

Gospel of Matthew

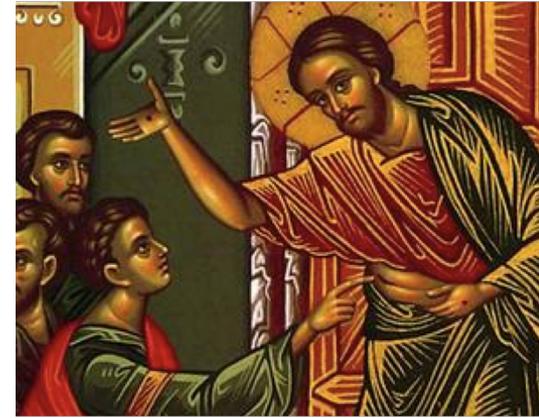
10:8-20

Among Wolves!



Again, not much at all is known of these others disciples.

Nathaniel is pointed out by Jesus upon their first meeting to be a man with an exceptionally pure heart. Thomas is perhaps best known – for questioning Jesus in John’s gospel chapter 14 and asking Him to clarify his statement that He was going away to His Father’s house where He would prepare a place for



them and that they would know the way to come to Him. Thomas was mystified and asked “***But we don’t know where you are going. How will we know the way to where it is?***” Jesus was able to clarify with His famous words of 14:6 - “***I am the way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father UNLESS AND UNTIL they come thru me***”. Thomas is even better known for His statement as he enters the upper room where the other disciples were sequestered in hiding after the crucifixion. They are excitedly abuzz with the news that they have seen the Lord, risen and alive! And Thomas responds that unless he feels the scars of Christ with his own hand, He will not believe. Jesus then appears and shows Thomas his scars, to which Thomas gives his famous awestruck response - “***My Lord and My God!***”.

But it is actually startling how common these men were – at least to begin with. They had fears, faults, and false motives, and Jesus took 3 ½ years to form them into individuals of depth, character, and loyalty, and then into a unified team with which He could build his church, a rather loosely organized human organism that would reach the world with the truth of the Gospel and with the power and love of the Holy Spirit! From these 12, and with the others - men and women who were witnesses and who truly believed - the world would be changed one person at a time. Jesus sends out the 12 with these great words, “*Freely you have received. Freely give*”.

Actually those words reverberate through the centuries until today. If we claim that we are His disciples, He is reaching out over the centuries and saying this to you and I.



These were all young men caught up in extraordinarily uncommon circumstances. But despite the fact that these young men were as common as dirt, Jesus drapes their shoulders with the mantle of apostolic authority. He ORDERED them to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cleanse those with leprosy. The underlying principle under which they are sent out is this - *God has gifted you with the truth. Now go out and freely pass along His gift to others.*



Their instructions were to take only the clothes upon their backs – even to leave any kind of money/coin behind! They were to pack no provisions of any kind for the journey! The underlying principle for this was that the workmen were worthy of their keep. In other words – the 12 could not require payment for the good news they brought, but it was only right that people in the towns they ministered to be expected to support these messengers and send them on their way with their every need well-supplied. The response to God’s messengers was a response to God Himself! How do I know that? Well it is obvious by what comes next!

Their instructions were that when a pair of them entered a home that offered hospitality, they were to bless it. When they were finished delivering their gospel message in that village, town, or city, and left that household, they were to either leave their blessing upon it, or were to take it back, based upon their treatment while they were there. We can safely assume that if they were treated with respect and the people gave them a good meal or two, and a real bed, perhaps offering a coin or two for their continued journey when it came time to leave, then that household could *keep* the *apostolic* blessing, and they would indeed continue to be protected by God! But if their service and their hospitality was begrudging – given with an attitude – if they acted put out, inconvenienced – if they gave meager meals in a stingy effort to save money, and the beds were unclean, then they were to withdraw their apostolic blessing as they left, and shake even the dust off their sandals so that God would not have anything to do with them. The type of hospitality people gave would usually depend, of course, upon how that household received the news of the gospel of Jesus! If they received it with gladness, from gratitude they would give the shirt off their backs.



*Jan's gun

If they rejected the message, they would quickly become resentful – even hostile if they concluded that the gospel conflicted with the Judaism they held dear.

Vs. 15 – then there is this verse. Remember when John wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan town? I told you about it last Sunday. Jesus rebuked John and moved everyone on. But now, you see Jesus proclaiming that it would be worse for the inhospitable than for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, a pair of cities just south of the Dead Sea (we think) made famously infamous for having been doused in fire and brimstone from heaven, almost 2000 years before because. He, however, was not calling down judgment fire from heaven. This is simply a true statement about hell. Hell is real! Hell is beyond awful! And Hell is eternal, from everything we know from scripture! Hell is worse than Sodom and Gomorrah in any case! Jesus is God’s way of escape from Hell. To reject His representative is to reject Him which is to reject one’s “get out of Hell” card! Listen - the Gospel is good news! The bad news is the everyone on earth is on equal footing – we all start out condemned to hell! But the gospel says we don’t have to stay condemned to hell! **JESUS** saves people from hell – from the 2nd death – and He is offering a ticket to heaven! But He will not force it on anyone! A person has to “*receive*” it! Remember that Jesus answered Thomas – “*I am the way... no one comes unto the Father except through me!*”



Vs. 16 – “*I am sending you out as sheep among wolves*”

It is almost a comical image, it’s so ridiculous! Sheep have absolutely no defense against wolves! They are just a big bag of fresh meat to a wolf! Jesus is using just an impossible image! He is sending his disciples



out into a hostile world, and he’s sending them out penniless and defenseless! Can you



comprehend that this is the most counterintuitive approach to world conquest that has ever been attempted! I mean, it has never even occurred to

anyone with ambitions to build an empire to send their army out without any weapons! Everyone knows it would be a slaughter – zero percent chance of it NOT being a slaughter, even against vastly inferior numbers!

