

Luke 10:1-12

"Lambs Among Wolves"

March 30, 2025

1. Intro

- a. In December of 2018, Pastor Wang Yi, the shepherd of Early Rain Covenant Church in China, was arrested for speaking out against the Chinese government's oppression of the Christian Church
 - i. Pastor Wang was once a well-respected intellectual in his country
 1. He was a university teacher, an influential public scholar, and even an accomplished poet
 - a. But one day in 2005, Wang Yi fell off of a ladder in the library while trying to get a book
 - i. And as he lay on the ground, alone and bleeding profusely, he says that he was overcome with an inexplicable awe of the Lord
 - ii. Looking back on that moment, Pastor Wang wrote that this actual, PHYSICAL fall represented for him the spiritual fall that he was so desperately in need of
 1. He needed to descend from the high place of knowledge and intellectualism, to a low place of dust
 - a. And so, in the days that followed, Wang Yi surrendered his heart to Christ
 - ii. In 2011, Wang Yi was ordained as Pastor of the church he and his family were members of
 1. He and his family left the nice house that the University had provided for him, willingly moving to an apartment where most of his neighbors lived in poverty
 - a. His only mode of transportation was a cheap electric bicycle that he would ride around town, strategically speaking to others about Christ
 - i. Pastor Wang forsook many of the worldly desires that everyone around him was chasing, even as his former colleagues mocked and ridiculed him
 - b. And in response to their mocking, he said, "God has given me three treasures: the freedom to move at any time, the possibility that I might go to jail, and the promise that I will return to heaven at any time."
 - i. I wonder if we would look at those three things as "treasures?"
 - iii. In 2017, the Chinese Government issued an order called the *Regulations on Religious Affairs*, through which it began to crack down on the growing number of house churches being planted across China
 1. Either come under the authority and the censure of the STATE-RUN church, or you will go to jail
 - a. Pastor Wang, this man who was once a well-known servant of the state, now began to speak out against the state on behalf of the TRUE church
 - i. And, as it was promised, in 2018 Pastor Wang Yi received his treasure of being arrested and imprisoned for his faith
 - ii. Pastor Wang is still imprisoned to this day
 1. He's only allowed limited communication with anyone in the outside world
 2. He's given moldy rice for most of his meals
 3. And he spends most of his days in solitary confinement

- a. He has two more years left on his sentence, that is, if the Chinese government doesn't decide to extend it for his continued non-compliance
 - iv. Pastor Wang Yi serves as a modern-day example for us, that we all, as followers of Christ, are called to live as lambs among wolves
 - 1. We'll return to Pastor Wang's story later
 - a. Let us now turn to our passage for this morning...

2. Luke 10:1-12

- a. *¹After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ²And 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. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹'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.' ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."*

3. Verse 1 of Luke 10 is such a great insight for us into Jesus' earthly ministry

- a. We tend to focus much of our attention in the Church upon the twelve Apostles, those who Jesus specifically chose to be his closest students
 - i. But there were actually MANY true followers of Jesus by this time in his ministry
 - 1. Back in Luke 8, we saw that there were many women who accompanied Jesus and the twelve, providing for Jesus and the rest out of their own means
 - a. But here in verse 1, we see that there are also now SEVENTY-TWO others, whom Jesus will commission and send out to prepare the way for his coming
 - i. Now, we know that when the hour of Jesus' arrest comes, the vast majority of them will scatter
 - 1. But Luke reminds us in Acts chapter 1 that they soon regrouped in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection and ascension
 - a. And the company of believers in Acts 1 now numbered around a hundred and twenty brothers!
 - 2. The Twelve were certainly given a place of prominence, and even authority
 - a. But, the reality is, Jesus' following of true believers was beginning to grow
 - ii. And so, Jesus sends out the seventy-two, in groups of two, with the very same mission and message he had given to the Twelve back at the beginning of chapter 9...
 - 1. Go from town to town
 - a. Heal the sick
 - b. Proclaim the Kingdom
 - c. And prepare the people for my arrival
 - b. And he sends them out with these words of encouragement...
 - i. *²The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*
 - 1. This would have been a FANTASTIC revelation of the Kingdom on two different fronts for these followers...
 - a. The first is knowing that the harvest is plentiful

