

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MISSION

Week One | July 8, 2018 | What is Gospel-Centered Mission?

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 10:1–16. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Christ calls us to join Him in His mission and gives us an example to follow.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

In Luke 10, Jesus teaches us three essentials of gospel-centered mission that shape the kind of people we are and how we reach out to others.

MEDITATE

"Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2b).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *“Jesus is the founder of Christianity.” What do you think about this statement? Would you say it is accurate? Why or why not?*

One of the most common responses to the question, “Who is Jesus?”, is that He is a religious teacher who founded Christianity. Many consider Him the first to present the basic teachings of the religion and that He taught His followers what it means to follow that particular spiritual path. They think just as the Buddha is to Buddhism, or Muhammad is to Islam, so Jesus is to Christianity. According to this perspective, not only is Jesus merely a figure who convinced many people to follow what He said, Christianity is nothing more than a religion invented by man at a certain point in history.

Yet not everyone agrees with this perspective. Others say Jesus really doesn’t have much to do with Christianity at all. They argue that He never saw Himself as God, never desired to propagate His teachings around the world, and certainly didn’t consider His death an atoning sacrifice for sin.

One of the main proponents of this idea is philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche, Jesus was an ordinary man, a humble Jew who was well respected for His care for others and His religious piety. He was a moral teacher, though He did not create a system, doctrine, or religious order to follow. He lived a life of service to others, especially the voiceless and the oppressed Jewish people. He was put to death by the Jewish elite who were in cahoots with the Romans—the Romans who were in positions of power and frequently put to death those who opposed their rule. Jesus died the death of a criminal even though he was an innocent man, according to Nietzsche, as further evidence of corrupt power-structures in society.

For Nietzsche, the “religion” of Christianity began not with Jesus, but with the apostles—especially the apostle Paul. He believes that after Jesus’ death, the disciples came up with a plan to fabricate the resurrection and create a systematic religion. Their motivations were ultimately to get revenge on the Jewish elite and the Romans by gathering a massive following of converts that would flip the power structure of society and establish the apostles as the new authority. According to Nietzsche, they put their plan in action by writing the New Testament, which allowed them to insert accounts of miracles and signs of divinity into Jesus’ life that never actually happened. As far-fetched as this narrative may sound, it is enormously popular in contemporary culture and scholarship.

Luke’s gospel engages this debate by not siding with either perspective. Instead, he gives us an entirely different answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” Jesus is not the human founder of a new religion; He is the fulfillment of a promise God made back at the beginning of the world. He didn’t come to make a new law; He was the

fulfillment of the law. His life, death, and resurrection were the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

Those who are in Christ are brought into much more than a religion created at a certain point in history or a political power structure. They are invited to participate in God's mission of redemption. The apostles showed us that this mission was worth their lives. They suffered poverty, sickness, persecution, and discomfort because they were persuaded that a life dedicated to God's mission was the best life they could live. Christianity is far more than a man-made religion. It is the true story of the whole world. The best part is that we are invited to participate in it.

Q: *Discuss the difference between Christianity as presented in the grand narrative of Scripture and a man-made religion rooted in a certain point in history.*

|| UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In Part 3 of our study of *The Real Jesus*, we will examine Jesus' mission. Rather than coming to create a new religion, Jesus came as the central figure of God's mission of redemption. Those who are in Christ are invited to participate in the reality of His mission to save people from every tribe, nation, and tongue and restore what was broken by sin in the world. This week we will be studying three characteristics of those who participate in this mission.

1. PRAYING

2. GOING HUMBLY

3. SPEAKING BOLDLY

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

PRAYING

|| LUKE 10:1-2

Q: *What was the first command Jesus gave to the witnesses?*

Q: *Is it surprising to you that this was the first command? Why or why not?*

The center of gravity for evangelism should be prayer. Prayer begins every effort and is maintained throughout. Prayer for the lost to hear the good news of the gospel should be a defining characteristic of a Christian. How reluctant we are to share the gospel because we are certain our message will be met with apathy or even ridicule. But Jesus tells us that the problem is not finding people who are willing to listen, but rather finding people who are willing to witness!

Prayer is a miracle-working activity. Not only do we see God change things through our prayers, but we also see Him change us through them as well! Whenever we pray for something, we must be prepared for the fact that He may call us to be the answer to our own prayers. When we pray for someone, our hearts grow more sensitive to them and aware of them. Prayer sharpens our eyes to be able to see what God is doing. It awakens our senses and helps us to perceive what we otherwise would have been oblivious to. Through our prayers for the lost to hear the gospel, God will soften our hearts and give us a love for them, making us more aware of them. We will be quicker to identify them as those who need Christ. As you follow Jesus' command to pray for laborers, be prepared for Him to answer that prayer by making you one of them!

Q: *Think back to your own conversion story. Who was praying for you? Who was praying for the people who would share the gospel with you?*

Q: *Who in your life doesn't know Christ? Consider all the different spheres you operate in—work, family, friends, school, community, hobbies and recreation. Do you pray for them regularly?*

GOING HUMBLY

■ LUKE 10:3-9

Q: *What does it mean to be lambs sent out among wolves?*

Q: *Why do you think Jesus tells them not to take supplies with them?*

Q: *What kind of attitude does Jesus say they are supposed to have?
How are they to treat others?*

In these verses, Jesus gives us a perspective-shift. He immediately cuts at our love of comfort and security by telling us that that is not the reality we will live in. To describe the danger, He uses the metaphor of lambs sent out among wolves. He sends us out among predators, not to a safe house. Furthermore, He tells us to go without supplies! Why would He do something like that? Because in the midst of danger, He is our safe house. As we walk among predators, He is our protector. He fills our empty hands and gives us everything we need.

