

Jesus – The King of the Jews #27

Sheep Among Wolves

Matt 10:16-23

Introduction:

1. As part of their training toward finally being sent on their own after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the twelve needed to have an idea of the obstacles they would face.
2. Some of the specifics Jesus taught in this chapter applied only to the apostles; yet in principle they apply to His witnesses in every generation.

I. The Analogy

16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

A. "Behold"

1. "Behold" - pay special attention to what I am about to say.
2. It could have seemed to the apostles that they were destined to be powerful wolves who would go out with invincibility to conquer the defenseless, unbelieving sheep of the world.
3. But the Lord here made it clear that the world's "sheep" are not really defenseless and that the apostles' powers—divinely endowed and marvelous as they were—would not prevent them from suffering from the hands of men.

B. "Sheep"

1. They, and the rest of His followers until He returns again, would be the real **sheep**.
2. Here is a paradoxical truth
 - a) *Jesus graphically pointed up the tensions between our vulnerability and our invincibility—*
 - b) *Tension between our weakness in ourselves and our strength in Him*
 - c) *Tension between the power of hateful persecution and the power of loving submission*
 - d) *Tension between the worldly power of the flesh and the supernatural power of the Spirit.*
3. Sheep are perhaps the most dependent, helpless, and stupid of all domesticated animals.
 - a) *They are as often panicked by harmless things as by those that are dangerous.*
 - b) *And when real danger does come, they have no natural defense except running, and they are not very good at that.*
4. In *A Shepherd Looks at the Twenty-third Psalm*, Philip Keller gives many insights from his long experience as a shepherd in Canada.
 - a) *He points out that because sheep are so indiscriminate in their choice of vegetation to eat, it is necessary to carefully protect them from eating poisonous weeds.*
 - b) *Because they are highly vulnerable to weather extremes and to infections and disease, they must be regularly and individually checked for dangerous symptoms, for cuts and abrasions, and for insects and parasites that can harm them.*
 - c) *Flies buzzing around their eyes and ears have been known to so irritate and frighten sheep that they beat their heads against trees or rocks until they are dead.*
 - d) *Sometimes flies will lay eggs in a sheep's eyes and ultimately cause blindness.*
 - e) *In trying to escape real or imagined danger, sheep will sometimes panic into a blind stampede, and pregnant ewes will lose their lambs from the running and sometimes even their own lives from utter exhaustion.*

BYZ **Matthew 10:16** Ἰδοὺ, ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμᾶς ὡς πρόβατα ἐν μέσῳ λύκων· γίνεσθε οὖν φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις, καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστέραί.

The I is emphatic: "It is I that send you forth."

Harmless (ἀκέραιοι)

Lit., unmixed, unadulterated. Used of wine without water, and of metal without alloy. Hence guileless. So Luther, without falsity. Compare Romans 16:19; Philippians 2:15. They were to imitate the serpent's wariness, but not his wiliness. "The presence of the wolves demands that ye be wary; the fact that ye are my apostles (compare "I send you") demands that ye be guileless" (Dr. Morison on Matthew).

φρόνιμοι adj nmp no degree from **φρόνιμος** - as relating to the quality of one's thinking resulting from insight *wise, intelligent, sensible* (MT 7.24), opposite **μωρός** (*foolish, stupid*) and **ἄφρων** (*foolish, senseless*); substantively **φρόνιμοι** *people with understanding* (MT 25.4); comparative **φρονιμώτερος, τέρα, ον** *more intelligent, shrewder* (LU 16.8)

ἀκέραιοι adj nmp no degree from **ἀκέραιος** - literally *pure, unmixed*, as wine; figuratively in the NT, of a character marked by integrity and innocence of evil *pure, sincere, harmless* (PH 2.15)

C. "Wolves"

1. But the sheep's greatest enemy is predators, the worst of which in Palestine have been **wolves**.
 - a) *People in Palestine understood the nature of sheep and the danger of wolves.*
 - b) *They knew how difficult the task of the shepherd was simply to keep his sheep alive, much less healthy and contented.*
2. The world will continue to make raids on the church just as wolves make raids on flocks of sheep.
 - a) *"I know that after my departure," Paul said, "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" ([Acts 20:29](#)).*
 - b) *In his Romans letter he spoke of believers being looked on by the world as "sheep to be slaughtered" ([8:36](#)).*
 - c) *Mt 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