- i. Jesus tells them that there are MANY throughout Judea and the surrounding regions for the laborers of the Kingdom to bring in
 - 1. So they were given this great PROMISE of MUCH potential fruit
 - b. And in addition to that, Jesus revealed to them that God Himself is LORD over all the harvest
 - i. HE is the Vinedresser of John 15
 - 1. HE is the one who will remove fruitless branches from the Vine of Christ
 - 2. HE is the Lord over all the harvest!
 - ii. I wonder if, in hearing Jesus' words regarding the "Lord of the Harvest," if they thought back to the story of Boaz in the book of Ruth?
 - 1. Boaz was the kind and compassionate lord who oversaw all the harvest being done in his own fields
 - 2. Boaz was the fair and equitable lord who treated all his servants with care and generosity
 - 3. Boaz was the loving and gracious lord who blessed the lowliest of them all, the young Moabite widow named Ruth
 - a. Boaz, the lord of his harvest, points our gaze forward to the Father, the Lord of THE harvest, who is overseeing ALL of the reaping into His Kingdom
 - 2. These two realities were meant to serve as encouragement to the seventy-two...
 - a. If they KNEW that there was MUCH fruit out there just waiting to be gathered...
 - b. And if they KNEW that God Himself is Lord of the Harvest, and He is a good and wise and kind and compassionate Lord
 - i. Then what did they have to lose?!
 - 1. So Jesus tells the seventy-two, "Pray EARNESTLY to the Lord of the Harvest for more workers... there is an ABUNDANCE of fruit to gather in!"
 - ii. Jesus gives his disciples these words of encouragement
 - 1. But then he also grounds them with these words of caution in verse 3...
- c. Luke 10:3
 - i. *³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.*
 - 1. For the reality is, as Christ is sowing his SEEDS in the Kingdom, Satan, the evil one, is also sowing his WEEDS
 - a. This is the purpose of Jesus' *Parable of the Weeds* in Matthew 13
 - i. Until the day that Jesus returns to this earth, Satan will continue his efforts to thwart the expansion of the Kingdom
 - 1. He will continue to sow his weeds
 - a. And many of these weeds will become wolves
 - 2. Wolves were a common predator in those days in the Middle East
 - a. The Arabian wolves that live in that region of the world are the smallest of the wolf species, but that doesn't make them any less dangerous
 - i. Due to the harsh conditions in much of the middle east, the Arabian wolf is extremely resilient
 - 1. They are able to live in regions where the temperature goes as high as 120 degrees

2. They are omnivorous eaters feeding on whatever meat they're closest to
 3. And they are the apex predators of the land, which means that their only real threat are humans keeping watch over their next meal
- ii. And in light of all of that, Jesus tells his disciples, I am sending you out as LAMBS in the midst of wolves
 1. Friends, from a worldly perspective, this is very poor shepherding, isn't it?
 - a. In the world, it is the wolves who secretly prowl among the lambs
 - i. The shepherd keeps the lambs safe
 - ii. The shepherd lays down his life to keep the lambs secure
 1. Jesus himself acknowledges this in John 10, as he condemns the hired hand who runs off in fear when the wolves come to attack the sheep
 2. It is Jesus who ALONE is the GOOD Shepherd who defends his flock with love and care
- iii. But here, in this verse, Jesus tells his flock, I am sending you OUT among the wolves
 1. I am sending you OUT of the comforts of the barn
 2. I am sending you OUT of the security of the sheepfold
 3. I am sending you OUT to walk among the wolves
 - a. Flip over to Matthew 10 in your Bibles, and we'll see how Jesus goes into even greater detail of what this will look like for his followers
- iv. In Matthew 10, verse 16, we read...
 1. *¹⁶"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²²and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."*
 - a. Who are the wolves that Jesus is sending his lambs out into?
 - i. The wolves will be the rulers of the synagogues
 - ii. The wolves will be governors and kings
 - iii. The wolves will be their own siblings
 - iv. The wolves will be their own fathers
 - v. The wolves will be their own children
 1. The wolves will be ALL who hear the disciples' message of Christ and his Kingdom...
 - a. And they HATE them for it
 - i. All because of the name of Jesus
 - v. So how does Jesus tell his disciples to respond?
 1. *"Be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves"*
 - a. Now, when we hear Jesus say, "Be wise as serpents," our mind immediately tends to jump to Satan as the serpent in the garden
 - i. And we get in our heads this image of one with a cunning and deceitful heart