But Jesus is proving a point. Everything about the gospel - this whole plan, *is an act of God* – a complete miracle from top to bottom and from beginning to end! It cannot be seen to be an act of human strength or skill! It has to be seen clearly as something only God can do!

I told you this a number of times before, so now I call on you to remember that this is the point of virtually all of those crazy Old Testament miracles where God either provided for Israel, defended them, or gave them the victory! It was ridiculousness beyond ridiculousness! 300 against over 100,000! A boy against a giant! A river of water from a dry rock in the desert! Huge, thick, rock walls of a city falling flat when it is marched around and shouted at! I could go on for at least a half hour, I think, just going through the Old Testament naming the miracles where God employed ridiculousness to ensure that no mistake could be made that it was something HE did and not WE did!



It was all pointing to this time – the time of the Christ! God is being entirely consistent here and He's doubling down! Salvation is His turf, his possession solely. The world must know that from its infancy, this movement is not a man-thing but a God-thing! A human being can do nothing to save themselves or to save others! Only God can do that, and He will not have us horning in! When we do, we ***RUIN EVERYTHING!*** The imagery of these men being sent out penniless and defenseless is to very purposefully point to that fact of salvation!

Vs. 17 – “wise as serpents, harmless as doves”

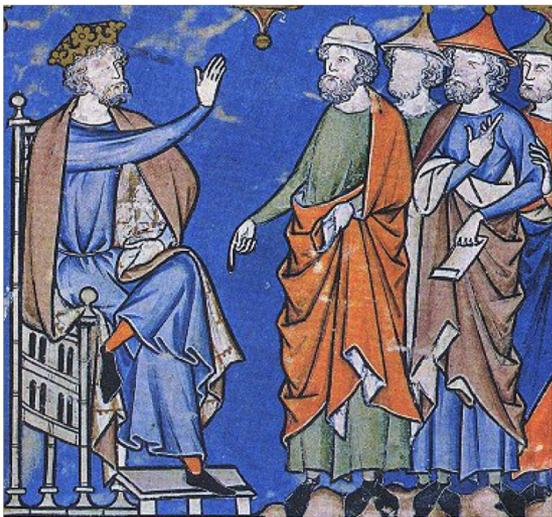
A serpent comparison is a bit of a strange imagery in the Bible in reference to the good guys! It is always used in connection with Satan and with bad and evil things.

So for Jesus to tell His followers that they should be “*as wise as serpents*” ... well,

that is a stretch! But I think what He is referring to is the ability of a snake to see trouble coming and to try to avoid it. A snake actually *feels* trouble coming before it sees it, picking up on even tiny vibrations in the ground made by the movement of an approaching threat or from prey.

Jesus is telling us that we need to be vulnerable, but not stupidly so. Don't walk up to the chopping block and lay your head across it! **Hide** when you need to, **run** when it is your best option, **escape** those looking to kill or even persecute you, **protect yourselves** within certain limitations so you can go on with your mission.





Vs. 17 – Now Jesus speaks to the future. It might not be too bad this first time that He sends his disciples out, but in the future, the pressure from the secular and religious authorities would intensify! Now, that is probably consistent with what these men

had in mind. They had thought from the beginning that they were signing up for a rebellion against the governments of the Herodian dynasty and of the Romans. Like most everyone in Israel, the conventional thought was that the Messiah was being sent from God by way of Israel to conquer the world. So resistance from the powers-that-be was to be expected. But these guys knew that in the end, God would prevail and they would have top positions in the future government of Jesus Christ!

Little did they know what they were getting themselves into! Jesus had no intentions of overthrowing world governments at this time in history. That will happen but in the distant future! He was establishing His Kingdom over the hearts of people! He was intending on building a nation from *within* nations! They would be His called-out ones – “*come out from among them and be separate*” - 2 Cor. 6:17



Rev. 1:6

1 Pet. 2:9

Your job and mine is to act as a **go-between** (that is what a **priest** was) between God and man. You and I have a message of reconciliation from God. It's called the gospel!

Your job is to act as God's **ambassador** – to present Him well/accurately, and to relay messages from the throne of God to the people of the earth who don't know how much they need Him!

The alternative for them is hell! I hate that – but I have to say that it is an effective motivation to do our job! If we love with the love of Christ we will do our job of winning and wooing people to Jesus so that they might be saved! If we do not do our job, we love neither Christ nor people despite our vehement protestations to the contrary! Christ said that those who love Him obey Him and He has ordered us to go and tell! If we do not love Christ or people, then WE are the ones that need saving!



You say you love Jesus? Prove it! Pass on the love!