D. "I Will Send Your Forth"

1. It is consistent with their predatory nature for wolves to come into a flock in the field to attack, mutilate, and devour the sheep.
2. The normal danger for sheep is that wolves come in among *them*.
 - a) *But here Jesus told the twelve, **I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.***
 - b) *He called them to go into the wolves' own territory, to walk into the very maw of their enemies.*
 - c) *Jesus is the perfect Good Shepherd, who loves His sheep with a divine love, who intimately knows them and is known by them, and who lays down His life for them ([John 10:11-15](#)).*
3. But it is *not* natural or consistent with their nature for sheep to voluntarily walk into the wolves' own den.
 - a) *Yet that is where the Good Shepherd, sends His disciples—into the hostile world of ungodly*
 - b) *That is where they can serve Him best and be most effective in winning others to Him.*

E. Cost of Discipleship

1. Before the 12 went out into their first brief and undemanding service for the Lord, He set before them the cost of discipleship.
 - a) *Just as He did not escape opposition and persecution, neither would they (cf. [John 15:18-27](#); [16:33](#)).*
 - b) *And it is unnatural for a shepherd to send his sheep into such certain peril.*
 - c) *The apostles, and to various extents every believer after them, would be sent out defenseless in themselves among evil, rapacious, vicious, God-hating mankind.*
2. We do not hear much preaching today of sinners needing to count the cost of salvation and repenting of sin in confessing the Lordship of Christ, or of coming to Him humbly, devoid of pride and self-trust, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and entering the narrow gate and walking the narrow road of righteousness.
 - a) *Rarely are Christians called to take up their crosses and follow Christ in moving out into the world as sheep led to slaughter.*
 - b) *The popular appeal is to ease, comfort, riches, advancement,*
 - c) *But Jesus offers to the disciples hardship, suffering, and death.*
3. After the siege of Rome in 1849, Garibaldi said to his soldiers, "Men, all our efforts against superior forces have been unavailing. I have nothing to offer you but hunger and thirst, hardship and death. But I call on all who love their country to join with me."
4. After the Allies were forced to evacuate Dunkirk in 1940, Churchill said to his fellow Englishmen, "All I can offer you is blood, sweat, and tears."
5. If those human leaders refused to send out their fellow countrymen to war under false pretenses, how much less would the Son of God!

II. The Attitude

16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

A. "Wise as Serpents"

1. In Egyptian hieroglyphics, as well as in much ancient lore, **serpents** symbolize wisdom.
 - a) *They were considered to be **shrewd**, smart, cunning, cautious.*
 - b) *In that characteristic, at least, Christians are to emulate **serpents**.*
 - c) *Paul advises believers to be wise in Col 4:5*
5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.
 - d) *Servants of the Lord are to be shrewd and cunning in dealing with the unbelieving world around them.*
2. The basic idea is that of saying the right thing at the right time and place, of having a sense of propriety and appropriateness,
3. When the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus into either defending or condemning the Roman govt by asking about paying taxes to Caesar
 - a) *He did not take the occasion to vilify Caesar or the Roman government—vile, debauched, unjust, and ungodly as they were.*
 - b) *Nor did He condone their wickedness - "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's"*
 - c) *It is neither brave nor wise, and neither spiritual nor loving, to needlessly incite anger or court trouble.*

B. "Doves"

1. As the most harmless and gentle of birds, **doves** represent being pure, or **innocent**, another characteristic of the faithful disciple of Christ.
2. Being true to God's Word and uncompromising in proclaiming the gospel does not require, and should never include, being abrasive, course, inconsiderate, belligerent, blatant, or blunt.
3. Wisdom and innocence, cunning and gentleness, are handmaids of discretion.
4. No apostle was more uncompromising of the gospel than Paul; yet he declared in 1Cor 9:19-22 →
5. Innocence involves more than simply avoiding negative attitudes and approaches. It also involves the positive attribute of purity.
6. Godly wisdom has no part in anything that is impure, deceitful, or defiling. It is always the ally of truth and righteousness.
7. Nothing untruthful or unethical can enhance the gospel or make its witness more effective.

