

1. Intro - My sheep among wolves

I'm not the biggest fan of poetry. I think it's because I often don't get the word pictures.

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" says Shakespeare - Is he saying his true love makes him sweaty and annoyed?

But if you do get the image poetry is powerful.

(Oh right, a summer's day in England is very pleasant - that's a good thing)

In today's passage Jesus paints a word picture too, but he doesn't take any chances with this bunch of blokes. Nothing too subtle.

v16 "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves.

They couldn't miss that one could they. You're a defenceless, domesticated food source...and I'm deliberately dropping you into a pack of hungry carnivores. Predator and prey.

Today's passage pretty much unpacks that rather alarming word picture.

But I want to show how and why Jesus uses it. Life as his sheep among wolves will be hard, so he wants to **prepare** his sheep, and give **courage** to his sheep.

And here's how.

He says...

You'll be **hated** as my sheep...but **safe** as my sheep.

And then

You'll feel **divided** as my sheep...but **welcome** as my sheep.

You'll be **hated** but **safe**.

You'll feel **divided** but **welcome**.

And that's where we're going today...as Jesus prepares and gives courage to his trembling sheep.

PRAY

Before we dive in to what Jesus tells the twelve, we need to also ask how his words might impact **us**. I'm going to say from the start I think the principles (if not the details) apply to all of Jesus' sheep. I say that because Jesus warns of specific things **will** happen to the twelve but **don't** **happen** on this mission. But they **do** happen in the future, and not just to the twelve. The book of Acts shows us all sorts of everyday sheep among wolves. Not just missionaries, not just pastors, but all who are truly His sheep. If that's you, it's a bit scary isn't it? So let's listen now to our master's warning and encouragement.

2. Hated as my sheep...

I'm going to read in four sections today, starting with chapter 10:16-25.

The text is from the Christian Standard Bible and is included on the printout and web page.

V16

¹⁶ "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves.

Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, ²⁰ because it isn't you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.

²¹ "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. ²² You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. For truly I tell you, you will not have gone through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ A disciple is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his master. If they called the head of the house 'Beelzebul,' how much more the members of his household!

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

As I said, scary stuff.

I'm at Point 2 on the outline... as my sheep you be hated

So what will life look like as one of Jesus' sheep?

Hard. On the food chain its wolves up here... and sheep down here. The disciples are being sent out to witness to the arrival of a King. But a King most people in Israel have rejected. The call to repentance is not welcome. It wasn't back then, and it's not now. For he's not just the King of the Jews is he? He's the Lord of your next door neighbour, workmate, family.

You'll need to have your wits about you. You've got to be smart. Yes my sheep, says Jesus, you're going to get hurt. There's no fair play in the wild, so don't expect it.

Therefore v16 be as shrewd as serpents....

That's going to look different in each situation isn't it. Like their master, the disciples would sometimes step up to conflict, sometimes they'd lay low. Be a brave sheep, but not a stupid one.

We need to be shrewd as snakes. But we don't need to be **suspicious** of everyone. We don't need to treat everyone as if they hate us. But we should be taken off guard if they do. And being prepared will help you with the second half of verse 16.

V16 ...shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.

You see, if we're constantly taken off guard by rejection we'll eventually baton down the hatches won't we? Protect ourselves. Hardened hearts.

But the disciples are being sent out to bring Christ to the people. In their preaching, in their deeds, but also in their character. They are part of the message. They're sent out to **reflect Jesus**. So the sheep need to be smart, but still have a heart for people. Compassionate. Vulnerable. And that's going to mean you get hurt. Hearts get hard to protect themselves from hurt. But how could we show Christ to the wolves if there's a wall around our hearts?

No, the sheep need to expect persecution. But persecution brings the opportunity to show Christ. The disciples will be taken to court, flogged by their own people, brought before the authorities. But all this happens v18 to display Jesus.

Persecution brings the opportunity to show Jesus. And Jesus is ready to help when it comes. From V19

19 ...you will be given what to say at that hour, 20 because it isn't you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.

