



World Christian Fellowship

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Sheep Among Wolves!

Matthew 10:16-17

Matthew 10:16-23, *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. ¹⁷But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. ¹⁸You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

²¹“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²²And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Lord instructs the Twelve on their first missionary venture. It is a part of their training. Before they are ultimately and finally sent out after the resurrection and ascension, they need to have some anticipation of what will be like when they face a hostile, Christ-rejection world.

So, the Lord here sends them out ever so briefly, but at least to give them a taste of what they will face.

As He sends them, He gives them instruction.

The instruction our Lord gives to the Twelve has some very specific reference to them. But beyond that it goes beyond that to touch all who represent Christ in the Church age, and it even goes into the period of the great tribulation.

There is a telescoping effect.

V 23, *When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

It ends with the coming of the Son of Man.

That is an eschatological term used by Matthew to refer to the return of Christ.

What Jesus teaches her as immediate import for the Twelve as they go out is a dispensational statement related to a very specific time in which they lived.

Matthew 10:6, *But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

But it begins from there to telescope, and it touches the time in which they will fully be sent.

It even touches all of those who were ever sent by our Lord, even those who will be sent against the terrible opposition of the great tribulation prior to the return of Christ.

Here is a span and a sweep of all the history of God's people, from Jesus the first time He came, to Jesus the second time He comes.

Jesus sees the Twelve on this first mission. But with His marvellous, omniscient, prophetic eye, He sees the Twelve again in their full mission.

Not only that He even sees all those who represent Him.

Finally, He sees those who will be in the great tribulation and the terrible opposition they will face.

1. **V 5-15, Tasks of the Apostles.**
2. **V 16-23, Response to their ministry.**
3. **V 24-42, Cost of being a disciple.**

Starting with the Twelve, this marvellous telescoping effect that encompasses everybody who represents Christ until the second coming. There are some very specific things that relate to the apostles.

V 8, *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

There is no indication at all that they did raise the dead, on this first brief mission. But they would do in their full and final sending, after the resurrection, when the Spirit came.

V 17, *But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.*

This did not happen on this their first mission. There was no persecution of them at all until after the resurrection of Christ.

So, there are some specific things that fit then, such as, “Go now to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;” some that fit later for them, such as “Raise the dead.”

“You will be persecuted in the synagogues;” and some general things that sweep on through history for us.

Perhaps some of that are most uniquely fulfilled by those who will live in the great tribulation.

Now, the reason I take the time to explain that to you is because people have misunderstood this chapter, and particularly this section, wondering why the disciples didn't do all these things that were done, and wondering how and where these all apply.

But biblically speaking, this is a very common pattern.

Many times, in the Old Testament, the prophet will make an immediate prophecy that also has a fulfilment in the future. Very often David will speak of something coming to pass, or an attitude that he has, or something about himself and have in mind ultimately the Messiah.

Micah 5:2-4, *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”* ³*Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labour has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel.* ⁴*And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His*

God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth;

Micah says nothing about the thousands of years in between His birth and His kingdom.

Very commonly, in the prophetic literature, predictions have an immediate fulfilment and a future fulfilment. Exactly that is what our Lord is doing.

He is predicting the role and the place of the apostles and has in mind the ultimate sense that this will sweep clear through history to the time of the great tribulation.

If we don't understand that, we will not understand this chapter. If we do, then we will.

Otherwise, you can't explain why they didn't raise the dead or why they weren't thrown into the synagogues and beaten during their first mission. But if you understand that it's an unfolding all the way into the future.

Now, this then is our Lord's ordination of the Twelve.

V 16, *"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves."*

I am not an expert on sheep, and I am less of an expert on wolves.

Sheep are so easily scared and panicked. If a jackrabbit jumps out from behind a piece of brush, it's enough to stampede the whole flock. They are just real edgy animals.

When danger comes, they are utterly helpless. The only thing they must do is to run.

They are totally defenceless. They have no weapons at all. All they can do is run, and they are not built for speed. Great big fat bodies and four toothpicks for legs.

Yet, all kinds of dangers face sheep.

Shepherd must protect the sheep from poisonous weeds. So, the shepherd must go ahead of the flock and make sure there are no poisonous weeds.

Sheep are also vulnerable to weather. Parasites, which attach themselves to the sheep's body to all kinds of diseases and especially to insects.

There are certain flies that are so much a problem to sheep, that sheep have commonly been known to beat their heads

against rocks or trees until they are dead because of the annoyance of flies buzzing around their ears and eyes.

Very often, flies will land in their eyes and plant their eggs there, and ultimately, it will cause the sheep blindness.

