

“The Missionary Life”
Matthew 10:5-11:1
February 18, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

Having been recruited by Jesus as his disciples (10:1-4), the twelve now find out what they have signed up for. They are to be missionaries, those sent out to announce the good news of the kingdom. But perhaps things are not to be what they would have expected or hoped. This missionary life will apparently involve some suffering. They are going to be sheep among wolves, sent by Jesus himself into such danger. In some ways, following Jesus is like getting married—you don’t really know what you’re getting into until after you’ve made the commitment. But also like marriage, you will never taste of its joys until a commitment is made. Missionary work continues to be marked by suffering and danger.

Two-hundred and six years ago tomorrow, on February 19, 1812, Adoniram Judson set sail from America to India and later Burma (now Myanmar), where he served as a pioneer missionary to that Buddhist nation. He set sail with his wife, Ann, whom he had married only two weeks prior to their departure. Their missionary service to Christ was marked by significant suffering. When Judson asked Ann’s father for his permission to marry his daughter, his request foreshadowed this suffering.

I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?

He said “yes”, and Ann’s dad never saw his daughter again. Ann Judson died about 14 years after their departure from America. But that wasn’t the end of the story. The Judsons were a significant part of seeing the gospel take root in this land, and today there are thousands of churches and hundreds of thousands of Christians there. Let’s look now at the life of a missionary, which is actually the life of every Christian since the Church is called to be a missionary Church.

I. A Life of Trust

As God's people, we are a people of faith, called to trust God as we proclaim a message inviting faith. Jesus told his disciples to go out proclaiming, **"The kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (10:7). There is a time coming, and one that has already begun to arrive with the coming of Jesus, when God shows up to establish his reign of peace and justice. The disciples are sent out both to declare this message through their words and to demonstrate it through kingdom deeds of healing and casting out demons. The rest of the Bible makes it clear that the proper response to this declaration of good news is repentance and faith.

As the disciples went forth declaring this message and inviting a response of faith, they were to live lives of trust in God. They were to take no money for their needs, nor even some basic necessities such as sandals and a staff. The Bible doesn't teach that every missionary or Christian worker must take a vow of poverty. The apostle Paul would sometimes work bi-vocationally as a tentmaker to provide for his needs, and at others times would accept money from churches for his needs. He also taught that Christian workers should be paid for their work, quoting from the Old Testament that **"The laborer deserves his wages"** (1 Tim. 5:18). But what is required of every Christian worker, and every Christian for that matter, is to live a life of trust in God. It is the nature of the kingdom.

It is easy to see the disciples' need to trust God as they were sent out without money and other resources. But it would also be the case that those welcoming them would have to trust God. Imagine having a barefoot stranger showing up at your door asking to stay with you. Somehow, Jesus went ahead of his disciples and provided a welcome for them in every village. And those who trusted God enough to welcome these disciples never regretted it, because God gave the gift of peace to that home (v. 13).

As I spoke with the missionaries who were here at our Missions Conference, I was struck by the fact that all of them in various ways were in places of having to trust God. With some, it was for financial support that still needed to be raised. For others, it was uncertainty about the future or just the difficulty of the work to which God had called them. We too are called to trust God by our welcome of them as we partner with them both financially and in prayer. That's the way of the kingdom, where life is more like the wild, unpredictable river than the calm and predictable canal.

II. A Life of Suffering

In verses 16-25, Jesus makes it clear that he is sending them into a life of suffering. **“I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves”** (v. 16). Wolves are predators before whom sheep are defenseless. Sheep are slow, awkward and weak. Wolves are fast, aggressive and strong. Sheep do not stand a chance in the presence of wolves. Yet, surprisingly, Jesus says that he sends his sheep to be in the midst of wolves, in the heart of danger. It would seem that the mission of the church is going to go forward by going backward. Jesus gives some details about that in verse 18. **“You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.”** It happened exactly like that with the apostle Paul. Time after time, he was given an audience with powerful leaders only because of his suffering. He even went to the heart of political power, the city of Rome, where he testified to many in Caesar’s very own household. But he was taken there as a prisoner, to stand trial and answer charges brought against him.

In 1562, the French reformer Theodore Beza made a famous reply to the King of Navarre. “Sire, it is truly the lot of the Church of God, for which I speak, to endure blows and not to strike them. But may it please you to remember that [the church] is an anvil which has worn out many hammers.”

Adoniram Judson, the missionary to Burma that I mentioned earlier, knew something of suffering. In 1824, war broke out between Great Britain and Burma, and Judson was arrested and imprisoned for the duration of the war simply because he was a foreigner who came from an English background. He was treated so brutally during this captivity that most of his fellow prisoners died as a result of their cruel treatment. For long stretches of time, he was hung upside down by his feet.

The apostle Paul experienced much suffering in his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. He summarized the purposes of God like this: God’s **“power is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Cor. 12:9). The history of missions could well carry the title “Advance through Storm.” It is a story of many setbacks, many of them making no sense at all, but somehow the gospel seems to advance through them.

Jesus tells his disciples how they are to respond to this reality of suffering. **“Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”** (v. 16). They are not to naively walk right into danger, but are to be as shrewd as possible in attempting to avoid such danger. Snakes seem to know that people do not like them and respond by hiding and avoiding people in any way they can. Jesus commands similar behavior. But one thing Jesus’ followers are not to do is to out-wolf the wolves. That is, we are not to answer the power of our enemies with power of our own. We are to be as harmless and innocent as doves.