19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

III. The Persecution

- Jesus identifies four areas in which the wolves persecute believers—in religion, government, family, and society in general.
- **Beware** of these opponents, Jesus says—be on guard, be watchful
- To be innocent is not to be naive.
- We are to be meek and loving but we are not to compromise
- We are not to love people so much that we minimize their sin and lostness apart from Christ
- The disciples had not yet experienced persecution or even opposition.
- Resistance to Jesus was not yet strong.
- Jesus' purpose in warning about persecution was not to frighten the apostles and make them suspicious of every human being who was not a believer.
- Their very mission was to convert the unsaved and win them to Christ's kingdom.
- But they needed to be warned not to expect the world to receive the gospel and its messengers with open arms.
- Satan's world system, of whom every unbeliever is a part, is diametrically opposed to Christ, His people, and His kingdom.

A. Persecution by Religion

17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

1. The first source of persecution is religion - councils and synagogues
 - a) Even under pagan rulers, the Jews were often allowed to settle most disputes among themselves, including many civil issues.
 - b) For this purpose they had developed a detailed system of courts in which various cases were adjudicated.
2. Jews would try, convict, and punish (**scourge**) fellow Jews in their own religious **courts**
 - a) In NT times the **scourge** usually consisted of 39 lashes with a whip, one less than the max allowed by Mosaic law ([Deut. 25:3](#)).
 - b) One judge would call out the sentence, one would announce the punishment, one or more would do the scourging, and others of them would count the lashes.
 - c) Maimonides reported that appropriate Scripture passages were read and sometimes psalms were sung while punishment was on

B. Persecution by Government

18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

1. **Governors** were Roman procurators, such as were Pilate, Felix, and Festus, and any govt office or body below the national level.
2. **Kings** (such as the two Agrippas, Herod Antipas, and other monarchs mentioned in the NT) represent heads of state.
3. "For my sake"
 - a) This explains why the wolves are so vicious with the Lord's sheep.
 - b) It is not because of the sheep themselves but because of their Shepherd.
 - c) The world hates Christians because the world hates Christ.
 - d) Every person who identifies with Christ becomes a potential target of Satan and his evil forces, including evil men.
 - e) The stripes, lacerations, bruises, and scars were made on Paul's body, but they were intended for his Lord.
 - f) When they eventually took his life, it was because his life was Christ's life.

IV. The Provision

19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. 20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

A. Don't Become Anxious

1. To be maligned, persecuted, arrested, and beaten is traumatic, and it is extremely difficult not to **become anxious**.
2. When we are charged with a wrongdoing, the natural reaction is to **speak** out in our own defense, to convince others of our innocence.
3. Paul admonishes us to be at all times "anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let [our] requests be made known to God" ([Phil. 4:6](#)).
4. Those who suffer for Christ will be defended by Christ.

B. God Will Tell Them What to Say

1. But in the special circumstance of being brought before a religious or civil court we have the additional promise that **it shall be given [us] in that hour what [we] are to speak**.
2. The well-known commentator R. C. H. Lenski writes, Without previous thinking, planning, imagining, at the time of their trials in court, the Apostles will receive directly from God just what to utter. It will come into their minds just as it is needed, and thus they will utter it aloud.... The apostles, indeed, make utterance, and yet they do not, for their act is due to the Holy Spirit, so that most properly he is the one who does his uttering.

17 Προσέχετε δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων· παραδώσουσιν γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰς συνέδρια, καὶ ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν μαστιγώσουσιν ὑμᾶς· **μαστιγώσουσιν** verb ind fut act 3pp from **μαστιγώω** - literally, as beating with a lash or whip *flog, scourge, whip* (MT 10.17); figuratively, of God's corrective punishment *chastise, punish severely* (HE 12.6)

18 καὶ ἐπὶ ἡγεμόνας δὲ καὶ βασιλεῖς ἀχθήσεσθε ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ, εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. **ἀχθήσεσθε** verb ind fut pass 2pp from **ἄγω** - *lead, bring*; (1) as conducting or accompanying someone or something *bring or take along* (1TH 4.14); figuratively, of the influence of God's Spirit *lead, guide* (RO 8.14); (2) as a legal technical term implying use of force *lead away, arrest, take into custody* (MK 13.11); (3) of time *spend, celebrate, observe* certain days (AC 19.38); **τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει** probably *this third day he spends*; perhaps impersonally *this is now the third day* (LU 24.21); (4) intransitively, as moving away from a point of reference *go, depart*; **ἄγωμεν** *let us go* (MT 26.46); (5) present imperative as an interjection intended to call attention to the following statement