Sometimes sheep will panic and stampede just trying to elude the flies, and in the stampede, the ewes with lamb will lose their lambs, and they will become exhausted.

But beyond all of these, the most severe enemy of sheep is the predator, wolf, the flesh-eating, wild animal.

There is record that 2 wild wolves have been known to kill as many as 292 sheep in a single night.

Ewes heavy with lamb, when chased by such predators, will slip the unborn lambs, and lose them in abortions. A shepherd's loss from such forays can be appalling.

Yet despite the damage, despite the dead sheep, despite the injuries of fear instilled in the flock. So cunning and skilful were their raids, they defy description.

Now, if you lived in the Lord's time, in Palestine, you would have understood this. You would have understood the severity

of the task of the shepherd who had to defend his sheep against all these things, and he didn't even own the sheep.

The shepherd worked for the sheep owner. In fact, if you came back and reported that a sheep had been killed, you had to have a piece of the flesh of that sheep to prove a wild animal had killed that sheep if it meant that you had to pull it out of the mouth of the wolf himself. Else you could lose your life because they feared people would steal the sheep if they didn't have evidence that that they had been killed.

So, the idea of the sheep and the wolf was very common in the minds of these men.

Our Lord says to them now, I am going to send you out, and it will be like sheep in the midst of wolves. Not sheep in fear of wolves arriving, but sheep among wolves that have already arrived.

Now, that is not exactly the most thrilling call to the ministry you have ever heard.

Sending them out as sheep is a wonderful thought.

Christ is the Good Shepherd.

- ✓ He knows His sheep.
- ✓ He loves His sheep.

✓ He cares for His sheep.

They know His voice, John 10.

But the idea of them being in the middle of or among vicious, destructive, deadly wolves is the Lord's way of making the most graphic illustration of the helplessness and the fearfulness of confronting a Christ rejecting, God hating world with the message of the kingdom.

Sometimes the wolves are among us.

Acts 20:29, *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*

Romans 8:36, *As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."*

Some people just view us as sheep to be slaughtered. Sometimes the wolves are on the outside, sometimes the wolves are on the inside, masquerading as sheep.

Remember the wolf in sheep's clothing,

Jesus' instruction would be enough to panic anybody. Helpless, defenceless apostles going out among rapacious, vicious, wicked, God hating men.

We would think the Lord would say, “we are going out as wolves among the sheep. Get them. Tear them up for the Gospel.”

Matthew 9:36, *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*

It would seem that they were the sheep, and we are the wolves, and we have the power of God.

But they are the wolves, and we are the sheep.

It doesn't mean that we are going to lose.

It just means that we don't have the resource in ourselves.

When we read in **John 10** that the Good Shepherd, gives His life for the sheep. He will defend us.

We are so concerned about getting people saved that we water down the Gospel.

- Don't talk about repentance,
- Don't talk about confession of sin,
- Don't talk about humbling ourselves,
- Don't talk about hungering and thirsting for righteousness,

- Don't talk about the lordship of Christ,
- Don't talk about obedience,
- Don't talk about narrow way,
- Don't talk about the cost and the price.

Then when somebody becomes a believer, we don't talk about going out as sheep among wolves.

We aren't as honest as Jesus is. We don't recruit people for evangelism and say, "Look, there are some wild wolves out there. Are there any of you sheep who would like to volunteer?"

The world talks about ease and comfort, riches, advancement, and ambition.

Jesus offered hardship and death.

What have we gained?

Just clouded the issue for them and everybody else.

That's why we have so many on the broad road and so few on the narrow road.

But the many on the broad road think they are saved because we have so watered down the reality of it.

Jesus is saying to them that they are going to cut you up out there. They don't agree with you. They don't believe your message. They don't want to hear your message.

Garibaldi, in 1849, after the siege of Rome, said this 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.”* They came in the hundreds.

After Dunkirk, Winston Churchill, British Prime minister said, *“All I can offer you is blood and sweat and tears.”*

Lord says, “Blood, sweat, tears, hunger, thirst, death.” That's the way it is. He never sends anybody out without fully telling them the truth.

It is tough being on a mission field. It is tough being a missionary right here.

2 Timothy 3:12, *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

God is gracious, and there's a time of respite for you. Somewhere in the world, always, the Church is being devoured, persecuted. Somewhere. It may come here.

We can thank God for this breath of fresh air, but in the midst of it, don't be under the illusion that there is no persecution.

Whether you ought to obey God or men?

You have a mandate from God.

If we are definitive with our faith, there is always a price to pay. You cannot confront a God-hating world without a reaction.

Who are the wolves?

Twelve are told they are going to get persecuted, in effect, and it didn't happen till after the crucifixion, even when Peter cut off Malchus' ear, they didn't arrest him.

