

Luke 10:1-16

The Goodness and Severity of God

One of the things that the terrorist attacks of September 11 have shown is the patriotism of the American people. As one radio commentator said, "We're not hearing people speak of themselves as Irish Americans, German Americans, or African Americans right now. They're just Americans."

Every where you go you see American flags. Even bars and liquor stores have "God Bless America" signs out front. In one sense the terrorists have helped galvanize our country. But in another sense they've exposed an area of illogical weakness in our modern culture.

That irrational, unreasoned philosophy is known as pluralism. Now before you want to run me out of town for being against pluralism let me give an important word of explanation.

There is a vast difference between "tolerance" and "pluralism." One is rooted in truth and the other is illogical, false, and contains the seeds of it's own destruction.

As Joel Belz writes in World Magazine: "Tolerance" gives me room to say, "I think you're wrong, but I'll defend your right to be wrong."

"Pluralism" suggests, much more strongly than most folks admit, that there isn't any such thing as right and wrong-and no such thing as truth and error. As it is practiced more and more in America, pluralism tends to require that you not only leave room for your neighbor to believe what he believes, but that you also refrain from disagreeing with it. There's a world of difference between the two perspectives."

This was brought home in a striking way a week or so ago by a woman in Michigan. A church building located next to her house was sold to an Islamic group. She voiced regret that a building that once was dedicated to the worship of Jesus Christ was now being used for Islam.

Somehow she ended up on TV with a reporter and two Islamic clerics. In the middle of the session she committed the unpardonable sin of our age: She called Islam a false religion. The reporter was horrified that she was so intolerant. Instantly she became an infamous celebrity. Editorials in the local papers branded her comment "hate speech."

Unfortunately no one ever asked the Islamic clerics what Islam thought of Christianity. Someone should have asked them, "Does Islam believe that Jesus Christ is God? Does Islam believe that Jesus died on a cross for our sins? Does Islam believe that Jesus rose again the third day? Does Islam believe that Jesus is the way the truth and the life and that no man comes to the father except through Him?"

The answer to everyone of those questions is "No!" Islam considers Christianity a false religion.

The woman didn't want to picket the mosque. She wasn't going to throw stones at the worshippers. In fact she said, "I'll probably bake them some cookies. I just believe they're wrong."

Intolerance attacks others with different beliefs. Tolerance says we disagree but we treat each other with respect.

The American Heritage dictionary has several definitions of pluralism. The one that sums up where we've been as a nation says: a. The doctrine that reality is composed of many ultimate substances. b. The belief that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life.

Nobody's right because there is no ultimate truth. We can't say that Islam is a false religion because words like "true" and "false" have no meaning. They're just personal opinions. But now we ask the question, can we say that it was wrong for terrorists to hijack airplanes and kill thousands of people? Of course we can. All of a sudden there are some absolutes. All of a sudden there is right and wrong.

The events of September 11 have forced us to face the fact that right and wrong do exist. Everybody's belief system is not true and above questioning. Truth and error exist.

The conflict comes because over the past few decades our nation's Biblical heritage has been replaced with a silly mishmash of relativism, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Not true tolerance but a stifling, repressive form of intolerance that denies ultimate truth.

The Bible claims that it's true. Islam claims that it's true. Both can't be right when they disagree on the fundamentals. And it's not intolerant of either side to say

they're right and the other is wrong. That's simply being true to your sincerely held beliefs. The real question is how do we know who's right?

That takes sitting down with the Koran and sitting down with the Bible and examining the evidence. If one of those books is from God and one isn't there's going to be obvious.

I have no doubt that the Bible is the one that stands. It has demonstrable historical, scientific, and prophetic accuracy.

I also have no doubt that most of our "God bless America" talk is more political than theological. We see signs that say "God bless America" hanging from bridges and overpasses on the highway.

Someone told me they saw one that read: "Repent! Then God will bless America." That's the reality but I don't believe most of our nation is ready to go there yet.