The words given by the Spirit witness to Jesus. And the dove-like innocence under pressure is a witness to Jesus. A response of grace paints a portrait of Jesus. They may or may not like the picture, it might lead to further rejection, even hatred, but that's up to Christ, the sheep are **His** witness. He's been there before you, and by His Spirit He is there with his sheep.

And the persecution won't stop in a hurry as the disciples bring Jesus to this rebellious Israel. Sadly, it won't simply be a matter of opening the doors of heaven to a people waiting eagerly for their Messiah. The people of Israel ought to be expecting Kingdom of God to come. Show it to them my sheep, give them the opportunity to embrace it, but if they don't, move on.

And why does this persecution come to the sheep of Jesus. Well it precisely because they're His. V25. In the previous chapter the leaders of the Israel said Jesus was in cahoots with the devil. So what of those who follow Him?

Friends, it's fitting you be hated because you belong to Jesus. Yes, he's the Lord. Yes, he merciful. But he's hated because he's a threat. Wolves don't answer to anyone, even the King. So they certainly won't listen to His little sheep.

So Jesus has prepared his sheep for a pretty tough life hasn't He. And yet, he's about to tell us we don't need to be afraid. Let's find out why.

3....but safe as my sheep.

v26-31

²⁶ “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

We’re at Point 3 if you’re following the outline - ...but as my sheep you’re safe.

The wolves hate Jesus. So the sheep are hated because we belong to Jesus.

The wolves hate Jesus. But the sheep are safe because we belong to Jesus.

From this section, I’m going to bring out five reasons why we’re safe and don’t need to fear.

Ready?

Reason number 1.

Being His sheep means you don’t need to fear

- because you’ll be vindicated.

Vindicated means shown to be on the right side. To to the wolves it looks like we’re on the wrong side. The losing side. The losers side. But v26

...there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known.

We don’t have to justify or defend ourselves against the wolves now. In fact we can show them kindness, mercy, and grace. We belong to Jesus, and we’ll sit next to Him on His throne when he returns in His own good time. You’ll be seen for what you are. You don’t need to fight for yourself. And that means you can speak the truth, because that truth will one day be seen for what it is too, just as you will be seen for what you are.

Reason number 2.

Being His sheep means you don’t need to fear

- because you’re immortal.

If you belong to Jesus you will never know death. True death. Yes, your body will die, but that death is the door to a fulness of life you will never experience here.

So you don’t need to fear the death of *this* body.

Across the globe there's an estimated 1000 people who will die this month because they take the name of Jesus. The wolves think they've brought about the worst thing that could happen to those sheep. But after the death of their body what can the wolves do? They can't touch the sheep now.

So v28 ²⁸ Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus isn't saying to fear God in the same way you might fear wolves. The wolves are trying to harm you but they can't really do much. Your Father has your good at heart and **he** has power over eternity. The fear of God is a fear of awe and reverence, and a fear of what would be if you weren't a sheep!

But you are a sheep so..

Reason number 3.

Being His sheep means we're safe and don't need to fear

- because you're **cherished**.

- **V29**

²⁹ Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

And even if the wolves do kill you, do you think it's outside your Father's control? If he's mindful of a bird, then he's going to be concerned about one of his own children isn't he! Someone joined to Jesus.

Your hairs fall out without **you** even noticing. Yet your Father rules over everything but he's concerned about your hair. You're the apple of His eye, what can the wolves do?

All they can do is kill us, so we're safe on that front.

But we're not out of the woods yet. Some close loyalties are about to be tested.

4. Divided as my sheep...

Let's keep reading from v32

³² "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ Don't assume that I

came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

³⁷ The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it.

