



MATTHEW 10

WISE AS SERPENTS INNOCENT AS DOVES

As Jesus sends out the 12 disciples to spread His message, He instructs them to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” The evangelizing Christian should not be naive: We face a world that will label the Bible as “hate speech” and “intolerant.” We must be vigilant, anticipating and evaluating our dangerous surroundings. These instructions remind us that people with political and social authority may want to silence the Gospel and your ministry efforts. Nothing has changed: When we serve Jesus, we should be ready for hardship. -JT

1 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; **3** Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; **4** Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. **6** Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. **7** As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ **8** Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

9 “Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— **10** no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. **11** Whatever town

or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. **12** As you enter the home, give it your greeting. **13** If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. **14** If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. **15** Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

16 “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. **17** Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. **18** On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. **19** But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, **20** for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

21 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. **22** You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. **23** When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 “The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. **25** It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

26 “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. **27** What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear,

proclaim from the roofs. **28** Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. **29** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. **30** And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32 “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. **33** But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to turn

“a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”

37 “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. **38** Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **39** Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

40 “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. **41** Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. **42** And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Study Notes

BlueLetterBible.org Commentary

He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease: Jesus did not only call the twelve; He also gave them power to do what He had called them to do. The

same principle holds true today: whom God calls, God equips. The equipping may not be completely evident before the ministry begins, but it will be evident along the way.

This is the first and only time in Matthew that the twelve are called **apostles**. "The word apostle literally means *one who is sent out*; it is the word for an *envoy* or an *ambassador*."

These twelve Jesus sent out: Jesus was touring around the region of Galilee teaching, preaching, and helping needy people with miraculous power (Matthew 4:23). The sending of **these twelve** was a conscious expanding of that work. Now the work of Jesus was being done by many more than simply Jesus Himself.

Who were the **lost sheep of Israel**? In a sense, all of them were. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.* (Isaiah 53:6). Yet in another sense, there were also **lost sheep** that were abused and neglected by their spiritual shepherds, the scribes, priests, and Pharisees. This is the sense of Jeremiah 50:6: *My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray.*

As you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand": Earlier (Matthew 4:17) we were told that Jesus' message was, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* The disciples brought the same message Jesus preached, simply bringing it over a much broader area than Jesus could just by Himself.

The authority for these disciples to **raise the dead** is remarkable; yet the later fulfillment of it was recorded in both Acts 9 and 20, and there were no doubt other unrecorded instances. We have no evidence that either such a thing was common, or that this authority has been permanently withdrawn. It is wise for Christians today to both believe in God's power to do such miracles through His people, and to not be too quick to believe unsubstantiated reports of such miracles.

For a worker is worthy of his food: When they came among others, they were to be workers among them. They would work among them in both spiritual work and practical work. We can imagine them preaching the Word of God, praying for and with people, and helping with the farm work.

If the household is worthy... if it is not worthy: Those who did receive these disciples can expect to be blessed (let your peace come upon it); but those places that refused them could expect to be treated as Gentile cities (**shake off the dust from your feet**), and as such, were in serious danger of judgment.

The Christian missionary will need to be wary, to avoid receiving harm; but he must be of a guileless mind, that he do no harm.

- SPURGEON

I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves: Jesus freely and honestly warned His disciples that they would face persecution. Because they went out without police or military protection, He sent them **as sheep in the midst of wolves**.

Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves: Despite their vulnerable position, Jesus' followers were not to defend themselves with worldly forms of power. They were to remain **harmless as doves**, though **wise as serpents**.

Wisdom would keep them from attracting trouble unnecessarily or show them how to avoid it without compromise. **Serpents** are attacked by everyone, and must use creativity and wisdom to survive. Remaining harmless would keep them from giving in to the temptation of retaliation. "The Christian missionary will need to be wary, to avoid receiving harm; but he must be of a guileless mind, that he do no harm." (Spurgeon)

You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake: This was a remarkable statement, recognizing the great influence the gospel and its preachers would have. **Governors and kings** would notice them — and arrest them, bringing them to trial.

"This affords a striking proof of the prescience of Christ. Who could have thought, at *that time*, that these *despised* and *illiterate* men could excite so much attention, and be called upon to apologize for the profession of their faith before the tribunals of the most illustrious personages of the earth?" (*Wakefield*)

For My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles: Because they were persecuted for Jesus' **sake**, they could be a **testimony** to both religious and civic persecutors. "The specific mention of the *Gentiles* suggests that the wider mission of the post-resurrection period is already in view." (France)

Do not worry about how or what you should speak: "It was not the humiliation which early Christians dreaded, not even the cruel pain and the agony. But many of them feared that their own unskilfulness in words and defence might injure rather than commend the truth. It is the promise of God that when a man is on trial for his faith, the words will come to him." (Barclay)

WISE AS SERPENTS INNOCENT AS DOVES



MATTHEW 10

#45

I AM SENDING YOU OUT
LIKE SHEEP AMONG WOLVES



MATTHEW 10:16

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