

Lesson 23

Serpents and Doves

Icebreaker:

Why do you think Christians feel inadequate and fearful about evangelism?

Introduction:

After giving His disciples instructions on how to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God, Jesus prepares them to enter a hostile environment. He is sending the disciples among people who will oppose His message, even to the point of killing them.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 10:16-23, Luke 10:3

The Twelve Are Sent Out to Preach the Good News

Matthew 10:16-23

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; **therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. But beware of men;** for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, **do not become anxious about how or what you will speak;** for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. And 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. And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.

The Sending of the Seventy

Luke 10:3

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

Go your ways; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

Go your ways. Go to the city to which I have assigned to you.

The Commands:

1. Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves.
2. Beware of men;
3. But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak.
4. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next.

The Lesson:

Jesus told the disciples that He was sending them as sheep among the wolves. In a previous lesson, Jesus had told them about the canine family. He said, “*Do not give what is holy to dogs.*”¹ The instruction meant that they were not to give anything that was from God (holy) to those that had already rejected God (dogs). In other words they were not to preach the message of the kingdom to these people. The disciples were to be shrewd like snakes, avoiding contact with them by staying low, moving quietly and purposefully while staying out of sight. They were also to have peaceful natures like doves. The disciples were to exhibit good conduct, not provoking men to argument nor giving them cause to persecute Christians.

Jesus told the disciples to beware of these men, so recognizing the kind of people they are becomes important. Like wolves, they have several common traits. They tend to band together in society, attack the weakest individual as a group and usually are howling about something. Jesus told the disciples you could recognize them by their fruit: (1) living after the flesh instead of walking in love, (2) teaching others to cause God’s children to fall and (3) grumbling and complaining against God and His ways.

Despite taking these precautions, Jesus said the disciples would not be able to avoid all confrontation. Some would be tried in court and persecuted for their message. Jesus assured them that they didn’t need to worry about how to defend themselves when on trial, as the Holy Spirit would enlighten them as to what to say. Once the disciples were persecuted in a city, they were to immediately to flee to the next town.

This principle applies to Christians today. Once a testimony of Christ is given to a person and the witness is persecuted for that testimony he is not to bring another testimony to that individual but is in fact obligated to get away from him as quickly as possible. God will not hold the witness guilty of that man’s blood should he die in his sins.

At this point in His instructions on preaching the kingdom of God, Jesus makes an interesting statement, “*For truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.*” He is essentially equating His second coming with the preaching of the gospel throughout Israel. For many years this preaching assignment was difficult to do since the Jewish people were dispersed² among the nations and not in control of the land. In 1948, Israel became a nation once again and the “times of the Gentiles”³ has been fulfilled. It is still difficult to preach the gospel in Israel since it is against the law but it is of primary importance for Christians to continue the message to the Jewish people in their homeland.

Group Discussion:

1. How long a time do you think it takes between sowing any “word of God” into a person before you can reap what you have sown? (Fairly immediately. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, *Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION”*. Also in Amos 9:13 it says, “*Behold, days are coming,*” declares the LORD, “*When the plowman will overtake the reaper.*”)

¹ Matthew 7:6 – “Do not give what is holy to dogs.”

² The Diaspora.

³ After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jews were allowed to remain there until the Bar Kokhba Revolt (131-135 AD). They were expelled from the city of Jerusalem in 134 AD and it was renamed Aelia Capitolina. The city remained under foreign (Gentile) control until June 8, 1967 when it was liberated from Jordan in the Six Day War. In 1980, a proclamation was issued that declared Jerusalem a united city under Israeli sovereignty.

2. What do you think Ecclesiastes 11:4 means? *He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.* (This verse tells us that a fearful person looking for ideal conditions will neither sow nor reap. Their justification runs like this: **1)** The wind might blow my seed on unproductive ground; therefore I might be wasting it and **2)** The clouds indicate it might rain; therefore the harvest would be ruined.)
3. How might a person overcome his fear? (By changing the way he thinks. For example, in the case above he could change the direction of his throw and make provisions to cover his crops.)
4. When is the best time to sow the word of God? (*Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good - Ecclesiastes 11:6.*)
5. What does Psalms 126:5-6 mean to you? *Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.*
 - a. Tears indicate the time to plant.
 - b. The ground is broken up and well watered
 - c. The tears can be another's or your own.
 - d. There are six kinds of tears:
 - i. Joy (Genesis 33:4)
 - ii. Sorrow (2Kings 20:5)
 - iii. Desperation (Esther 4:1,3)
 - iv. Travail - like childbirth (Isaiah 42:14)
 - v. Repentance (Joel 2:12-13)
 - vi. Compassion (John 11:35)
6. What is a wise way to sow your seed? (Sow in peace. James 3:17-18 says, *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”*)
7. How much sowing should you do? (That depends on how much you want to reap. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.*)
8. What are you sowing? (*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*)

Point of the Lesson:

Be wise in the way you declare the gospel.

Application:

- Pray every day for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.
- Preach the gospel to at least one individual this next week trying to stay as close to how Jesus said to do it.