figured that one out. But I’m sure that an owl is wiser than a sheep! And the image that Jesus uses isn’t even a fully mature sheep. He describes those thrown out into the harvest as lambs. Weak, immature lambs. It’s true that we have heard the promise of Jesus when He said, “Greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father” (John 14:12). We believe that promise in theory, but many of us have not yet tested that promise in real life. When you give the Lord of the harvest permission to throw you out into His harvest field, you may come face to face with the painful realization that you are just a lamb. Joining the Lord of the harvest in His harvest field is a radical challenge for lambs.

Wilbur was just a lamb when he gave the Lord of the harvest permission to throw him out into His harvest field. Wilbur had been a Christian all of his life, but he was immature and inexperienced as a worker in the Lord’s harvest field. In March, 2002, Wilbur was invited to preach a series of sermons in Kenya, Africa. His reply was terse and to the point: “You know I don’t preach!” He could have said, “I’m just a lamb! Choose a mature sheep like Billy Graham!” Surely God would choose someone more experienced, more spiritually mature than him. Wilbur decided to ask God for a sign. After all, Gideon had asked for a sign to know that it was indeed God who was directing him to lead the army of Israel. So Wilbur knelt in prayer and said, “God, I have never asked for a sign before, but I need to know that this is what you want me to do.” Immediately, these words came to Wilbur’s mind: “Why are you asking for a sign? I have asked you to go into all the world and I will be with you!” The answer was so clear. All

this 70+ year-old “lamb” could say was “Thank you, Lord.”

A few weeks later, Wilbur e-mailed the local coordinator in Kenya and asked, “How many do you expect will be attending the meetings?” He was shocked by the response. They were expecting approximately 5000 people during the week and 10,000+ on the weekends. When Wilbur read those numbers, he was confronted again with the painful realization that he was just a “lamb”. He said to his wife, “There is no way that I could face that many people and preach those sermons.” Wilbur wanted to serve God. He was willing to pray the radical prayer, giving the Lord of the harvest permission to throw him out into His harvest field. But Wilbur was struggling with the radical internal challenge of being an immature and inexperienced lamb. Many of us can relate to Wilbur’s sense of inadequacy.

Perhaps more radical than the internal challenges that we will face when we are thrown out as lambs into the harvest are the external challenges: “Behold, I send you out as lambs *among wolves*.” Not only are you sent out as a lamb, but you are sent out as lambs among wolves. You will face adversaries when the Lord of the harvest throws you out into His harvest field. You will face predators. These adversaries are not mild-mannered or timid. They are wolves. On another occasion, Jesus describes these wolves as “ravenous” (Matthew 7:15). The apostle Paul calls them “savage” (Acts 20:29). And notice that there is not just one wolf. Jesus said, “I send you out as lambs among wolves.” There are many wolves. These predators hunt in packs. They look for vulnerable targets and seek to destroy them.

The challenge is even more radical due to the fact that you are sent out *among* these ravenous, savage predators. You are in the midst of them. It is not the nature of lambs to go out looking for trouble. Lambs do not go wolf spotting or wolf hunting. It is the wolves who are

hunting for lambs. When you give the Lord of the harvest permission to throw you out into His harvest field, there will be times when you will find yourself surrounded by these savage, ravenous wolves.

To meet these radical challenges, both internal and external, you must heed the counsel of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 10:16. When Jesus sent out the Twelve, He said to them, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” The Greek word that is used here, translated “wise”, refers to practical wisdom, discernment, prudence. It is the same wisdom that Jesus calls for at the end of His sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 7:24) This same Greek word is frequently found in the Greek translation of the Book of Proverbs. Such practical wisdom helps us to know when to be silent (Proverbs 11:12), when to withdraw (Proverbs 14:16), and how to diffuse angry words (Proverbs 15:1).

You need practical wisdom when you are thrown out as a lamb among wolves. But what does Jesus mean when He says, “Be wise as serpents?” In the ancient Near East, the serpent was considered a symbol of wisdom and cunning. Serpents are alert and cautious. They do not seek unnecessary contact or conflict with a predator. They do not provoke attacks.

Jesus was a perfect example of a lamb among wolves. He was the lamb of God, and Satan knew it. And Satan attacked Jesus with every weapon in his evil arsenal. Jesus was surrounded by ravenous wolves. But Jesus demonstrated wisdom in His interactions with His adversaries. Many of the religious leaders were continually looking for ways to trap Jesus and to destroy Him. He manifested a wisdom that comes from heaven by avoiding confrontation. On many occasions, Jesus realized that if He spoke the truth openly, His enemies would pounce on Him, accuse Him of blasphemy, and seek to destroy Him. Therefore, He taught in parables so

that His adversaries would see but not perceive, and hear but not understand (Matthew 13:14).

