

Sermon for October 29, 2023 - Reformation

Matthew 10:16-23 (EHV)

Theme: The Lord's Lionhearted Lambs

- 1) Wisely recognize the time and danger.
- 2) Harmlessly confess Christ with confidence.

¹⁶“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be on guard against people. They will hand you over to councils, and they will whip you in their synagogues. ¹⁸You will be brought into the presence of governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹Whenever they hand you over, do not be worried about how you will respond or what you will say, because what you say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰In fact you will not be the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you.

²¹“Brother will hand over his brother to death, and a father will do the same with his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. ²²You will be hated by all people because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. ²³And when they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. Amen I tell you: You will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

I must admit: all the changes going on in the world scare me, but not in the way people might think. I do not fear the threat of climate change, pandemic, war, or other disasters. What scares me is how the devil has blinded so many people into thinking that it is okay to do whatever you want, however you want, whenever you want. And if you try to show them otherwise, they get mad at you, saying: “I have the final say in what’s good for me, not anyone else – or some ancient book that’s open to “interpretation.”

This deception to “be your own god” is nothing more than the same temptation the devil used to get Adam and Eve to fall into sin - just in different packaging. Because that lie sounds so appealing, People don’t recognize its danger: how it is inherently selfish and inevitably destroys our relationship with the LORD and other people.

Sadly, many people are not only falling for the devil’s lie, but they are also doing their best to promote it – demanding that people not only tolerate but affirm their philosophical, religious, and lifestyle choices. And if you don’t? Then they shame you for being “unloving” and “bigoted.”

Yes, times are changing, and the changes are scary. So, what should we do: hunker down and hide under a rock – hoping the world won’t notice us until Christ returns? I sometimes wish I could do that because I don’t want to lose my friends or be at odds with any extended family members who have fallen prey to the devil’s deception. But the truth is that ignoring the problem won’t make it go away. Worse yet, if we say and do nothing, we are letting the devil entice our loved ones away from Christ without a fight!

So, what would the LORD have us do? Let us learn from the encouragement Jesus gave his disciples as he sent them out into the world as sheep among wolves, under the theme: **The LORD's lionhearted lambs**: 1) Wisely recognize the time and danger we are in. 2) Harmlessly confess Christ with confidence.

Part One: Wisely recognize the time and danger we are in.

Our text is part of a more extensive encouragement Jesus gave his disciples before he sent them out to preach *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.¹

It's sad to note that, even though the Scriptures were read every Sabbath in the synagogues, Jesus described the Israelites as lost. Why? Because they neither knew Jesus nor his salvation. Instead of pointing to the promised Saviour, their rabbis were constantly telling them that they must earn salvation through their own works, just like the apostate Roman Church taught in Luther's day and still teaches today.

Jesus moved his disciples to have the same compassion for the lost that he had. He didn't want them to see the people as their enemy – even though many people would vehemently fight against them – but as brothers who have been duped and enslaved by the devil and in need of spiritual rescue. Sadly, because Satan brainwashed the lost so thoroughly, the disciples' job of preaching God's Law and Gospel would not be easy.

¹⁶*“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.*

Snakes are crafty creatures that are keenly aware of their surroundings. In the same way, God wants his disciples to be keenly aware of the spiritual dangers surrounding them. Doves are iconic pictures of peace. By comparison, Jesus wants his disciples to conduct their ministry so that they are not a threat to anyone but bringers of peace.

Jesus continues: ¹⁷*Be on guard against people.* The Lord needed his disciples to realize that the sinful nature in every person is hostile towards the truth of Christ. That means many people would try to subvert their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. Some would use threats and brute force. Others would try to gain the disciples' confidence, only to betray them later. Jesus' warning was not to scare the disciples, but to prepare them; for their fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of Satan who have entrapped and enslaved the very people we are trying to free with the Gospel.

Therefore, Jesus warns: *They will hand you over to councils, and they will whip you in their synagogues.* ¹⁸*You will be brought into the presence of governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.* A couple of verses later, he adds: ²¹*“Brother will hand over his brother to death, and a father will do the same with his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.* ²²*You will be hated by all people because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved.*

You don't have to read far into the book of Acts to see Jesus' warnings come true. Shortly after His ascension, Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin for healing a lame person in Jesus' name. Herod beheaded the apostle James. The evangelist Stephen was lynched by his own countrymen. And the apostle Paul? The list of things he suffered from people for lovingly proclaiming the Gospel is so long that we don't have time to list them. The point I want to make is this: the Bible clearly reveals the vehemency with which the unbelieving world responded to the disciples' desire to preach the Gospel. But here's the other thing to note: the Bible also clearly shows that God was working in all of it to ensure His Law and Gospel were proclaimed for the salvation of many souls. Despite all the hardships and persecution, the LORD was faithful to his promise expressed by St. Paul shortly before his martyrdom: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*ⁱⁱ

It is no different today. The unbelieving world still hates Christians who speak the truth. Why? Because it wants to believe the devil's lies. Many Christians around the world still experience physical persecution. We must remember that and uphold our brothers and sisters in Christ with prayer - helping them in any way we can.

