

# Adventuring with God

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## Lambs among Wolves

When Jesus appointed 72 representatives to go out two-by-two into all the villages where He would go later, He gave them logistical instructions about where to stay and what to take with them. He also told them what their work would consist of—they were to heal the sick and tell everyone that the kingdom of God was near. But there was more. He went on to tell them *how* they were to behave when they went out to represent Him. Their demeanor was to reflect their calling. Here's what He said: **"Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves"** (Luke 10:3).

Some Christians think that God only cares about what we *believe about* Him—that if we have the right doctrine and interpretation of Scripture, that's sufficient for accurately representing Him. While doctrine *is* important, it isn't all that's needed to reflect what the Christian life is about. As He lived among the disciples and taught them about God's kingdom, Jesus was just as likely to correct their wrong *attitudes* as their erroneous ideas.

As a group, they were once turned away from staying in a Samaritan village because of ethnic prejudice. James and John burned with indignation at the insult and asked Jesus, **"Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"** (No wonder He nicknamed them the Sons of Thunder!) Jesus quickly rebuked them, saying, **"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them"** (Luke 9:54-56, NKJV). They didn't yet understand what it meant to follow *a Lamb*.

Throughout the gospel accounts Jesus carefully explains what it would mean to represent Him. He taught the

disciples about serving rather than dominating the ones they would lead, loving each other rather than competing for mastery, and dying to the human drives of self-promotion and self-actualization. Unlike the Sons of Thunder, they were to welcome persecution for the Kingdom's sake, forgiving and praying for their enemies. The Beatitudes spell out clearly what He meant when He said He was sending them out as lambs. They prove the counter-intuitive nature of His kingdom and challenge every wolf-like quality we foster in our hearts.

Jesus also taught and modeled the importance of relying on God's wisdom, power, and help rather than trusting in our own abilities. He was very open about His dependence upon His Father in fulfilling what He had been called to do. **"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing. . . . By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me"** (John 5:19, 30).

Many years ago, when we lived in rural Ontario, Tony and I owned a flock of sheep. Each batch of new lambs shared common qualities, including a sweetness and gentleness that made them so much more submissive than their adult counterparts. They also were of necessity very dependent creatures. They literally could not fend for themselves. They had to rely on their mothers for daily survival, which included protection from predators.

In spite of their seemingly weak and vulnerable condition in life, they also had another endearing quality that set them apart from the older sheep. The old English word is *gambol*, which means a state of

jumping and skipping about in play. As is true with even human babies, lambs are playful and carefree *because* they're dependent. They don't feel responsible for "making it happen" (whatever *it* is), and so they fully enjoy life.

It may be hard for us to see the spiritual implications of this trait, compared to being dependent and submissive. But one of the reasons Jesus was so opposed by the religious leaders of His day was because of His attitude of confidence—a kind of playfulness—in His spiritual life. He wasn't uptight trying to get everything right through concern for spiritual rules and regulations, like the Pharisees were. He wasn't out to impress anyone with His efforts to please God. Most of His acts of worship, in contrast to the Pharisees, were done in secret, away from human eyes. And He couldn't be bullied by the threats of those who wanted to trip Him up or silence Him. He lived His life with abandon and trusted His Father to protect Him from deadly predators and provide what was needed in every situation—just like every lamb we saw on our farm.

Oh, yes, Jesus was serious about His spiritual calling, and He pursued it with intensity and fervor. I'm not suggesting that He was frivolous about what He had come to do. But in terms of daily interaction with His Father, His relationship with Him was so intimate and accepting that some thought it shockingly casual. We can certainly understand His confidence. How many sons have the pleasure of hearing their father declare the following? **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"** (Matthew 17:5)

Jesus rested in the Father's love, calling Him *Abba* ... Daddy. He was so secure in His spiritual role that He could extend grace to everyone He encountered. He wasn't in competition with them; He was eager to share the joys of the kingdom with anyone who loved His Father as He did. Are we going out to represent Him with the same attitudes?

Wolves must scrap and fight, gaining their place in the world through competition and mastery over others. They can't ever rest or enjoy any hard-fought victory, because they know they must defend all their gains against other aggressors. They have no time to play and enjoy the gifts of life. They must strive and strive and

strive until the day they die, and sadly, their short-term gains win for them no long-term rewards.

Jesus invites us to a different kind of life. He beckons us to enter into His joy and to find the rest for our souls that He promised. This is only possible as we take on His nature, becoming like a lamb in God's flock of sheep. We must acknowledge our weakness and rely on His strength; we must submit to His plans and put aside our own. Then we can relax and enjoy the relationships we have with our heavenly Father and the other members of His family. As Susannah Wesley is quoted as saying, "There are two things to do about the Gospel—believe it and behave it."

To build a kingdom on the seemingly fragile and vulnerable nature of a lamb, especially when living among the more aggressive and powerful wolf, seems on the surface to be ludicrous—how could lambs even survive, let alone overcome, such a formidable enemy? But look at the early church. In the midst of the dominance of Roman life and culture—wolves, to be sure—the kingdom of God advanced in the face of tremendous opposition and persecution. Rome fell, but the church of the living God did not.

If we fast-forward to the end of history, we discover that the Lamb is mentioned 30 times throughout Revelation—a book that only has 22 chapters. Overcoming all obstacles and triumphing over every enemy, the Lamb is victorious! The only One worthy enough to open the seals of the scroll and release the final judgments of God, the Lamb will be glorified and praised through all eternity. Doesn't that make you want to skip and jump and rejoice in the amazing power and wisdom of God?

Right here, right now, Jesus Christ invites us to share in the overcoming power of His life. Perhaps, like me, you've gradually changed into a stubborn, willful sheep, leaving behind the winsome ways of a lamb. But it's not too late for us! We can ask Him to help us return to the place where we can in greater measure trust, submit, and enjoy all the good pleasures of His kingdom.

**"Whatever happens,"** Paul wrote to the Philippians, **"conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that**

you may become blameless and pure, children of God  
without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in

which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold  
out the word of life” (1:27; 2:5, 14-16).

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### **O to Be Like Thee!**

“O to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer, this is my constant longing and prayer;  
Gladly I’ll forfeit all of earth’s treasures, Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

*O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art!  
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness—Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.*

O to be like Thee, full of compassion, loving, forgiving, tender and kind;  
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting, seeking the wandering sinner to find.

O to be like Thee, lowly in spirit, holy and harmless, patient and brave;  
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches, willing to suffer, others to save.

O to be like Thee, Lord, I am coming, now to receive the anointing divine;  
All that I am and have I am bringing; Lord, from this moment all shall be Thine.”

Words by Thomas Chisholm, 1897