- b. That's NOT AT ALL what Jesus is alluding to here
 - i. Snakes get a bad rap for being vicious and sneaky predators
 - ii. We're told here in Oklahoma to be extra careful this time of year if you go hiking out in the woods, because a copperhead could leap out and bite you at any moment
 - 1. But the reality is, most snakes are NOT aggressive
 - 2. Most snakes, if a human walks by, will either slither quickly away, or they'll remain so still you never even know they're there
 - a. In their "wisdom," most snakes try to avoid being quarrelsome
 - b. Most snakes don't put themselves in UNNECESSARY danger
 - c. Most snakes seek to avoid any traps set out for them
- vi. So, in that sense, Jesus tells them, "Be WISE as serpents, and be as innocent as doves"
 - 1. "And as the wolves seek to destroy you," Jesus says, "don't be anxious, for THE SPIRIT IS WITH YOU to help you know what to say to them"
 - a. And the one who endures to the end...
 - i. In other words, the one who remains faithful EVEN UNTO DEATH...
 - 1. Will be saved!
- vii. When Jesus says that he is sending the seventy-two out as "lambs among wolves," friends, THIS is what he means
- d. And so, back to Luke 10, Jesus tells the seventy-two in verse 4,
 - i. *"Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road..."*
 - 1. Now, we have to remember that this command is DESCRIPTIVE, not PRESCRIPTIVE
 - a. When the Apostle Paul went out into the mission field, he often carried with him the money from other churches that helped support much of his work
 - i. He surely carried a knapsack with him to hold his clothes and his writing materials
 - ii. I don't know that the Bible explicitly says this anywhere, but I'm pretty sure he wore sandals on all of his many miles of travelling
 - iii. And Paul most certainly could not be characterized as keeping his head down, walking briskly, and not greeting anyone on the road
 - 1. In fact, it's highly likely that Paul probably greeted just about EVERYONE on the road, for he relished his calling as an ambassador of Christ!
 - 2. So these commands from Jesus are NOT prescriptive for all Christians
 - a. These were simply DESCRIPTIVE for the task at hand
 - i. Jesus had a limited time left here on this earth
 - ii. His hour was soon to come
 - 1. And so, the seventy-two were sent out with a sense of URGENCY
 - 2. This was no modern-day mission trip, where the disciples would go and spend one day helping to build a church...
 - a. And then the next day playing with kids at a school...
 - b. And then the next day going on a safari to see a bunch of wildlife
 - b. This was an urgent mission

- i. Jesus had come to proclaim the Kingdom throughout the towns and villages of Judea during his short 3-and-a-half year ministry
 - 1. And then he would return to the right hand of the throne of God
 - ii. So these men needed to be solely focused on preparing these towns and villages for Jesus' arrival
- ii. And in keeping with the urgency of their message, Jesus gave them very specific directions regarding their response to how they were received...
 - 1. *⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹'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.' ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*
 - a. You can just sense in Jesus' words the need for both haste, and a singular focus
 - i. We're reminded of Jesus' words back in Luke 4:43, when a certain town tried to keep him from leaving, and he said to them,
 - 1. *⁴³"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."*
 - a. There were some towns that received Jesus
 - i. And in those towns, Jesus cast out demons, he healed the sick, and he proclaimed the message of the Kingdom
 - ii. And then he moved on to the next town
 - b. But there were also other towns, such as his very own hometown of Nazareth, who would NOT receive him
 - i. And so, for those towns, he would shake the dust off of his feet and move on
 - b. And this is how the seventy-two were to act as well
 - i. If you are received by a son of peace, stay at that person's house
 - 1. Eat and drink with them
 - 2. Be warm and gracious and engaging with them, as you heal the sick and preach the good news
 - 3. And let them know that I am on my way!
 - ii. But, if they do not receive you, get really angry with them, argue forcefully with them on social media, and yell at them all that they're all going to hell
 - 1. That's not what Jesus says, is it?
 - a. Shake the dust off your feet
 - b. Remind them that, whether they receive it or not, the Kingdom of God has come near
 - c. And then move on
 - i. Judgment for them certainly WILL come... and we'll look at that more in depth next week
 - ii. But judgment is not for you to deliver