BYZ **Matthew 10:19** Ὅταν δὲ παραδιδῶσιν ὑμᾶς, μὴ μεριμνήσητε πῶς ἢ τί λαλήσητε· δοθήσεται γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ τί λαλήσετε· In that hour - Very precise. "In that selfsame hour." Bengel remarks: "Even though not before. Many feel most strongly their spiritual power when the hour comes to impart it to others." Be not anxious (*mē merimnēsēte*). Ingressive aorist subjunctive in prohibition. "Do not become anxious

V. The Hatred

- Persecution of believers may come through the hatred of families who betray their own members and through the hatred of society in general.

A. By Family

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

1. Believers are promised possible persecution by their own families.
2. During Roman persecutions untold number of Christians were betrayed to civil authorities by a **brother** or **father** or **child**.
3. That tragic practice has been repeated many times, and it is not unknown even in our own day
4. In certain religious cultures a funeral service is held for a family member who becomes a Christian

B. By Society

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

1. The idea is that of **all** people in general, society as a whole.
 - a) *As verified by the last two thousand years, believers find they are **hated by all** classes, races, and nationalities of mankind.*
 - b) *Some believers live lives of almost constant conflict with the world, while others seem to escape it entirely.*
 - c) *Some Christians are not persecuted simply because their testimony is so weak it goes unnoticed by the world.*
 - d) *When biblical doctrine and standards are compromised to accommodate fallen human nature, society has little argument with that kind of Christianity and will give little opposition to Christians.*
2. But to confront the world as Paul did with the declaration that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" ([Rom. 1:18](#)) is to guarantee society's wrath against the gospel and those who preach it.
3. Government reacts against believers because it is under the control of the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world.
4. Endurance of persecution is the hallmark of genuine salvation.
 - a) *Endurance does not produce or protect salvation, which is totally the work of God's grace.*
 - b) *But endurance is evidence of salvation, proof that a person is truly redeemed and a child of God.*
 - c) *We do not earn our salvation by endurance, but prove it.*
5. God's Word assures us that absolutely nothing can separate us from Christ that we can count on such unshakable endurance. Rom 8:38

VI. The Response – vs 23

1. We have no right to provoke animosity or ridicule.
2. And Christ here urges escaping persecution when doing so is expedient and possible.
3. We are not obligated to stay in a place of opposition and danger until we are killed, or even imprisoned.
4. That is the pattern Paul followed throughout his ministry
 - a) *When persecution became so severe in one place that he could no longer minister effectively, he left and went to another.*
 - b) *He was not afraid of persecution, and many times he was severely beaten before he left a city.*
 - c) *At least once he was stoned and left for dead.*
 - d) *He endured whatever ridicule, reviling, beatings, and imprisonment were necessary while he ministered.*
 - e) *But he left a place when his effectiveness there ceased.*
5. That is the pattern that every faithful minister and missionary is to follow until the Son of Man comes.

20 οὐ γὰρ ὑμεῖς ἐστὲ οἱ λαλοῦντες, ἀλλὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τὸ λαλοῦν ἐν ὑμῖν. 21 Παραδώσει δὲ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν εἰς θάνατον, καὶ πατὴρ τέκνον· καὶ ἐπαναστήσονται τέκνα ἐπὶ γονεῖς, καὶ θανατώσουσιν αὐτούς ἐπαναστήσονται verb ind fut mid 3pp from ἐπανίστημι - only middle in the NT, of hostile action rise up against, rebel against

BYZ Matthew 10:22 Καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου· ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται.

Ye shall be hated (esesthe misoumenoi). Periphrastic future passive, linear action. It will go on through the ages.

BYZ Matthew 10:23 Ὅταν δὲ διώκωσιν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ, φεύγετε εἰς τὴν ἄλλην· ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ τελέσητε τὰς πόλεις τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, ἕως ἂν ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.