Even though the terrorist attacks have unmasked the absurdity of relativism and pluralism, we're not ready to go there. As a nation we're still not ready to face the fact that there are moral absolutes. And that's even though we say it was immoral to use passenger airplanes as weapons of mass destruction.

The Bible has something to say about tolerance from God's point of view. God tolerates a lot from the sinful inhabitants of this world. But there's some things He says are intolerable.

Turn Luke 10 pg 1004

The Gospel of Luke gives us an account of the life of Jesus Christ beginning with His virgin birth and ending with His bodily ascension into heaven.

By chapter 10 Jesus has "set His face to go to Jerusalem" and experience the cross. There was never any doubt as to why He was here or what His mission was. Luke 19:10 gives us Jesus own description of His purpose: *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

Unlike Islam, and every other world religion, the Bible teaches that the way to God depends on God, not on us.

According to the Bible God loves us and wants people to enjoy a relationship with

Him. He's the answer to our search for that ultimate relationship. He'll fill the hole in our hearts, help us overcome our loneliness and our faults. He will give us peace here and now, and eternal life with Him in Heaven.

The Bible says that He is the Creator of the universe and all it contains, including you and me. We won't be complete inside until we have a personal relationship with the God who created us.

How do we know all this? God is also the Author of the most important Book of all time. The Bible is His "Owner's Manual" for human life. In His Book, we read:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Here's the problem; it's separation.

Being at peace with God isn't automatic, because by nature we're separated from God. This separation is what's at the root of our selfishness, loneliness, and dark feelings.

We grieve the One who cares for us most through our sinful acts, thoughts and attitudes, That's ALL of us, no matter how moral and upright we may seem on the surface. If you search your own heart honestly, you already know this is true. This has caused a split between us and the One who made us and loves us. This split is called sin.

How do we know this? Again we go to the Bible: Isaiah 59:2 *God says: Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you.*

Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

God's remedy is very different from what you'll find in man's religions.

Because He loves us, God won't allow this split to remain between us. But because He is perfect, He can't allow our sin to go unpunished.

He can't just overlook our wrongdoing. He'd cease to be God. The sin-debt has to be paid.

Religion and good living can't pay it. So He paid for our evil thoughts and deeds Himself. He came to Earth as a human, Jesus Christ. He came to suffer the punishment you and I deserve so we won't have to. Three days later, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And He calls us to trust him.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

In fact He commands us to trust Him. Acts 16:31 *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*

In Luke 10 Jesus sends out 70 of His disciples to carry His message. He speaks of a harvest.

In this sending out of these disciples we get some instructions on what should be our priority as we participate in the harvest:

The first priority: We Must Share Jesus' Vision **Read vs 1-2**

We tend to look on this world in terms of politics. Jesus Christ looks at it as a harvest field. We see people as rich/poor, black/white, asian/middle eastern. We have all these distinctions and differences.

God sees everyone in one of two categories. Either they're part of the harvesters or part of the harvest. That's it. Either they've trusted Him by faith and they have His message, or they haven't trusted Him and need to hear the message.

That's the vision we need to have. There's a harvest all around us. The harvest is great but the laborers are few. Not that there's not a number of potential harvesters, but the problem is not many of them have caught the vision yet. They don't see life in terms of the harvest.

There's too many Christians who go through life without giving a thought to how God wants to use them to share His message with others.

So what's the solution? Jesus says first of all pray. God's work will only be done in His power. But now notice what we're to pray: *pray the Lord of the harvest to send out*

laborers into His harvest.

Isn't it odd that doesn't say pray for the harvest? He says pray for harvesters. I don't think that it's wrong to pray that people would be open to the message of the Gospel but here we're told to pray for more laborers.

There's a lot of work to do. There's a lot of people in the world who don't know Christ as Savior. And think about it, what happens if your diligently praying that God would send out laborers? Eventually your going to realize that you're part of the answer to your own prayer.

It's hard to pray that God would use others and not be willing to be used yourself.