The disciples didn't experience any persecution till after the resurrection, but it's going to come, and it's going to come from the wolves.

We know who the sheep are.

The sheep are the apostles.

"I send you forth as sheep."

V 17, "Beware of men."

Men are the wolves. Human beings.

We wrestle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies.
We wrestle against a demonic foe.

Satan, the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of the darkness of this world is behind the system.

- It is supernatural.
- It is hellish.
- It is demonic, but its agents are human, and the enemy is man.
- Men who slaughtered the saints.
- It has been men who crucified, burned at the stake, stoned the saints of God.
- It has been men who threw them in jail when they preached.
- It is men that are the enemy, men who talk about the milk of human kindness.
- It is men who are the dupes of Satan.

Matthew 5:10-11, *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
¹¹ *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

The assumption there is that men do this. It is on the human level.

It had already begun coming down around our Lord, if not His disciples.

Matthew chapter 9, once Jesus forgave sin, forgave that paralyzed man, the Pharisees began to move in.

Matthew 9:11, *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

They began to react against Him, and the plot began to brew.

Matthew 9:34, *But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."*

They said, "He is demon possessed."

There was a wolf even in the Twelve.

Judas Iscariot.

He was one of those like Paul spoke of who arise from the midst. He that wolf, ultimately delivered the Lord to be murdered. He is responsible for the destruction from the physical human side of our Lord, as well as others.

V 17, *"Beware of men."*

Keep your eye out for men.

They are not your friends in one sense.

Don't forget that we must reach people, and we must love all men, the Bible says, as God loves them. Do good to all, especially those of the household of faith.

We want to keep a balance but realize that the enemy's going to attack you through human agencies.

Don't be surprised when you are criticized.

Don't be surprised when you are fired for articulating your faith.

Don't be surprised when people won't invite you to the parties or the activities.

Don't be surprised when some girl dumps you, or some guy dumps you because of your faith.

Don't be surprised because human agents represent the kingdom of darkness.

V 22, *And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*

It isn't isolated.

The "all" here is not the all of every human being who ever lived on the face of the earth.

Jeremiah 3:6, *The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot.*

Israel played the harlot under every green tree?

You understand what the author means.

It is a literary license.

It doesn't mean they had left no tree without an adulterous affair on the face of the earth. It's just a generic statement.

Psalms 6:6, *I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears.*

Matthew 14:5, *And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.*

Not everybody in the world who ever lived does, but that's a general statement. All kinds of men, all classes, all sexes, all races, all nationalities, all cultures and so forth.

Jesus was talking about the Jewish people going to be antagonizing. Through all the ages of history, are going to react negatively to the Gospel when it's lived and presented.

The reason that we do not experience more of this overtly is because our message has been so altered to accommodate men so that we don't confront them.

The Gospel begins with lostness, because you don't even know where the Gospel begins unless you understand that the first thing Paul says is the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.

What do you say first when you meet someone?

The wrath of God is revealed against you for your ungodliness. For you know what is true of God for the creation around you, and instead, you have turned the truth into a lie, and you have worshipped the creature more than the Creator. God has given you up to your own lusts.

As we study the book of Romans on our Bible study.

Then you could go on to point two. After you pick yourself up.

It is so different!

But Jesus said, "When you go out and preach repentance for the kingdom is at hand, you are confronting people with their sinfulness. You are confronting the dupes and agents of Satan., They are going to react."

When you recruit men for the ministry or the mission field, this is the kind of thing we must remind them of!

They are going out as sheep among the wolves.

People misunderstand you.

- They misrepresent you.
- They criticize you.
- You must accept that as part of it.

Sometimes the physical suffering would be easier to handle than the emotional and mental anguish.

1 Corinthians 4:9-13, *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonoured! ¹¹To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. ¹²And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; ¹³being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

How about this for recruiting missionaries?

All of you who would like to be appointed to death, spectacles, fools, naked and buffeted, filth and offscouring, line up to the right.

Welcome to the mission field.

Welcome to the ministry,

Welcome to the representation of Christ.

“Spectacles” is a very interesting term.

When a Roman general won a battle over another nation or another city, He was given the privilege of parading his army through the streets. This was called triumph.

He would parade his army, and they would have all their spoils, the wealth, and all the fare that they had taken from the defeated foe. At the end of the whole line would come a little group of captives tied together on their way to die in the arena.

That is the term that is used here for spectacle.

God means us apostles to come in at the very end like doomed gladiators in the arena. That’s us, set for doom.

“Appointed to death.”

Jesus told Peter later that he would die, and almost all, with just a few exceptions, were martyrs.

V 10, *“We are fools.”*

The world thinks us fools.