Immediately after Jesus cleansed the Temple, the religious leaders tried to trap Him with this question: “By what authority are You doing these things?” (Matthew 21:23) If Jesus had answered them with plain speech, they would have surely stoned Him for blasphemy. It was true that Jesus had cleansed the Temple by His own authority as the Son of God, the Word made flesh. But He showed wisdom in His response to the religious leaders who were confronting Him: “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: ‘The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?’” (Matthew 21:24-25) In other words, “You answer my question and I will answer yours.” The wise response of Jesus threw the proverbial “ball” back into their court. Now, the religious leaders were facing a dilemma of their own. If they answered that John’s baptism was from heaven, they would be speaking condemnation upon themselves because they had refused to listen to John. If they answered that John’s baptism was from men, the multitude would mob them because John was widely accepted as a prophet of God. After conferring together, the religious leaders came up with this “wise” answer: “We do not know.” Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” (Matthew 21:27)

You need similar practical wisdom when dealing with the savage and ravenous wolves that will inevitably surround you. But remember that such wisdom only comes from above. James reminds us that “if anyone of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all *liberally* and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). The Lord of the Harvest does not rebuke His lambs for their lack of maturity and experience. Rather, He encourages you to seek the practical wisdom that you will surely need to meet the radical challenges that you will

encounter. And He offers to give you that practical wisdom liberally when you ask Him.

When you are thrown out into the Lord's harvest field as a lamb among wolves, you also need to be as harmless as a dove. The Greek word translated "harmless" literally means "unmixed". The same word is used to describe pure gold. Laborers in God's harvest field are to demonstrate moral purity and integrity

In the ancient Near East, the dove was a symbol of purity and faithfulness. You are called in your interaction with others, including the savage and ravenous wolves, to be above reproach in speech and conduct. The apostle Paul admonishes us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Laborers in the Lord's harvest field should never adopt the ethics or mimic the behaviors of their adversaries. Like the dove, you are a symbol of peace, hope, and the presence of God's Holy Spirit in a world that is filled with savage, ravenous wolves.

As I was thinking of this image of the lamb being thrown out into the harvest, in the midst of wolves, I asked myself this question; What is the lamb's greatest resource? It's not her strength. It's not his courage. The lamb's greatest resource is the shepherd! Every lamb needs to remember these words of the Shepherd, recorded in Deut 31:6, "Be strong and of good courage. Do not fear or be afraid of them. For the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

Never forget this vital truth: The lamb's greatest resource is the shepherd. When the Lord is your shepherd, you shall not want! When the Lord is your shepherd, He will enable you to lie down in green pastures, even in the midst of ravenous wolves. When the Lord is your

shepherd, He will lead you beside still waters. When the Lord is your shepherd, He will restore your soul. When the Lord is your shepherd, He will lead you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. When the Lord is your shepherd, you will fear no evil even when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Why? Because the Good Shepherd is with you!

It's true. When you give the Lord of the harvest permission to throw you out into His harvest, you will face radical challenges. Those challenges will be internal and external. But you can have the blessed assurance that Jesus is with you. Jesus will never leave you or forsake you.

Perhaps you are wondering how a lamb like Wilbur survived after he was thrown out into the far away country of Kenya. In spite of internal and external challenges, Wilbur faithfully preached night after night, and when he gave his first invitation for people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, over 400 people came forward! He was totally amazed! The final weekend of the meetings, attendance was estimated to be over 25,000 and nearly 2,000 individuals made commitments to become fully devoted followers of Jesus!

Wilbur learned by experience a lesson that we all need to learn. When we give the Lord of the harvest permission to throw us out into His harvest, we may be thrown out as a lamb among wolves, we may face radical challenges that are both internal and external, but we are not alone. Jesus is with us. Jesus will never leave us or forsake us!

When our son Christopher was a in high school, I think he was still in 9th grade, he went with some friends to downtown Chattanooga to sing some Christian songs and talk to people about Jesus. They didn't have any experience with street witnessing. They were just lambs. But their hearts were willing, and God blessed their laborers. Part way through the afternoon,

Christopher needed to use the restroom, so he went into the IMAX theater lobby and found a men's bathroom. While he was there in the men's bathroom, an older teenager came in and began to verbally attack him. "I think it's stupid to love Jesus!" Christopher was feeling a little intimidated. All of a sudden, the door of one of the toilet stalls opened, and a very large man walked out. "I love Jesus!" he said! The older teenager looked startled and left. Now he was the one who felt intimidated! When Christopher told us the story, there was a sparkle in his eye. He had never met the tall stranger before, and he has never met him since. But I have no doubt that God used that tall man to remind Jesus that even though you're just a lamb among wolves, you don't need to be afraid! Jesus will be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you!

Isn't that good news? I hope that you will prayerfully consider how you will respond to the appeal of Jesus. Will you pray this radical prayer? I assure you that your life will be changed forever! If you have already prayed this radical prayer, keep praying. It's not a one time commitment. It's a day by day commitment: Lord of the harvest, I earnestly beg you to throw out laborers into Your harvest, and You have my permission to begin with me." And pray with the blessed assurance that Jesus will never leave you or forsake you! Be strong and of good courage. Do not fear or be afraid of them for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you!