

Speaker: Associate Pastor Richard Yun
Title: Sheep Among Wolves
Text: Matthew 10:16-23

Introduction

In Matthew 10:16-23 Jesus says,

"16 Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. 17 But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. 18 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But 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; 20 for 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. 22 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 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."

Before Christ would send out the disciples following His resurrection and ascension, they needed to anticipate the response they would face from a hostile, Christ-rejecting world.

There is a telescoping effect of the instructions our Lord gave to the twelve.

- First, it had specific reference to them as apostles
- But our Lord also had in mind the role of all Christians through history up to the time of the Great Tribulation.

I. Jesus' Opening Statement (v. 16a)

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."

A. The Picture

- The Vulnerability of Sheep
 - Helpless, dependent, and timid.
When danger comes, they are utterly helpless.
Sheep need to be protected.

- The Viciousness of Wolves

The most severe enemy of sheep is the predator—the flesh-eating wild animal (indicated in Matthew 10:16 as a wolf). It was documented that "Two [wild] dogs have been known to kill as many as 292 sheep in a single night of unbridled slaughter."

Who Are the Wolves? (vv. 17a, 22a... "beware of men") Men are the wolves. It's true that we wrestle *"against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Eph. 6:12).

Satan, the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), the ruler of the darkness of this world, is behind the demonic system. But its agents are human. It is men who do those wicked things.

So shepherding is a difficult profession to protect the sheep from the wolves.

B. The Perspective

- An Honest Appraisal
 - The conflict between sheep and wolves was familiar to the disciples.
 - That they were to be sent among vicious, deadly wolves was our Lord's way of graphically illustrating the dangers of confronting a Christ-rejecting, God-hating world with the message of the kingdom.
 - Acts 20:29--Paul said to the elders of the Ephesian church, *"I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."*
 - Romans 8:36--Paul here cited Psalm 44:22: "We are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

- An Honest Approach

Jesus' honesty is refreshing. The popular appeal today promises ease, comfort, riches, advancement, and ambition. But Jesus offers hardship, persecution and perhaps even death.

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

1 Peter 4:14--Peter said, *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."*

When you stand with Christ, Satan will cause people to ostracize, criticize, condemn, and falsely accuse you. But it's truly a joy to take the blows meant for Him who took the blows meant for us.

But the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep - He will defend us (John 10:14-15).

Conclusion

How do we react to a hostile world? I believe it will become more hostile when we want to make God's Kingdom our priority and to declare the truth.

The sheep will defeat the wolves--not in their own strength, but on the basis of Christ's power. They would win in the end (Matt. 28:20; John 14:18-19).

Jesus said he would be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). He will not forsake us or leave us. We will be persecuted, but He will be there to enable us to endure it. Jesus said that *"in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).