



5. The Wow! Factor

Luke 10:1-20

We all experience amazing things in life. You know, the sorts of thing which make our mouths drop open and we go “Wow – that’s amazing”. Sometimes it’s great world events – the first Moon landing. Or sometimes its just things that are so out of the ordinary that it leaves us speechless. Today we’re going to look at some things Jesus said and they have a certain “wow factor” about them.

In the past few weeks we have heard some contrasting words from this passage in Luke’s gospel. On one hand we found out that reaping God’s harvest of people is for all because it’s easy and requires no skill other than our innate human ability to make friends.

On the other hand we were also warned that if we went out to reap the harvest we were lambs amongst wolves and we would find people who would reject us and reject Jesus.

So what do we make of this – is reaping easy or isn’t it? This last clutch of verses should seal it for us. The disciples came back rejoicing – things went even beyond their wildest expectations. And their comments was. Wow! *17 The seventy-two men came back in great joy. "Lord," they said, "even the demons obeyed us when we gave them a command in your name!"*

What Jesus is doing here is opening our eyes to the truth behind what He’s calling us to do. Reaping should be simple but it’s potentially dangerous and fraught with potential difficulty. And if we just left it like this then all we would have are just human responses to the issue – which is often the case. On the one hand we have people who are just put off by the problems and dangers. On the other we have mission zealots who want to try the latest good idea be that Alpha or Café Church or the like.

But these last three verses give us a different perspective on reaping. It reveals the issues as they really are. And it should end up with us saying “wow, is it really like that?”

🔴 Warfare

When we seek to go out to reap God’s harvest, we aren’t just doing a bit of recruiting for God but we enter into a spiritual battle where we are trying to rescue real people from real spiritual issues. Rescue them from what? Sin, eternal separation from God, hell – all these but also from the present control they are under. Control – by whom? Satan and his forces – demons.

This is an area we so often don’t like to talk about or think about. We have been brought up in a rational society and our picture of satan and demons is probably something out of Dante’s inferno. It’s medieval, fictional, unreal. Our perception of the works and ways of satan are probably shaped by Vincent Price horror films than by the reality of God’s word. Yet satan was real to Jesus and His disciples, as were demons and all the like. Satan is the Liar, the Deceiver and he’ll happily operate unobstructed amongst people who don’t believe he exists because they think it’s a load of superstitious clap-trap.

Yet if we allow the Holy Spirit to open up our eyes to what God says in His word and then start looking at the world, we see that satan and his demons have their filthy mitts all over it. And he’s right there ready to discourage us from sharing Jesus with people, to distract and discouraged interested people from exploring what Jesus is about, to discredit Christians and church and all the rest of it.

The disciples went to live amongst people in the towns they visited and they found their opposition,

but it wasn't people that was causing rejection, but what was behind it and they encountered those who were demonised and commanded the demons in the way Jesus did and found they obeyed.

And what's clear from the rest of the NT is that as we live and witness as the people of God, we have to recognise that we are in the middle of a pitched battle – not with people (we're trying to rescue them!) but with spiritual forces *Eph 6:11 Put on all the armor that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. 12 For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.* And satan is out to get us – 1Pet 5:8 (NIV) *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

Now if you're someone with reservations, or fear or nervousness about sharing your faith with people, maybe that this is probably about the last thing you want to hear. On the face of things, it's pretty worrying to think that we may not just have people after us for being a Christian, but the whole of the forces of darkness as well!

But hey, this is a sermon called The Wow Factor so let's get to the Wow bit and see what Jesus has got to say about it.

◆ Winning Side

18 Jesus answered them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

It's not clear if Jesus' words are prophetic here, looking forward to Calvary, but is a description of the downfall satan had already suffered. What is clear though from God's word is that on Calvary Jesus didn't just satisfy the righteous requirements of a holy God to make a way open that through faith we find forgiveness of sins and peace with God. He scored a crushing victory over the power that satan and his forces of darkness have wielded over the human race since man fell in the Garden of Eden.

The One who saw satan fall from heaven is the one who's chucked him out for good!

John 12:28 (TEV) Father, bring glory to your name!"

Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again."

29 The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, "An angel spoke to him!"

30 But Jesus said to them, "It was not for my sake that this voice spoke, but for yours.

31 Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown.

So if we hear in Scripture that we are up against satan and he's like a prowling wolf then there's something we need to understand. Satan is rather like one of those war criminals on the run – like Ratko Mladic or Osama Bin Laden. He's a foe that can't win and he's effectively on the run but is capable of causing problems if we drop our guard. But he's beaten and as you will see in a moment, Christians are more than to deal with him or his demonic forces wherever they are found.

◆ Walled Around

19 Listen! I have given you authority, so that you can walk on snakes and scorpions and overcome all the power of the Enemy, and nothing will hurt you.

This is an amazing piece of scripture. When we became Christians God took a nobody, a nothing and made each one somebody in Him. If you are a believer this morning, you are a child of God – one of His family; ambassadors – His representatives; witnesses – part of His body. God has made you important in heaven – given you status and authority. Why do you think that the Christian faith spreads so rapidly amongst the poor, the low castes, the underclass in so many parts of the world? Because they understand that God turns nobodies into somebodies.

And we have authority – authority over demons in Jesus' name, and power by the Holy Spirit to overcome the power of the enemy. It's not our authority – it's His authority. Look in Acts and you'll see the apostles using the authority of the name of Jesus to perform miracles. If you're serving Jesus and in obedience to Him, satan is not going to be a problem to you. Remember the verse I gave you a few moments ago: 1 Pet 5: *9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that*

your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. Then consider this one too: James 4:7 (NIV) *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

What about this scorpions and snakes bit? What do you call a snake who hangs around traffic lights with a bucket of water and a squeegee mop? A windscreen viper! You don't have to go far in Luke's writing to find that this literally happened to Paul on the island of Malta.

