

Sheep Among Wolves

Thomas Robinson, *Learning at Jesus' Side*, 9, July 29, 2012

Matthew 10:16-25 Jesus continues instructing the Twelve

¹⁶ “Behold, **I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves**, so be **wise as serpents and innocent** (guileless) as doves.”

¹⁷ Take care in dealing with people, for they will **hand you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues**, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before **governors and kings for my sake**, to bear witness before them and the **Gentiles**.

¹⁹ When they **hand you over**, do **not be anxious** how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is **not you who speak**, but **the Spirit of your Father** speaking through you.

²¹ **Brother will hand over brother** over to death, and the **father his child**, and children will rise against **parents** and have them put to death, ²² and you will be **hated by all for my name's sake**. But the one who **endures to the end will be saved**.

²³ When they **persecute you in one town, flee to the next**, for truly, I say to you, you will not have completed all the **towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes**.

²⁴ A **disciple is not above his teacher**, nor a **servant above his master**. ²⁵ It is enough for the **disciple to be like his teacher**, and the **servant like his master**. If they have called the master of the house **Beelzebul**, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

Matthew 6:25, 33

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, **do not be anxious about your life**, what you will **eat** or what you will **drink**, nor about your body, what you will put on.” ... ³³ But **seek first the kingdom of God** and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 24:9, 14

⁹ “Then they will **hand you over to tribulation and put you to death**, and you will be **hated by all nations** (Gentiles) for my name's sake.” ...

¹⁴ “And this **gospel of the kingdom** will be proclaimed throughout the **whole inhabited world** as a testimony to **all nations** (Gentiles)....”

Matthew 12:17-21

¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ “Behold, **my servant whom I have chosen**, my **beloved with whom my soul is well pleased**. **I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles** (nations). ¹⁹ He will **not quarrel** or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰ **a bruised reed he will not break**, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings **justice to victory**; ²¹ and in his name the **Gentiles** (nations) **will hope**.” [Isa 42:1-4]

Matthew 9:33-34; 12:23-24

³³ And ... the **crowds** marveled, saying, “**Never was anything like this seen in Israel**.” ³⁴ But the **Pharisees** said, “**He casts out demons by the prince of demons**.” ...

12: ²³ And all the **people** were amazed, and said, “**Can this be the Son of David?**” ²⁴ But when the **Pharisees** heard it, they said, “**It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons**.”

Daniel 7:13-14 Daniel's vision of the Son of Man (God's people) receiving an eternal kingdom.

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven **there came one like a son of man**, and he came to **the Ancient of Days** and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given **dominion** and glory and **a kingdom**, that **all peoples, nations**, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and **his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed**.”

Being Like Jesus – A Wrench in the Works

The Twelve must have felt whiplash! Jesus honored them as “apostles,” sends them out with amazing authority / power for healing and renewing the “lost sheep” of Israel. No ordinary resources, but still, astonishing signs and the message of God’s powerful rule breaking in. They’ve been around Jesus, seen the throngs flowing in to get something from him. Jesus gives. Now the throngs will come to them. Nice. You can do without sandals if you can raise the dead. But suddenly Jesus’ words turn very dark: Wolves and flogging, betrayal, executions, broken families, persecution, fleeing, hated by everyone. What happened to the authority and kingdom? Jesus knows that they/we think of authority/power within the structures of this world – a means of control, domination. God’s “kingdom” meant throwing out the Gentiles; independent Israel. Like Rome, in control of her own land and armies; punishing enemies, sending tribute to no one. Jesus knows that his signs / authority point to a radically different kingdom, hard to imagine, loving enemies, including Gentiles, through a crucifixion, defeat of sin and death. What? How? God’s kingdom must come in its own distinct way.

Jesus shakes them with harsh images. “You’ll be like me! ... They call me Beelzebul.” The crowds like Jesus, but religious leaders see profound danger, a battle with Satan. No holds barred.

Vulnerable for Testimony – An Opening for God

Jesus warns that people are the danger. They can’t make sense of you, but they’ll sense that the disciples don’t fit their values, goals, but rather undermine them. Jesus repeatedly speaks of being “handed over” (*paradidomi*), “betrayed” (like Jesus was handed over by Judas, 10:4). Jesus wants the disciple to be “wise as serpents” (smarter than the tempter) and unmixed, wholly committed in their lives. They know that God is doing a radically new thing and learn that they are part of it. Learn not to be anxious (6:24). The disciple’s vulnerability/danger (like Jesus) is an opening for the Father’s Spirit to speak. God is wholly present doing his saving work. Jesus promises no deliverance from danger but opportunity for witness, participation in God’s work.

People Don’t React Well

Jesus wants his disciples to know that the crisis at the heart of his message is far deeper and more dangerous than they imagine. The world’s structures and values are deeply rooted in every aspect of life. They won’t surrender to God’s rule (the Sermon on the Mount) without wreaking havoc like departing demons: Jerusalem destroyed, Israel lost as a nation, Rome overturned, Church corrupted. The struggle of Mammon, Power, and Addictive/abusive pleasure against the claim of God’s kingdom runs through every human heart and relationship. Jesus is not predicting all these troubles for the Twelve in the next few weeks but letting them see the depth of the struggle. All happened and worse: 35 years later the emperor Nero blames Christians for the fire in Rome. They’re “hated for their abominations” (Tacitus) and outlawed.

Fleeing Into the Eternal Kingdom

When they persecute you, Jesus says, don’t stay and fight or get killed. Run, flee! Don’t underestimate the power of the world’s glory in combat to pull you into the violence. You’ll end up hating your enemy, gaining your life and losing your soul. Keep living in that other kingdom. Testify in ever new places. Jesus talks of the Son of Man coming, not the “second” coming, but coming into his kingdom through his death and resurrection: “All authority in heaven...” What a strange kingdom! Hard, challenging words. But through them, God’s power and beauty.