



THE DANGER AHEAD

“Go your way, behold I send you out as lambs among wolves.” [\[1\]](#) Luke 10:3

A/ HARVESTING IS SUPPOSED TO BE DANGEROUS WORK!

When we went to Central Asia I asked how the gospel first came to the region. The reply was that the first missionaries came courtesy of “Apostle Stalin”. I had heard Stalin called many things but never “apostle” so, of course, I asked what was meant by that statement.

The story is that Stalin, in his hatred of all things Godly, had arrested the believers around Moscow and sent them in train cattle cars to Kyrgyzstan. Today that is a three day and night journey and they left in that time with only what they could carry and with no provision for food or water along the way. One third died during the journey and one third died upon arrival, since there was no provision for them once they arrived. The third who survived were the first witnesses for Jesus in the region [\[1\]](#).

Mao Tse Tung is also called an “apostle” by members of the body of Christ in China. Again, you may ask why? When Mao came to power the church in China was concentrated in the south east of the country, dependent upon western finances, subservient to western leadership and weak. Mao deported the foreigners, destroyed the Christian schools, seminaries, church buildings and began to arrest the believers and send them all over the country as slave labour in factories, mines and farms. They gave of their bread and blankets to the sick and dying. They took the worst jobs like cleaning the toilets to be able to go from cell to cell and bring comfort. The testimony of the believers as they lived, served, suffered and died began to bring multitudes to Jesus. The testimony of Jesus which had been isolated in an alien culture and confined to one part of the country was planted across the nation at the expense of the

communist Chinese state. The Word became flesh and dwelt among them! [\[2\]](#)

Did these believers suffer? Yes, and many died. Did Stalin or Mao have the last word? No. In trying to stamp out the church they only planted it more deeply in the soil of their nations.

B/ IT IS IN SUFFERING THAT THE NATURE OF JESUS IS MANIFESTED

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:11- 12

The commandments of Jesus delivered in the Sermon on the Mount confront the realities of persecution and suffering. The command to love our enemies, bless those who curse us and do good to those who abuse us comes in Matthew 5:44. It was the fulfillment of these commandments that turned so many hearts to Jesus in the Chinese prison and forced labour systems.

These commands confront our desire for ease, peace and prosperity. We even have whole sections of the church which are teaching that a sign of God’s blessing is your prosperity and that difficulty, poverty and suffering are a sign of personal sin or lack of faith. That is a perversion of the gospel of the Kingdom. In this false environment of peace, prosperity and

pleasure people easily play the victim and wonder if God still loves them when they have a bad hair day. God is not your servant. We do not come to God for what we can get from Him. Trite faith formulas do not put God in your pocket. God is not a vending machine into which you place a dollar of faith, a dollar of confession and a dollar of offering and then get whatever you want.

We die to the old man of sin and give our new lives to God for His glory, even if that means suffering and sacrifice. The truth in many parts of the world is that coming to Jesus will not make your life easier. It will make your life more difficult and more dangerous. In the year of mid 2008 to mid 2009 over 176,000 people were martyred for their faith in Jesus according to www.opendoorsusa.org. That is almost 500 people per day making the ultimate sacrifice.

These realities of suffering and persecution confront an easy gospel that tries to entice people to come to Jesus for all He will do for them and all they will get from Him. In contrast, Paul told Timothy (2 Timothy 3:12), “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” Some have turned that completely upside down and have taught that if we just have enough faith in Jesus, our lives will be healthy, wealthy and full of peace and pleasure. This “gospel” of peace and prosperity is not a New Testament gospel. We have baptized western materialism and pleasure seeking as the Kingdom of God.

It does not matter how many scriptures the television preacher uses to prove that his materialism and love of money is blessed by Jesus. You know that much of their talk is about blessing and cursing and how we are blessed or cursed according to what we do, especially in the area of what we give to them. The Old Testament covenant of blessing and cursing, based in obedience to the Mosaic law, is preached as applicable to today. However, we are not in the Old Covenant. The promised land of the Old Covenant has become the promised Spirit of the New. The blessings of prosperity in the land have become the blessings of being in Jesus in every situation. We are blessed in Jesus, because of what He has done and those blessings of inward life and peace are powerful enough to cause us to be joyful, even when we suffer.

The Hebrew church suffered and even “joyfully accepted the plundering of (their) goods”. Why? They knew they had a “better and more enduring possession... in heaven” (Hebrews 10:34). If we have truly seen eternity, that vision puts time and all of its stuff in context. We are not to react as victims but to be confident that after doing the will of God, we will receive the promise!

Paul spoke to the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians 3:3, “That no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.” We are not necessarily appointed to prosperity. We are appointed to being like Jesus and that may mean appointment to suffering.

Many saints in contexts of suffering and persecution are allowing the mystery of the cross of Jesus to work as they turn abuse into the grace of forgiveness and cursing into the grace of blessing. Blessing is more powerful than any curse and forgiveness is more powerful than any abuse. You may not be able to choose what happens to you but you can choose your attitude and your response. Quiet confidence, peace, joy and forgiveness in the face of adversity is a major testimony that Christ lives in you!

Steve and Marilyn Hill.

Steve and Marilyn are the founders and directors of Harvest Now- a ministry committed to making disciples, and multiplying simple communities of disciples with a large focus in Central Asia.

Editors Note:

This is an excerpt from the Luke 10 Manual. You can find this book here on our site at this link in the resource section:

<http://simplechurch.com.ua/en/resursy/knigi-materialy/336-rukovodstvo-luki-10.html>

The Luke 10 Manual is an inspiring and practical training manual that looks closely at the mission given to us by Jesus.

Using Luke 10 as the background scripture passage, the book answers very practical questions about finding a man of peace, making disciples, and planting churches. The book will challenge your heart as well as give you practical tools for reaching your family, friends, and neighbors.

[1] From conversations with friends in Central Asia.

[2] For a first hand account see *The Heavenly Man*, Paul Hathaway, Monarch Books, Mill Hill, London, 2003.