Friends, the hard truth is - Jesus divides - Point 4 on the outline - Divided as my sheep... Life as a sheep will often feel divided. As humans we crave intimacy don't we? Can anyone watch the movie scene of the happy family around the Christmas tree and not feel something? Perhaps bitterness because they never had it, longing because they've lost it, cynicism - that's so cheesy - does anyone have that? But perhaps joy bringing their own family to mind. We're for love. Intimacy is good. Loyalty is good. Its good, but it not ultimate. When Christ takes over as Lord of our life we have a new love, a new loyalty. And this love, this loyalty is ultimate. But this new loyalty brings a problem doesn't it. Our new loyalty is obvious. Our good master who poured out his life for us. But what about our old loyalties? Friends, they must now submit to the new boss. But it's not always easy to side with Him is it. It will be a real cost when you acknowledge him before others. When you say "I'm with Him". because that so often means "I'm not with you...anymore". That's bound to cost you a friendship sooner or later. It may even cost peace in the family. Things might have been terrific in the family before you were a sheep. Now things are at best tense. Loyalty to your new master means distance with your family. And the wedge that is Jesus may well see the distance increase. It may be a sudden division or a slow drift away. But to survive the strong pull of the old loyalties you're going to need a new kind of sight. Friends, you are going to have to learn how to look into heaven. Friends if you are joined to Jesus by faith, Jesus says "He's with me" to the Father. You show you are joined to Him when you say "I'm with Him" Him before others. You'll be eager to acknowledge Jesus as Lord when he's **revealed**. But He's Lord of all now, so be eager to acknowledge him now. Yes, it will cost you the approval of the wolves. But whats' that compared to the approval of your Lord and Saviour. Friends I am speaking to myself here as

much as anyone. Why don't I want to pin up my colours? Because I'm a sheep who, for some reason, wants the approval of the the wolves. Has mercy on us Lord, give us view into heaven.

So can you see why Jesus says in verse 34 **"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."** Friends, the wolves hate Jesus, and so they hate His sheep. It might be a cold war often, but there can never be peace between them. And you'll see that division when your loyalties are tested.

And where are they tested more than in the family. Their approval is so important to us isn't it. And why wouldn't it be. They raised us. They protected us at school. But the land of domestic harmony has been invaded. At least that's the way it will seem to your family, if they don't belong to him. And this Jesus will not share your devotion. He says..

V37 - The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

I was so encouraged to hear of a family who kept going with their covid service when his unbelieving family dropped around last Sunday morning. When the family comes to stay for the weekend and you drive off drive off to church (yes, it will happen again), it will seem like a betrayal. "Wouldn't it be a better witness not to?" No, friends, I don't think it would. Driving off may feel like carrying a cross, but don't we want to live worthy of the one's who went to the cross for us? It will feel like loosing your life as you lose the approval of those you love. But Friends. Look at v39, loosing our lives for the sake our Lord and Saviour, friends, that's where we find it. And when our family sees us do that, even if it offends them, it's such a powerful witness to how all satisfying our Lord is. Loyalty to Him is worth any cost...even the disapproval of your dad, your brother.

5. ...but welcome as my sheep.

Friends, our Lord has given his disciples hard words to prepare us for life as his sheep hasn't he? As my sheep You'll be hated. But he followed them with great encouragement. You'll be hated, but you'll be safe. He's now said His sheep we'll be divided. But again, he gives courage. You'll be divided but welcomed.

Let's listen to our Lord one last time. v40

⁴⁰ "The one who welcomes you welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he's righteous will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And

whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward.”

This is our last point....point 5. You'll be divided from the family you've always been loyal to. Divided from them, but welcomed by a new family. You'll be welcomed by **some** for the same reason you're divided from others. **Because** you're a sheep, because you're joined to **Jesus**. It's him who divides and because of him you're welcomed.

Of course, the original context for this encouragement was the mission of the twelve to Israel. The gospels do tell of some who do welcome the 12 because they come in the name of the Jesus. And if they welcome the sheep because they're Jesus' sheep, they welcome Jesus. And if they welcome Jesus, they welcome His Father. How refreshing it must have been for the 12. But you can see Jesus broadens the idea out further than these 12 missionaries. Prophets, the righteous, a person right with God through faith, disciples. I don't think he's trying to set up a distinction but a broad description of the sheep. The reward of the righteous person is just that, he's right before God because he belongs to Jesus. His reward is the same. They welcomed each other because they've both been welcomed by Jesus.

Divided from one family, and joined to another.

Friends, we live in a world who hates our Lord, their Lord. Belonging to Jesus will be like sheep among wolves. But we're not told just to stick it out until He returns. He send us out with His Spirit that we might testify to his goodness and authority to save and rule.

As fellow his sheep let's encourage each other to do just that.

PRAY