And even though the LORD has mercifully spared us from experiencing physical persecution in Canada, don't let our nation's supposed "religious freedom" fool you. Our postmodern society wages a different kind of war against the Gospel. Humanism – the devil's lie that people can do and achieve whatever they want if they believe in themselves – permeates our public education system. Joining forces with powerful and influential people, social engineers do their best to promote a feel-good, anything-goes morality that tells people not just to tolerate sin but affirm it – all in the name of love. Worst of all, many Christian Churches are buying into the devil's lies: teaching you to be and do whatever feels right to you because (according to them) God accepts and affirms all choices you make. Some are even so crass as to say: "If you just don't love your spouse, get a divorce and pursue whomever you want because God just wants you to be happy. If you feel your life is too painful, talk to your doctor about MAiD because God is okay with you ending your life on your terms."

This last point about fallen Christianity promoting the devil's lies in Jesus' name is precisely why Jesus commands us to be as shrewd as snakes: He doesn't want us confused and lost through false teaching. This is also why he calls us to boldly proclaim His truth in love – promising that he is with us, using all the evil we experience for our everlasting good.ⁱⁱⁱ

But it's scary to do that – especially considering what Jesus said about what we might suffer. How can we do what Jesus asks? By remembering who He is and what he has done to save us. We were once a part of the lost until the LORD called us to faith through other lion-hearted lambs. He used them to show us our sins – leading us to repent of them all. More importantly, he used them to show us the Gospel: how all our sins are forgiven in Jesus. He used their witness of the truth to connect us to Christ and the certainty of everlasting life with him in paradise. Through their confession of His Word, the Holy Spirit has led us to believe that everything God says, commands, and prohibits in the Bible is for our protection and good. And now God asks us to be his lionhearted lambs for others – proclaiming the same message for the same purpose: to rescue the lost. We

don't have to be afraid when we do this. Why? Because the LORD promises to be with us as we witness his truth in love.

Part Two: Harmlessly confess Christ with confidence.

Jesus said: ¹⁹*Whenever they hand you over, do not be worried about how you will respond or what you will say, because what you say will be given to you in that hour.* ²⁰*In fact you will not be the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you.*

When God provides us the opportunity to confess Christ to others, we should not worry about what we are going to say or how we are going to say it. Instead, God wants us to speak the simple Gospel we believe and love – just as Martin Luther did at his trial before the Emperor in Worms – trusting Jesus' promise that the Spirit of God will direct our mouths to speak the truth we've learned from His Word – all to the glory of his name.

And as we speak, God wants us to be as harmless as doves. What does that mean? Think about it in the context of the early Christian Church. The enemies of the Gospel got Christians in trouble by telling the Romans that Christians were rebels who followed a different king than Caesar. This made the Romans nervous and led to the arrest of many Christians.

When the Christians were given a chance to answer their accusers, their testimony to the Gospel showed that they were not trying to overthrow the government or influence Roman politics. No, the Christians were harmless. The kingdom they preached was spiritual: a message of spiritual peace through faith in Christ Jesus.

So, we also have no political agenda as we share the Gospel. We are not trying to start a revolution or change governments. Our message is spiritual – the Gospel of God's forgiveness, peace, hope, and love in Christ. We want people everywhere to turn from their sins and believe the good news of Jesus for the salvation of their souls.

But just because we preach our Gospel harmlessly doesn't mean that the devil won't continue to rage against us. No, he will. Consider Luther: when he nailed the 95 theses to the Church door in Wittenberg, he didn't set out to break from the Church; he wanted to reform it by bringing it back to Christ. But the fallen away Roman Church felt threatened by the truth. Like the Jewish leaders of apostolic times, the bishops, cardinals, and pope did all they could to persecute the truth and stop the Gospel. But, as history shows, God used their vehemence against Luther to provide more opportunities for the Gospel to be shared and believed. May the Lord do the same for us in our time.

Confessing the truth of Christ is a scary prospect on this evil earth. The devil and unbelieving world hate the Gospel and will stop at nothing to try to silence us. But God also wants us to realize that we don't have to be afraid – even in the face of great persecution. Why not? Because the Holy Spirit stands with us. He will watch over us and protect us from harm – using even the great evil we may experience for our everlasting good. He will also give us the very words He wants us to

share. Let us then be God's Lionhearted lambs – using the opportunities God gives us to boldly share his Gospel with others in gentleness and love. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 10:6, EHV

ⁱⁱ 2 Timothy 4:18 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 8:28