- iii. You have been entrusted with one task and one task alone...
 - 1. Prepare the people for my arrival
 - 2. And if they don't receive you, then move on
 - a. And it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Sodom than it will be for that town
 - i. And again, we'll unpack that idea more deeply next week, as we look at verses 13-16
- 4. So, what then is the application for us today?
 - a. We'll spend the rest of our time looking at three key takeaways from this passage
- 5. The first is this: The harvest is STILL plentiful, and the laborers are STILL few
 - a. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the numbers do not lie
 - i. We've spoken many times before about the statistics surrounding the unreached people groups out in the world, but it is worth revisiting them briefly this morning
 - 1. As of February of 2024, the global population is around 8.1 BILLION people
 - a. These 8.1 billion people make up the approximately 17,200 people groups all around the world
 - i. These are what the Scriptures refer to as *ethne*
 - 1. It's the idea of certain groups with certain languages and certain customs, all living in certain areas
 - ii. When the book of Revelation speaks of a great multitude standing before the throne and before the Lamb, from "all tribes and all peoples and all languages," it is believed that these are all the various people groups out in the world
 - 1. And so, there are currently around 17,200 people groups across the globe
 - b. And 7,246 of them are still unreached by the Gospel
 - i. That is 41.8% of the world population who have yet to hear about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ
 - ii. 3.39 BILLION people who have yet to hear THE WORDS OF LIFE
 - 1. Is that not a MIND-BLOWING number???
 - a. Here we are, nearly two-thousand years after Jesus gave the Great Commission to "Go and make disciples of ALL nations..."
 - i. And we've barely made it to half of them?
 - c. Friends, the harvest remains ABUNDANTLY plentiful
 - 2. And yet, the laborers are STILL few
 - a. Again, just listen to the numbers...
 - i. Only 1 out of every 41,707 Protestant Christians goes as a missionary to the Unreached People Groups in our world
 - ii. Or, to look at it another way, there are over 57 THOUSAND Evangelical Christians for every ONE unreached people group
 - 1. Now, does that mean that, if you don't sign up to be a missionary to the unreached, then you don't count as a laborer in the Kingdom?
 - a. Absolutely not!!
 - iii. Local evangelism and outreach doesn't happen if there are not laborers right here at Forest Hills
 - iv. Discipleship and the spiritual training and equipping of the saints does not happen if there are not laborers right here in Sapulpa, OK

- v. Think about how quickly our church building would become unappealing to ANYONE if we didn't have laborers cleaning every week, mowing the lawn, or doing maintenance and repairs
 - 1. So there are COUNTLESS ways in which we can labor effectively WITHIN the Kingdom of God
 - 3. But when it comes to the GLOBAL fields that are ripe for the harvest, the numbers reveal the embarrassing truth...
 - a. The laborers are STILL few
 - i. So what is the application?
 - 1. Pray EARNESTLY to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into His harvest
 - 2. Pray EARNESTLY to see how the Lord wants YOU to play a role in the global harvest
 - a. As John Piper put it so well...
 - i. You can either GO, or you can SEND, or you can DISOBEY
 - 3. So which one will it be for you?
 - a. If the answer for you is clearly NOT to go, then what can you do to SEND?
 - i. Can you devote more of your finances towards giving toward reaching the unreached?
 - ii. Can you devote more of your time praying for the unreached, and for laborers to go out to them?
 - iii. Can you devote more of your time right here in Oklahoma, seeking ways to reach the unreached that God has brought to our doorsteps... through international students or refugees?
 - ii. Pray EARNESTLY to the Lord of the Harvest, for the harvest is STILL plentiful, and the laborers are STILL few
6. Our second application is this... we must remember that Jesus has sent US out to be lambs among wolves
 - a. A few days after Pastor Wang Yi was arrested for refusing to comply with the Chinese government's regulations, a letter was released from his church that he had written before the arrest
 - i. This letter is a beautiful example of what it looks like to live like a lamb among wolves
 - 1. Just listen to some of the things that Pastor Wang wrote...
 - a. "As a pastor of a Christian church, I have my own understanding and views, based on the Bible, about what righteous order and good government is. At the same time, [I admit that] I am filled with anger and disgust at the persecution of the church by this Communist regime, [and] at the wickedness of their depriving people of the freedoms of religion and of conscience. But changing social and political institutions is not the mission I have been called to, and it is not the goal for which God has given his people the gospel."
 - i. That is a good reminder to us that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ do not have the luxury that we have of democratic elections
 - 1. And perhaps that is why they have more clarity regarding the singular focus of proclaiming the Gospel
 - 2. Pastor Wang goes on...