The harvest requires labor and not everybody we speak with is going to be happy to hear what we have to say. **Read vs 3**

Jesus wasn't sending out victorious conquerors. He was sending out laborers. He didn't send them out to chase the wolves away. They were sent as lambs. Lambs don't have teeth to bite back with. Lambs don't have claws to defend themselves. Lambs aren't fast enough to run away. The only thing that a lamb has on its side is the shepherd.

Do you ever feel outnumbered as a Christian trying to live for Christ in this world? Do you feel like your school, your office, your factory is filled with people who are hostile to God's truth?

If you feel that way it's because they are hostile. People don't mind you wearing a pin that says, "God bless America." That's religious, and were a religious people in this country. That's general. It doesn't make them think about where they stand with God personally. It talks about God's blessing and, hey who doesn't want be be blessed?

Things are a lot different when you carry God's truth to others. When you confirm that there are things that are sin and wrong for people to do. When you talk about God holding us accountable for our actions. When you talk about God's holiness that punishes as well as blesses. That kind of stuff gets some of them riled up.

If you feel a bit outnumbered or intimidated just remember Jesus' words: *I send you out as lambs among wolves.* Here's our point of strength. The shepherd not only sends the lambs, he goes with them.

Matthew adds, "so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." We won't survive long as God's servants unless we stay very close to the Shepherd for our protection and strength. But if God is sending us then it's us and God and us and God is a majority no matter how many others seem opposed to the message.

The first priority: We Must Share Jesus' Vision Do you see the people around you as the harvest? Do you see yourself as a laborer with a job to do in the harvest? Do you see yourself as a lamb, dependent on the Shepherd?

The second priority: We Must Follow Jesus' Instructions **Read 4**

Just try to picture the typically dressed Jew in Palestine in the time of Jesus. He or she had just a few articles of clothing: 2 tunics; one was an inner garment, the other, an outer one used as a cloak by day and a blanket by night. Then there was a waistband worn over the 2 tunics, a head covering, and sandals. A wallet or travelers bag was carried for food & money & slung over the shoulder.

Now Jesus says leave some of this behind. I don't know what your family is like but I have a sister-in-law that will pack two large suitcases to come to visit us 2 days. She has more stuff than you'd need for two weeks. In a way most of us tend to do this. We have so much that we don't need.

But these disciples had hardly anything to start with and now Jesus says no money, no extra clothes, no provisions in a bag, not even an extra pair of sandals. Talk about packing light.

Isn't there a message here for you and me? We are all called to be missionaries for Christ; called to share the story of our faith in Christ with others. Don't we so often find ourselves bogged down with stuff, with burdens, with activities, we can barely get out of our own way? Dragging so much baggage with us, so preoccupied with such a variety of things, we find it difficult to focus on Jesus Christ and his call on our lives.

Most people I know who have garages don't keep their car in them. You know why? Their garages so full of stuff there's no room for the car. Then we build sheds in the back yard for the rest of the stuff!

Does this mean that God expects His people to get rid of everything they own, give away all their money, and their food?

We saw something similar to this in chapter 9 when the 12 were sent out on an evangelistic mission. This was very short term. They're going to go out and then in verse 17 they come back and report what happened. This is a short term missions trip meant to teach them to walk in faith.

They weren't even to socialize along the way. The mission was central. They were to stay focused on the task.

Read vs 5-9

Jesus wanted these seventy men to trust not in themselves, but in Him. So He told them don't go house to house because you are not satisfied with what one place provides. Don't make reservations along the way so that you are assured a place to sleep. If you try to run with the wolves, you don't stand a chance. Trust in your Shepherd.

When a pair of disciples would enter a house, they were to give the greeting: *Shalom* peace. That's a greeting that had Messianic overtones. If the owner of the household shared in that peace (in other words if they had a right attitude toward God) they should stay. If he didn't then the blessing of *Shalom* would return back to them and they could pass it on to someone who would appreciate it.