“They think our message foolishness.”

V 11, We are going to be “buffeted”

A word that means to strike someone with your fist.

It was used to beating a slave with the fists.

“filth,” a word that means a filth scab.

“offscouring” is what you scour off a dirty dish.

How is that for a call to the ministry?

What is an apostle?

He is a spectacle appointed unto death, a fool who is knocked around with people’s fists, one who is considered filth, and something to be scrubbed off a plate.

Who are the wolves?

Men.

Why are they so vicious?

V 18, *You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.*

For My sake.

They are vicious not because they really hate you, but because they hate Christ.

V 22, *And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*

The concept of name there means all that He is.
In the name of Christ is the sum of all that He is.

It's because of who He is and what He has done that we are persecuted.

If we are persecuted for what Christ has done, it must be very obvious that we and Christ are doing together what we are doing.

In other words, if Christ is not made manifest, nobody's going to persecute Him in me.

But when I am persecuted, it is because I represent Christ.

It is because He is in me, living His life.

It is because I reflect Christ in the world that I am persecuted.

Galatians 6:17, *From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

You could see the marks,

- the scars from the stones,
- the scars from the rods,
- the scars from the whips,
- the scars from the battering and the beatings all over his body.

For Apostle Paul they were the marks of Christ.

They never were intended for Paul.

Nobody really was that upset with Paul.

Paul wasn't that big an issue.

They were upset at Christ, couldn't get to Him, got to His emissary. Twice took his life. Once he came back.

Finally, they chopped his head off with an ax, and it wasn't because of him. It was because of who was living in him.

Colossians 1:24, *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,*

Paul wanted to know the fellowship of His sufferings.

He prayed his highest prayer.

Philippians 3:10-11, *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul really identified with being able to be punished not for what he did, but for what Christ was doing through Him in confronting the world of darkness.

1 Peter 4:14, *if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*

When the kingdom is built, Satan's going to cause people to react.

- They are going to rebel.
- They are going to banish you.
- They are going to turn you away.
- They are going to criticize you.
- They are going to condemn you.
- They are going to falsely accuse you.

It is fine!

For us to stand and take the blows meant for Him, who took the blows meant for us. In fact, that's a joy.

Apostle Paul really understood this principle.

Paul on the road to Damascus, literally his breath is a breath of threat and slaughter as he kills Christians. So, he comes along the road, and the Lord strikes him down. In a moment he was blind, and he was on the ground.

Acts 9:4-5, *Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ^sAnd he*

said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Had he ever met Jesus?

No.

Had Jesus been on earth?

No.

Was Jesus in heaven?

Yes.

How was he persecuting Jesus?

Because Christ was living His life through His people, and when he persecuted His people, he persecuted Him.

Paul never forgot that. That thought stuck in his mind so that when he recited his testimony.

Acts 22:7-8, *And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'⁸ So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'*

Acts 26:14-15, *And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'¹⁵ So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'*

Because we are sent into the world as were the Twelve, as will be the people who come in the tribulation time to represent Christ as sheep among wolves.

The wolves are men, and the reason they are so vicious is because they hate Christ. They hate Christ.

Matthew 12:30, *He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.*

No middle ground.

Conclusion.

How do the wolves attack?

What is our response?

How we react to a hostile world?

Jesus gathered these Twelve around Him. He said to them, "I am going to send you out, sheep among wolves."

Later He said to them, "I am going to be with you, and I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you, and you will win in the end. The sheep will defeat the wolves."

A great promise.

Not on their own strength, but on the basis of His power.

They wanted to stay close to Him because they knew He was the resource. They never wanted to drift away. They huddled around Him. They hung onto Him.

When He said He was going to leave them, they panicked.

When He told them to go away, they said, "Where would we go?"

He was the source of their food.

He fed them on the side of the hill.

He was the source of their tax money on at least one occasion.

He took it out of the mouth of a fish.

He was the source of their human need for love.

He poured His love upon them.

He cared for them.

He turned nature into one huge parable so that every time they saw a field, or a tree, or a mountain, or an animal, or a leaf, or a flower, or a piece of grain, instantly they thought of spiritual truth.

He taught them.

He was everything to them.

When He told them He was going to go away and leave them to the wolves, they panicked, because they so longed for His fellowship.

But He said, "I will send My Spirit, and He will dwell in you, and He will be your strength and your power. And with His power, you will overcome."

Through the resident Spirit in the life of a believer, he communes with the living Christ. He gave them a way to remember that in this, the Lord's Table.

Jesus said, "Come to the Table and remember Me, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. Every time you do this, remember that I died to save you from the wolves, and that someday I will come again to take you to Myself."