- a. “Every man’s life is extremely short, and God fervently commands the church to lead and call any man to repentance who is willing to repent. Christ is eager and willing to forgive all who turn from their sins. This is the goal of ALL the efforts of the church in China—to testify to the world about our Christ, to testify to the Middle Kingdom about the Kingdom of Heaven, to testify to earthly, momentary lives about heavenly, eternal life.”
 - i. Again, this is a WONDERFUL statement on the primary mission of the church
 3. And then, in regard to his disobedience to the state that would lead to his imprisonment, Pastor Wang writes...
 - a. “Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels. Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ. When I think of this, the Lord fills me with a natural compassion and grief toward those who are attempting to and actively imprisoning me. Pray that the Lord would use me, that he would grant me patience and wisdom, that I might take the gospel to them.”
 - i. Incredible.
 - ii. Brothers and sisters, we are not called to live our lives in the comfort and ease of our nice, safe, modernized barns
 1. We are called to go out INTO the world, knowing that we are being sent out BY JESUS as lambs among wolves
 - a. They WILL persecute us for our faith
 - b. They WILL ridicule us for the name of Jesus
 - c. They WILL hate us
 - i. So how will we respond?
 1. We MUST respond as Pastor Wang did, as we pray for compassion and grief toward our persecutors
 2. As we pray for patience and wisdom
 3. And as we long to take the Gospel to them
 2. We are not called to be proud and arrogant lions
 3. We are not called to be cunning and deceitful foxes
 4. We are called to be meek and humble lambs, as we go out among the wolves and proclaim the name of THE LAMB OF GOD, our Lord Jesus Christ
7. And third, we must keep in step with the Spirit in all of these things
 - a. Think back to Jesus’ words to the seventy-two about staying in a town and enjoying the company of the people, or shaking the dust off their feet and moving on
 - i. Again, we have to ask the question, is THIS command descriptive? Or is it prescriptive?
 - ii. How are WE to apply this passage to OUR lives?
 1. I would say that the answer is... it depends
 - a. If we look again at the life of the Apostle Paul, there were certain places where he was rejected, and he WOULD move on to take the Gospel to others
 - i. In Acts 13, when Paul and his companions went into Antioch in Pisidia, they were at first welcomed by the masses
 1. But when the Jewish religious leaders incited the important man and women of the city against Paul
 - a. And verse 51 literally says, “But Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust from their feet against them and went on to Iconium”
 - b. Just as Jesus had commanded the seventy-two

- b. BUT, there were also MANY towns where, even though he experienced HARSH persecution, Paul would often stay and reason with the people, and continue to proclaim the good news among them
 - i. One can't help but think of Acts 14, when Paul was stoned and left for dead in the city of Lystra in verse 19,
 - 1. But then in verse 21, Luke writes that Paul incredibly WENT BACK to Lystra
 - a. Where he stayed and continued to strengthen the church and appoint elders and advance the Kingdom
 - c. In these two examples, we see this truth:
 - i. Paul was as wise as a serpent, but he was innocent as a dove
- b. So how do WE know what WE should do when we experience resistance to the Gospel?
 - i. Well, Jesus already told us back in Matthew 10, didn't he?
 - 1. Don't be anxious about what you are going to say, because the Spirit of the Father will guide you and your words
 - a. If you have been sharing the Gospel with someone at work, and they continue to be ugly and nonreceptive to your words, the Spirit may tell you to move on
 - i. Don't throw your pearls before pigs
 - ii. Spend your time more wisely pouring into someone who WILL receive them
 - b. OR, the Spirit might just tell you to dig in, and be persistent
 - i. Certainly not belligerent or annoying
 - ii. But don't give up on sharing the words of hope and life and salvation with them
 - iii. Keep pressing in, regardless of how they respond
 - ii. This is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit who dwells within EVERY believer
 - 1. He is our Great Counselor, who guides us and gives us wisdom and direction
 - a. So look TO HIM to see what he would have you do
 - i. If he says, "Shake the dust off," then shake the dust off and walk away
 - ii. But if the Spirit tells you to not give up... keep sharing... keep preaching... keep proclaiming
 - 2. As Paul writes in Galatians 5:25,
 - a. *²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit*
- 8. Brothers and sisters in Christ,
 - a. The harvest is indeed STILL plentiful, and the laborers are indeed STILL few
 - i. So pray EARNESTLY to the Lord of the Harvest, that He might send out more laborers into HIS harvest
 - b. And as you are praying EARNESTLY for more laborers, do not neglect your own calling right here where God has placed you
 - i. You may not have been sent out to China to be a lamb among wolves
 - ii. But you have been sent right here to our city, our community, to be a lamb among wolves
 - 1. Be as wise as serpents, and be as innocent as doves
 - 2. Proclaim the Kingdom until the King returns, no matter how great the cost
 - c. And in all these things, keep in step with the Spirit
 - i. For as you do, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh
 - ii. You will walk in a freedom that no earthly government will EVER be able to take away
 - iii. And your life and your words will serve to prepare the way of the coming King, as one day every tribe, tongue, and nation will bow before the throne and say, "Praise the Lord!"