Acts 28:3 (TEV) Paul gathered up a bundle of sticks and was putting them on the fire when a snake came out on account of the heat and fastened itself to his hand.

4 The natives saw the snake hanging on Paul's hand and said to one another, "This man must be a murderer, but Fate will not let him live, even though he escaped from the sea."

5 But Paul shook the snake off into the fire without being harmed at all.

There are some fringe Pentecostal sects in America that literally believe that and handle poisonous snakes as part of their attempt to show they have power over the enemy. Is that what we should do too?

Now before you go off to the pet shop to buy your own cobra to test out Jesus' words, consider this: even though we have that reference in Acts, Jesus is probably being more figurative than literal here. The snake is a common picture of satan in scripture so Jesus could be emphasising the point that His disciples have power over him. But it goes further. Scorpions have nasty stings but there are only a few that are fatal stingers. The rest just make you very sick. To add to this idea that Jesus gives, let me give you part of Psalm 91 which has the same kind of sentiment:

Psal 91:9 (TEV) You have made the LORD your defender,

the Most High your protector,

10 and so no disaster will strike you,

no violence will come near your home.

11 God will put his angels in charge of you

to protect you wherever you go.

12 They will hold you up with their hands

to keep you from hurting your feet on the stones.

13 You will trample down lions and snakes,

fierce lions and poisonous snakes.

The snakes, scorpions and prowling lions are in scripture strong representations of the power of the enemy. Jesus promises us that satanic power will never harm God's people. Satan and his demons have power to make us Christians very spiritually sick if we are not watching where we are treading in our spiritual walk. There's lots out there to tempt us away from Jesus – false teaching, etc.

Yet we see when Jesus gives us, His disciples, authority. So when we find that when we do stumble across satan and the demonic, His authority protects us. In Psalm 91 we read how God makes sure you're looked after. And what about those people who do handle snakes? Let me use the words of a Baptist pastor in the US called Don Fortner:

The Lord's disciples were not crazed snake handlers! He did not promise them (or us) security against idiocy! — He promised them (and us) protection as they went about serving his interests, preaching the gospel.

What this passage also implies is that our walk should also be a careful and prayerful one. As we see the harvest and go out to reap it, we need to take care to walk with Jesus so we know where we are treading and what we are treading on so we know His help and protection. And how do we do that – surprise, surprise – by spending time with Him.

That's why when we seek to sow or reap as believers – to be His witnesses to others, that we spend time with Jesus, not rush off with the latest evangelism scheme and bags of enthusiasm. Apart for the fact that we need to be guided to those Jesus is bringing to harvest, we also need to understand that there is a spiritual enemy who is quite capable of knocking the spiritual stuffing out of us and destroying our whole reputation and witness if we are not walking with Christ.

We all have experience of trying some sort of service or witness for Jesus, and rather than finding it easy and satisfying, we find that we have a hard time and nothing happens. Remember the spiritual battle. Yet if we walk with Jesus and seriously use His name; if we hear the accuser pointing his finger and telling use we are not good enough or worthy enough, then plead the blood of Jesus – because He's died for you, you are good enough and worthy enough – you are in His family, you speak with His authority. Don't forget it.

Written in Heaven

20 But don't be glad because the evil spirits obey you; rather be glad because your names are written in heaven."

We need to take the words of Jesus seriously, both in understanding that we are in a spiritual battle against a formidable foe. And in this last verse Jesus encourages us to get the right perspective. We get these great passages in scripture but there are always those around who will get excited about something and lose perspective. The disciples were overjoyed that they had power over demons. They wanted to tell everyone about the power they exercised over demons. But Jesus cautions them.

The important thing in their Christian faith isn't what they can do to demons – because it's the Holy Spirit doing that anyway, not them – but that their names are written in the book of life. I know many Christians who are fascinated by the power Jesus gives us because we are His people. They desire to see the Spirit do miraculous things.

All well and good, but what is the important issue – what it's all for – to bring people who are without Jesus to Him. That's what Jesus died for. That's why He broke the power of sin. That's why Christians have authority over demons and why they are overcomers. So that more names can be added to God's list of who will spend eternity with Him! - *rather be glad because your names are written in heaven."*

It works the other way too. One of the reasons that many Christians find that their life is so devoid of the presence and power of God is that they are not rejoicing that their names are in heaven and desiring others are added. Or they are not walking with Jesus so they are not watching where they are treading.

I called my series "Reaping or Sleeping?" I believe this passage gives us a wake-up call to us to remind us that if we are not experiencing a harvest, then we may not be looking for who God is bringing to Himself. Or we may not be desiring for God to use us in the easiest task God gives His people. Or we may be along the road dining other things? Or we may not be prepared to use our most fundamental skills to make friends. Or we may have been discouraged by the thought that others may reject us? Or Satan may have kicked us into touch?

We are the people of God. We have a Saviour who has given us the mission, the authority and the power by His Spirit to bring in that harvest and push the enemy aside in the process. What are we doing about it. We've got everything we need? What more do we want? Here's a passage of scripture that truly has the WOW factor!

*Roma 8:31 (TEV) In view of all this, what can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us?
32 Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us his Son--will he not also freely give us all things?
33 Who will accuse God's chosen people? God himself declares them not guilty!
34 Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right side of God, pleading with him for us!
35 Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death?
36 As the scripture says,
"For your sake we are in danger of death at all times;
we are treated like sheep that are going to be slaughtered."
37 No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!
38 For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future,
39 neither the world above nor the world below--there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

WOW!