Verse 3 begins with the command, “go.” This command, which is repeated in the Great Commission, is the marching order for every Christian. Charles Spurgeon says, “Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.” In other words, the command to go and preach the gospel doesn’t apply to some, but to all. We don’t have to discern if God is calling us to be a missionary. If we are in Christ He already has called us to be part of His mission.

“Going” looks different in each of our lives and it’s root meaning conveys “intentionality.” God may give a particular call to someone to go to another country to share the gospel. Or, God may call someone to be intentional about being a witness in their workplace or with unsaved family members. “Going” means being attuned and active in the way God is working in the lives of others to reveal the truth of the gospel to them. It means being willing to step out of your comfort zone in love for God and for others.

Jesus also tells us what kind of attitude we must have as we go. We must not think we are “God’s gift to the world.” We must not use the message of the gospel as a sword to play intellectual combat with people. We must not treat others with a holier-than-thou attitude because we have found “the truth.” We must not seek to be offensive, obnoxious, or divisive. We are not to have a sense of superiority or entitlement.

Instead, we are called to be the aroma of Christ, who is the reconciler and the Prince of Peace. We are called to be gracious to those we come in contact with and humble before those we speak to. We are called to be agents of healing.

In verse 10, Jesus gives us another realistic portrait. We will encounter people who do not wish to promote peace. When that happens, Jesus says, we are not to pull out our swords to fight back. Instead, we are to keep moving, knowing that results are in the hands of the Lord. Our job is to be faithful witnesses.

Q: *Do you seek comfort and safety in the world? If so, how does that impact your ability to “go?”*

Q: *What are some examples of ways we promote unnecessary strife or offense in sharing the gospel? How can you present the truth with humility and graciousness?*

SPEAKING BOLDLY

LUKE 10:10–16

Q: *What is the message Jesus says should be preached by the witnesses?*

Q: *What is particularly bold about this message, especially for our context?*

In these verses Jesus tells His witnesses what they are to say. They are not going proclaiming their own ideas or words, they are to give faithful testimony to *His* words. Likewise for us, Jesus is the one who determines our message. We don't have permission to “go rogue,” leaving certain parts out that we think won't be well received or adding things to the message that we think will make it better. As witnesses, we are called to be faithful to His words and obedient to His commands.

Some may think these verses are throwing fire and brimstone. After all, saying “woe to you” seems harsh, judgmental, and unloving to us. It is all of these things if it is 1) spoken with a spirit of self-righteousness and pride, and 2) if that is the only message we share. If we hold these verses alongside the previous verses that emphasize the humility and grace of gospel witnesses, we see what speaking the truth in love looks like. Warning people of the destruction of sin and urging them to repent is the same as telling people to get out of a burning building. This warning is not a self-righteous condemnation, it is a plea from one person to another to save their life.

But “woe to you” cannot be our only message. It should be a segue to the broader message to look to Christ crucified and risen again. The good news is that though we are in a state of “woe,” we don’t have to remain there. We are in a burning building, but God has provided a way of escape.

🕯: *Which is more difficult for you, speaking boldly or speaking humbly?*

🕯: *Was there a person who helped you see both the reality of your sin and the reality of Christ’s forgiveness? How did they do it?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🕯: *List 1-2 people in each of your main spheres (work, family, friends, school, community, recreation/hobbies). Make a plan for how to pray for them regularly.*

🕯: *Discuss further Jesus’ use of “lamb” to describe how His witnesses should be. What all does this metaphor imply?*

🕯: *Think of a practical way you can share the gospel this week with someone you know. Ask the people in your group to pray that God would give you humility and boldness.*

🕯: *Where is God calling you to go that is out of your comfort zone? It may be across the world or across the street. It may be to people you don’t know or to people you have known your whole life.*

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- Father, thank You that You are a God who is on mission to save. You have not rejected us or destroyed us, though that is what we deserve. Instead, You enacted a plan to save us long before we were even born.
- Holy Spirit, show me ways I've held my own comfort above my love for those who do not know Christ. Reveal the pride in my heart that prevents me from speaking the truth of the gospel with humility and grace. Forgive me for not speaking boldly to save those who are dying because I fear their bad opinion of me.
- Jesus, thank You for demonstrating what being part of the mission of God looks like. Help me grow in Your likeness and follow Your example. Thank You for dying and rising again so I could be reconciled with God and adopted as His child. Thank You that Your work allows me to be part of the mission of redemption as well.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 10:1 Some textual scholars debate whether seventy-two was a literal or a metaphorical number. Either way, there is no doctrinal issue at stake. The number most importantly has symbolic significance because it also symbolizes the number of nations in the world (see Genesis 10).

LUKE 10:6 A “son of peace” is one who has found peace through salvation, and witnesses will find communion with them through their unity in Christ.

LUKE 10:13–15 The judgment of Tyre and Sidon will be less severe because Tyre and Sidon had clearly heard Jesus' message and repented before they willfully fell back into sin. Sackcloth and ashes was an outward symbol of repentance and mourning over sin. Capernaum will receive the greatest judgment of all because they witnessed so much of Jesus' ministry and also many of His miracles.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*