III. A Life of Joyful Surrender

Jesus makes it quite clear that following him is very different from merely admiring him. In a statement that would be completely inappropriate if he weren't God, he says that we must love him more than father or mother, son or daughter. And he adds, **"whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"** (38-39). In other words, the self-centered life ends in misery while the Christ-centered life in joy.

So we surrender our lives to Jesus, much like soldiers do in the army. Our nephew came for a visit this past week, and he is an officer in the U.S Army who is about to be deployed. When someone asked him about his plans for the future, he replied, "I will go where I'm told to go." That is something of the surrender we offer to Jesus.

The paragraph before this one speaks somewhat of the benefits of such surrender to Jesus. It releases us from all fear. **"So have no fear of them,"** meaning the powerful opponents of Christ and his people. We are released from this fear through a proper fear of God. **"Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"** (v. 28). But then Jesus is quick to add comforting language of God's care for us. Sparrows are of little value to people, both because of their abundance and because of the paltry amount of meat they provide. They may be sold for a mere pittance by humans, but God keeps track of them all, so that not a single one falls to the ground without his knowledge. Human hairs are also abundant, with the average human having about 100,000 on their heads. God numbers them and keeps track of them all. We number things we value. All of you could tell me how many children you have, how many grandchildren you have, and for some of you, how many great-grandchildren you have. God values us so much that he numbers something we don't even bother to number, the hairs on our head.

How do we square this with the warning of verses 32-33 that frightens so many? **"So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."** Are there any of us who have not denied Jesus before men at times, even if only through our silence when we should have spoken up? And didn't Peter do the very thing Jesus speaks of here, denying the Lord before a little girl who represented no threat to him at all? I think Peter's denial of the Lord is a key to understanding this. It is true that he denied the Lord, but then he acknowledged the grace and mercy of the Lord by coming to Jesus for restoration.

Let me say this differently. Before we can acknowledge Jesus before men, we must acknowledge Jesus before our own conscience and the accusations of the devil. That means that when we do deny Jesus before men, as Peter did, we don't take that into despair but into hope in Jesus' great mercy. It is only as we

do that that we will begin to have the courage to acknowledge Jesus before men.

IV. A Life of Rewards

There are so many rewards for the servant of Jesus. I'm encouraged by the last paragraph of this chapter as it teaches that these rewards come not just to the missionaries sent out by Jesus, but also to those who receive them by supporting them. As a matter of fact, it teaches that the one receiving them will receive the very same reward. **"The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward"** (v. 41).

I'm thankful that this passage comes just one week after our annual missions conference. As we are praying about our faith promises in support of missions, it is such an encouragement to read this passage. Our support of missions is a way to enter somewhat into the suffering and weakness that goes with missions. And we do so with the promise of Jesus for reward. That reward is not a financial one in this life, but something so much better. It is the reward of knowing Jesus through drawing near to him.

Someone might say, "But I have very little to offer." Notice the next verse. **"And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."** The "little ones," I think, are the little missionaries, so despised by man. Even those who are so poor that all they can give is a cup of cold water will be rewarded upon doing so. They give what they can and are rewarded greatly.

Several years ago, a young girl in our congregation made a faith promise. Though she had no job and no income of any kind, she felt compelled to take this step of faith. It was a large amount of money for someone with no income, but God seemed to provide in bits and pieces through the year. Even so, by the time she got to the end of the year, she was still a little short. With no hesitation at all, she gave without regret most of her Christmas money to fulfill that promise. Jesus is saying here that it's not the amount of money that's important, but the heart of faith that believes in the reality of the kingdom and our place in bringing about that kingdom.

CONCLUSION:

Years ago, Francis Schaeffer preached a sermon with the title "No Little People, No Little Places." With God, there are no little people and no little places. There are just people and places, all of whom need Jesus.

Small Group Discussion Questions
Matthew 10:5-11:1

1. Share a story where a missionary you know of was required to trust God. Perhaps it was a financial need, a family need, a ministry need or some personal issue.
2. As God's people, we are a people of faith, called to trust God as we proclaim a message inviting a response of faith. What area of your life right now is one where you feel the need to trust God?
3. How might God use the times when we trust him to have a good missionary purpose? Can you think of any examples of this, either in your own life or that of another?
4. This missionary life is also a life of suffering. We are sheep among wolves who are told to be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. What is not allowed for us is to answer the power of the wolves with power of our own. We are not to out-wolf the wolves. Can you think of ways that Christianity may at times have failed in this regard?
5. Sometimes suffering makes no sense to us, especially in the case of a missionary who has given up so much to serve in this way. Can you think of missionary stories where they have been called to such suffering?
6. Verse 33 says, "whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." How do we square that verse with Peter's denial of the Lord?
7. What does it mean to take your cross and follow Jesus (v. 38)? What does that look like in your life?
8. Hospitality is a major theme in this chapter, seen in the word "receive" as used of one's response to God's missionaries. What does it mean to receive a missionary?
9. How does your heart respond to the idea that the person receiving a missionary gets the same reward as the missionary (v. 40-42)? Do you see any opportunity to apply that to your life?