



## **Matthew 10:16–20**

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.

## **Reflection**

(Today's talk is given by Craig)

What will be the experience for those sent by Jesus to declare the good news of God's kingdom? On a surface level, you'd think it'd be pretty good! Jesus brings a message of redemption between us and God. God's eternal Kingdom is one where there is no sickness, death or disease. It is secure and is won for us by Jesus death on the cross. The Son of God, taking the wrath of the Father so that we don't have

to. That's pretty good news. In fact that is the ultimate good news.

And yet, right here, in the centre of Matthew chapter 10, Jesus warns his disciples that bringing the good news of God's Kingdom will not be an easy ride. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; Jesus says. Now, I'm no farmer. In fact I've only ever stepped foot on a farm about three times in my entire life! But my guess here, even as a rookie, is that in a scuffle between a sheep and a wolf, the wolf would win every time. It's not a pretty image.

Jesus even fills in the details for his disciples. They will be arrested, flogged and asked to give witness to their faith in Jesus, which we assume will come under deep pressure and physical threats.

‘I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.’

Now why would this be the case? Why would such good news result in such persecution? The answer is that Jesus’ news of God’s kingdom is confrontational. In the Roman context it was a message that no emperor, no Caesar or governor is worthy of worship. It is a message that calls us not to give our lives to the State but to God. And in its 1st century context this was an affront to the human kingdoms that had tried to establish themselves as divine.

And on a personal level, the message of the kingdom of God is also confrontational. It declares that we are not the centre of the universe, but rather God is. We are his

creation. It calls us not to self-promotion but repentance for our rejection of God. And the offer of forgiveness that is freely given in Christ is one that can only be accepted with a humble heart.

The apostle John wrote in the opening chapters of his gospel that in Jesus, light has come into our world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. In order to accept God's salvation we must first face the reality of how far we have drifted from God's good intention for us and our world. This is confronting.

Yet we see here that Jesus gives his disciples two pieces of advice.

Firstly, they are to be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves. Strange advice.

But it suggests that as the disciples go out on mission they are to be both wary and optimistic. They are not to go out naive of the dangers that lay before them and yet at the same time lest their shrewdness slip into deceptive cunning they are to remain as innocent as doves. I take it this means they must approach each and every person with the good news of God's kingdom knowing that for some they will see the light of Jesus and respond with joy and repentance. As I hear the call to shrewdness and innocence I hear a call from Jesus to his followers to be bold. To go out knowing that whilst many will reject the gospel message, others will embrace it and find life.

Secondly, as Jesus' followers go out they must go knowing they are not alone. They

must go, knowing that every time they open their mouths to speak of Jesus the Spirit of the Father will be giving them the words to say and the boldness to declare it. Here we have a beautiful picture of the Trinitarian God working for good. The Son, who secures salvation sends out his followers to declare the good news. The Spirit of God will give them words to say, however clumsy they may feel, and these words will be the very words of the Father who has made reconciliation between us and him possible. God working, three in one, to bring us back to himself and bring light and life.

As we continue to read through Matthew and indeed into the book of Acts we will see that this call from Jesus comes true. As his followers share what he has done

they face both persecution as well as great fruit.

If you are a follower of Jesus, he calls you to be a witness to God's kingdom as well. These words in Matthew 10 are not just for twelve men in the first century but also for anyone who would come after them embracing the invitation of the gospel to new life through Christ. We are called to be part of God's kingdom work by sharing our faith, being on mission, loving those around us in action and in word. This will not always be a comfortable place for us to be in. The world we live in is one where the individual is encouraged to be their own God. To set their own morality, to be their own saviours, to look out primarily for their own good. To speak the good news of God's kingdom into this culture is con-



frontational. And yet there are thousands of men, woman and children out there who are waiting to hear how much God loves them and what he has done for them in Christ. There are thousands of men and woman who are tired of trying to be their own saviours and want to know there is a better way.

In God's sovereignty he has placed you in the situation you are in for his glory. None of us knows who will respond to Jesus call and who will not, nor is it in our power to make people change. But we are called to share our faith – with shrewdness and innocence, knowing that every time we share about Jesus, about his church about our hope in him, God's Spirit will be leading us and giving us the words to say.

## **Think & Pray**

Take some time today to consider where God has placed you in life. Who are the people around you? And what ways can you share the goodness of God's kingdom with them? We mustn't enter this venture naively, but we also must not shirk back from what the Spirit can do through our humble words and witness.

Take some time today to pray for opportunities amongst your work colleagues, your family and your friends. And pray that God will give the boldness of his Spirit to share the good news of his kingdom.