

SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES

(Matt. 10:11-20)

Introduction:

1. The context of this passage is our Lord's sending out of the 12 on what is often referred to as the "Lesser Commission", in contrast with the "Great Commission of Matt. 28:18-20. Jesus sent them only to the Jews, not the Gentiles or even Samaritans (Matt. 10:5). This passage is part of what we might call the final "pep talk" before sending them out.
2. He tells them where to go (only the lost sheep of Israel), what to do (heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons, and preach of the kingdom of heaven), how to go about it (seek those who are "worthy" and avoid those who are not), and about the persecution they will face (arrest, hated). He concludes but telling them not be afraid and the reason why they should not be afraid.
3. The world is full of canons and our Lord is recruiting fodder!!!
4. Jesus said he was sending them as sheep in the midst of wolves, and that is true of us today. As Dennis Curd put it so well, the world is full of canons and our Lord is seeking fodder. Let us consider the phrase "sheep in the midst of wolves" more deeply for the fullness of this instruction.

Discussion:

I. We are Sheep.

- A. Consider the frequency of God referring to His people as sheep, and what we know about sheep.
 1. Sheep are without natural defenses, that is, they are harmless (v16b). Christians are to make themselves harmless (thus the command to "be" harmless as doves; from the Greek *ginomai* = to become). Jesus was the "harmless" that we are to be (cp. Matt. 12:14-21). Consider also the image we find in Is. 11:6, 7.
 2. Sheep are helpless (cp. Matt. 9:36; Rom. 5:6; 7:24).
 3. Sheep must be led and cared for (cp. Matt. 9:36; Rom. 7:25-8:1-4, 14; John 10; Ps. 23).
- B. How do we "become" sheep? Matt. 5:3-16 which yields Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3, 5; Rom. 10:10; Mark 16:16; Rev. 2:10).

II. In the Midst of Wolves.

- A. The Bible teaches about "wolves".
 1. In the context of our verse the wolves are those who are not worthy to receive the Gospel (vv 11-15; cp. Matt. 7:6; Luke 7:30; Acts 13:46).
 2. Wolves are those who will attack the church from without and within (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29, 30).
- B. The wolves are the darkness within which we are to be light.
- C. Many of us were wolves before "becoming" Christians. Sadly, some of us go back to being wolves; either attacking the church or simply becoming unworthy of the Gospel.

III. Why would Jesus send sheep into the midst of wolves?

- A. To find the lost sheep scattered among the wolves (Matt. 9:36; 10:6).
 1. The "lost sheep" are those worthy to receive the Gospel (Matt. 10:11-13a).
 2. The "lost sheep" are the good soil for the seed, which is the word (Matt. 13).
 3. The "lost sheep" are those asking/seeking/knocking who we are to help answer/find/open (Matt. 7:8).
- B. To be the light of the world (to attract lost sheep) and the salt of the earth (to nourish and preserve the lost sheep; Matt. 5:13-16).
- C. Because the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:25-28); because the surrender to God is the overcoming of the world (when the sheep follow the shepherd they overcome the wolves-John 16:32, 33; Rev. 3:21).
- D. Because He loves us so and desires that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Conclusion:

1. This leads us to questions for us to consider. Are we sheep or wolves? Are we becoming sheep or are we becoming/remaining wolves? If we are sheep, are we living as sheep among the wolves or are we sheep in wolves clothing? Are we seeking diligently the lost sheep of God? Are we "sheepishly" striving to overcome wolves?
2. One last question: are we surrendering to our Lord (dying to self) in order to overcome the world?
3. Invitation.

MORE ON “SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES”

1. Ps. 23 teaches us a lot about who we are to be.
 - v1 = Under the authority of God (submissive) and not worried (content).
 - v2 = Living as God commands and nourished by Him.
 - v3 = Healed/strengthened by God and living His way for His glory.
 - v4 = Confident of God’s care and provision and thus unafraid. Consider the comfort of God’s rod (protection) and staff (chastisement).
 - v5 = Even when in the midst of wolves (enemies) we are provided for, favored by God, and joyous.
 - v6 = Confident of the loving care and eternal hope all the days of our life.

2. Consider some of the characteristics of elders, the shepherds of God’s flock.
 - A shepherd must be himself a sheep (1 Tim. 3:2-3; Titus 1:6-8; 1 Pet. 5:2-4).
 - A shepherd must be a proven leader (1 Tim. 3:4-6, 10, 13; Titus 1:6).
 - A shepherd must be able to defend against wolves (Titus 1:9-14; Acts 20:28-32).

3. Our Lord is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) **AND** the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5)! Who we are will determine who/how He is towards us.
 - If we are sheep He will be the Lamb of God who shed His blood for our forgiveness.
 - If we are a wolf He will be the Lion of Judah and destroy us.

4. As sheep we are fully armed by our Shepherd for the combat with the wolves (Eph. 6:10-17; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Cor. 10:1-6).

5. Put off the old man (the wolf) and be clothed in white robes (wool).

Be sheep of the great Shepherd, strong and of good courage even in the midst of wolves. Seek the lost sheep of God and overcome the wolves of the world; knowing that life and life eternal is yours.