The reason for the trip wasn't their own personal comfort, it was to do God's work. For them it was to heal the sick and announce the kingdom of God.

Both of these were Messianic, to announce Jesus as Messiah. Our job's a little different. We're not empowered to heal the sick as they were. Our message isn't about a coming king, it's about the cross. But the underlying principles are still the same.

The first priority: We Must Share Jesus' Vision

The second priority: We Must Follow Jesus' Instructions

The third priority: We Must Declare God's Holiness

Read vs 10 & 11

To Shake the dust of a town off your sandals was a typical Jewish way symbolizing removing the every bit of Gentile defilement from themselves following contact with unbelievers.

This seems to harsh for gentle Jesus, meek and mild. How could he be so judgmental? Jesus' words of judgment to those who reject His Word only seem out of character because we haven't understood the character of the real Jesus. We only have a flimsy caricature of him.

The real Jesus knows that people are lost. The real Jesus knows that people need to be found. The real Jesus comes that they might have Life, and have it abundantly. The real Jesus dies on the cross to save people from eternal separation from God. The real Jesus puts himself between sinful man and God's wrath against sin. The real Jesus is serious about rescuing because the real Jesus is serious about the reality of God's judgment.

The reason that judgment seems foreign to us, is that we have bought into the idea that man is basically good. That all we need is some guidance and direction to reach our full potential. We've bought into the false philosophy of pluralism that everybody's right and nobody's wrong.

We've been told that as long as we're sincere in our faith God will accept us. The Bible gives us a very different picture. Man is under judgment. Man is lost.

A Savior only makes sense if the people he comes to save realize they need to be rescued.

And this is the heart of the issue. People who don't sense they need to be saved resist Jesus' message.

Until our Western culture comes to see the shallowness and lie of our "We're all okay" worldview, we'll reject the saving message of Jesus.

But some perceive their own moral poverty and need for real meaning. Some are ready. Some are hungry. Some are open.

Read 12-15

Chorazin & Bethsaida were cities near Capernaum. Capernaum was Jesus base of operations for his Galilean ministry. All these people had seen His miracles. Mighty works had been done by Jesus all around the area.

They had opportunity after opportunity to believe in Him but overall Jesus was rejected. So look who He compares them to.

Sodom, we know, was destroyed along with Gomorrah, by fire and brimstone. Tyre and Sidon, were two Phoenician cities on the coast of Lebanon. They represent the heathen world. Tyre was repeatedly said to have received divine judgment.

These should be sobering words for us. We live in a country that's had an unprecedented opportunity to hear God's truth.

Jesus is saying the judgement on those who had the most opportunity will be the greatest.

We talk about tolerance. Here's God's view of tolerance. *It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you.*

Could God be saying those same words to us today? I'm not trying to be a prophet of doom. I love this country. I earnestly want God to bless America. But God isn't some cosmic grandfather in the sky.

He's holy. He is righteous. And if He went so far as to pour out His wrath against sin on His own Son then we know the message of Jesus Christ is serious stuff to Him.

He will not tolerate unbelief, rejection, self-righteousness, or false religion. In Romans 11 we read this statement: *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...*

Look! God is good. He so loves the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God is good.

But don't forget the severity of God. His holiness leads to His goodness. His holiness leads to His severity. Which path are you on today? Have you put your trust in the salvation of God through Jesus Christ?

God has blessed America. The fact that you and I can be here today with free access to the Word of God is proof of that. It wouldn't happen in Afghanistan, Iran, The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain. But its happening here, today.

May those who have believed use their freedom to be laborers in the harvest. Remember Jesus' words *He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me*

May those who have not yet believed honestly investigate the claims of Christ to see His words for themselves. All religions can't be right because they disagree with each other in the most fundamental areas. If you don't know what to believe, be honest with God today.

Say, "Lord I don't know what is true. But I'm willing to take a look at the Bible which claims to be Your word. If You're real, please show me. If the Bible is true, please show me." I have confidence that God will honor that request and lead you to His truth.