

August 14, 2016

SHEEP AMONG WOLVES

Matthew 10:1-23

Matthew's Ninth Chapter ends with a vision of a Harvest in need of laborers. Chapter Ten sees Jesus sending His Twelve Disciples out into the world to encourage the crop! Jesus sees this moment in His ministry as a time for harvesting. Their primary message is that "*The Kingdom of Heaven has come near!*" (v. 7) But notice how the field is full of wolves and his laborers are being sent out as sheep into their midst! So, He gives them a heads-up: Your job will not be easy. Some just might not welcome you. And some will downright reject you. But keep telling them about how the Kingdom of God has come near!

Jesus tells them that it is actually not them they'll be rejecting, it is Him they'll be rejecting. The Twelve have caught the vision of Christ and His Kingdom. Added to the list of things they are not to take for their journey is sandals. These preachers are to go barefoot. And they are to shake the dust from their feet when they leave a town that shows them no hospitality. (v. 14) The impression you get is that they are to appear very obviously different. Having no possessions – money, bag for supplies, extra clothes, sandals, and staff – it is a sign of their self-denial. It is a sign of how they have relinquished certain amenities for the sake of the Kingdom.

There was always only one appropriate way to treat a person who had been set apart by certain vows: with hospitality. But, there are always risks because some will fear you either because they recognize that you have devoted yourself to a very serious purpose, or, because they think they will not like what you've got to sell. Francis Asbury told the earliest Circuit Riders, "You must have a stomach for every man's table, and a back for every man's bed." Christ's itinerants, however, were treading on territory where people who might host them might be hostile.

Their simplicity was to be a sign of how the Kingdom of God had come near to them, and they are bringing its promises to those they visited. If they are rejected, though, "*it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town!*" (v. 15) In case you don't know what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, read Genesis Nineteen. They were wicked cities. God couldn't find hardly any righteous people there, so they were destroyed after Lot and his family escaped. "*Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord, and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the Plain and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace!*" (19:27-28) Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated because of their perverse sinfulness. The rejection of Christ's messengers is worse than Sodom's sin!

The standards of the Kingdom are fairly clear. It has to do with whether or not people *listen* to Christ...or reject Him. Look a bit further at the issue of rejection. To reject the messengers was to reject Christ, and to reject Christ was to reject God! And... to reject God is to reject the Kingdom of God, and bring condemnation upon the soul, and, upon the land!

Certainly, today, we who are messengers are not like lambs in the midst of wolves. Realize that wolves don't just reject the sheep. Wolves are predators. They go after the sheep. And we can all admit that there are occasionally people who are out to get the sheep...for whatever reason. We all need to look to the Good Shepherd! I don't believe those who witness for Christ are being preyed upon, and often they are not really rejected; but... they are often just ignored.

It is an incredibly awesome and fearsome thing to bear the fire of the light of Christ's Word in a world where there sometimes seems to be so much darkness, and, where people often choose darkness rather than light. And... some are ready with buckets of water to douse the fire we bear. But the message

bearer stands between the fire of what Christ has said and the people who want, or, who ought to want, to hear it...and then...expose them to that fire. Will it warm them or burn them? Will it help them see in the darkness, or, will it blind them, or, even make them avert their eyes. Just remember the seed is the Word of God. Those who when they hear the Word and hold it fast in an honest and good heart, bear fruit. But...what happens to fruit when it is not harvested?

We don't worry, though, the Spirit should inspire the words we say about the Word of God. Sometimes, it's obvious that the Spirit is there...to some. But many just can't recognize it. The point is that we are to welcome the message of the Kingdom of Heaven...and then let it become our message! When it does, we will all produce fruit for the Harvest!