

Sheep among Wolves

by Edgar Reich

This sermon emphasizes the challenges faced by Christians, including persecution and opposition, especially in countries like China and North Korea. It encourages believers to not give up or lose heart, reminding them of the need to follow Jesus' teachings and be prepared to face difficulties. The message highlights the importance of being like sheep among wolves, sharing the gospel, and enduring hardships with faith and courage.

Scripture: Matthew 10:16, Matthew 10:21, Matthew 10:24, Matthew 10:27, Psalms 23:4, Matthew 10:22

Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Courage in Adversity"

Description

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Transcript

Church leaders and those in jail, and that includes also the average person that might attend a house church. Those reports often include beatings and torture. China allows a three-self patriotic church, but it is controlled by the government.

They are currently rewriting the Bible, changing the text from the original text to agree with Chinese culture and dictatorial and socialistic principles. There are severe restrictions on what pastors can say, and children are not allowed in the three-self churches. So true Christians join underground house churches.

With opposition, with difficulties in life, we also need to tell others about the Lord. We also need to do what the Word of God says. We also need to follow Jesus when he says, go, sheep, go, do something.

So, but don't give up and don't lose heart. We must not give up when we hurt, when weak, when failing, when we're opposed, when we lose courage, when we faint, or when we grow weary. The just shall live by faith.

Those are the sheep. Those are us. And we are to live by faith, and the Lord provides and strengthens us to do the task that he has given to us.

So don't give up and don't lose heart. God allows difficulties in our lives for us to become more like his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to live our lives in dependence upon him. Yes, we need higher help, and he will provide it if we ask him.

Without the challenges, we would never grow in character, nor grow in wisdom, nor grow in faith, and so life's challenges should be seen as invaluable in our personal development and to draw nearer to God. You see, God wants his children to live in dependence upon him, so he allows difficulties in our lives. So don't give up, don't lose heart.

In the passage this morning, Jesus added to the challenge for the sheep, the needs of wolves are also to be considered. They need to be saved. He says that in addition to all the problems we have in our own lives, God expects us to do what he says.

He sends us to wolves. So let us return to this text in Matthew chapter 10, verses 16 to 20, and just consider the text for a moment, and then to consider how it relates to us. In Matthew 10, verses 16 to 20, it says, Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. Scourging, by the way, means beatings.

You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles, Gentiles are unbelievers. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak, for it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. So in this passage here, Jesus explains that the message of the gospel, the message of salvation, is to be given in a certain way.

It needs to be given in humility and love, with great wisdom, and not offensive, but as gentle and as harmless as a dove. However, Jesus said, while doing so, we may still face great difficulties, persecution, and opposition. It may include job loss, it may include jail, it may include beatings, it may include other afflictions, but Jesus said, I'll never leave you nor forsake you.

If we have to go through deep waters, Jesus is with us. So don't give up and don't lose heart. Now Jesus explains also in this passage, in verse 18, and there Jesus explains the reason for sheep sent to wolves.

It is that we must be a witness to the wolves. We are to give a testimony of what God has done in our lives to make us sheep. Jesus said, don't worry what to say, the Holy Spirit will say through you to the wolves the words that are to be said.

So Jesus wants us to be sheep, to do the job of reaching out for him, that some wolves might still accept the truth and become Christians. You see, Jesus also loves wolves and he wants to reach some of the wolves to make it to heaven. So how does Jesus reach the wolves, the unbelievers, the wicked? Well, it is mainly through us, his followers.

It is through true Christians. It is through sheep. So don't give up and don't lose heart.

Because the Lord reminds us, he has turned us into sheep so that we can go to wolves. In fact, he has equipped us greatly and we'll cover that a little bit later on. So now let me share a little story.

The Lord took me, a wolf, and made me a sheep. I have a very vivid memory of God showing me that I was on my way to hell because I was so evil. It was an open grave I was in.

The grave was neatly cut out on four sides. I was lying on my back and could not move and could not get out. I had a huge rope of sin bound around all of my body.

I could not move. There I had the vision and that I was on my way to hell. I cried for help and no one came to help me, the wolf.

Then I cried to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, help me, save me, have mercy on me. Is there any mercy left for such a sinner as I am, Lord? Please save me. The Son of God came and released me from the grave and saved me.

I repented and prayed for him to save me and he did. Then heaven came down and glory filled my soul. When at the cross, the Savior made me whole.

My sins were all forgiven and now I am on the way to heaven. I gave my life to Jesus. I did not understand yet that I had become a sheep among wolves.

At that particular time, I was still in big business and I was actually a senior vice president in a major company running businesses in Europe and in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and so on. I got a notice of a major business meeting and I realized that we might have meetings on Sunday. So I asked the chairman for that particular time.

I said to him, you know, I've become a Christian and I really would like Sunday off so that I can go to church and I'll go to church. He said, yes, that's fine. You go ahead.

However, the chairman forgot. And on Sunday morning, when I was getting ready for church, all of a sudden, he gave the news. He said, we're going to have our business meeting on all foreign companies in one hour from now.

Get ready for it. So I went back to my room and I didn't know what to do. You see, it is also possible if you're required to work on Sundays to worship God on another day.

But, yeah, Colossians says that don't let anyone judge you by the day of a festivity. So if you're required to work, there is an alternative. But for me, I had asked him, he knew.

I had said I was a Christian and the Bible says, let your yes be yes and your no's be no's. So I was praying on a little carpet in that room, in that chairman's villa, and I was sweating. You see, I was understanding enough to know that it likely would mean my job.

It would cost me my job if I asked to go to church again. And so I was praying and sweat was dripping off me. I was praying for nearly the whole hour that I had the notice, but God didn't respond.

And when he has written something in the Bible, he doesn't need to tell us again. So finally, I got up. I towed myself off a little bit.

I put on a new shirt and I went outside. And there the chairman and the vice chairman were sitting at a great table full of documents of all of the and they were waiting for me. And as I went into the room, I said to the chairman, thank you for this meeting.

But I did speak to you about Sunday and that I had asked to be free from this meeting or from a meeting and that I really needed to go and worship God in church. And the vice chairman at that moment triumphantly turned to the chairman and he said, you see, you see, there's someone more greater than you. There's someone more important than you.

Then he turned to me and he said, if you do what you say and leave us now, you are fired. I went to the door and the vice chairman shouted behind me. If you touch this doorknob, you are fired.

I looked at my hand and I said, Satan, I used to be in your hands. I no longer am in your hand. I'm now in the hand of God.

Yes, I lost my vice president's, senior vice president's position. I got fired a year later. However, miracles happened along the way and God was with me.

And you know, the chairman gave me a free office for three years next to his office after I was fired. He gave it to me free of charge with the secretary and I used that office for three years to study for the ministry. At the same time, the chairman and the vice chairman allowed me to start a Christian fellowship inside the company.

You see, this is the way of sheep among wolves. And at Christmas time and by the time I left that company after three years, we had a Christmas party. The head office had 200 people and 95 people came to the Christmas party that we put on in the boardroom declaring our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, beloved, don't give up, don't lose heart. Remember the hand of God you're in. Don't remember the hand of the devil or of evil people because God is with you.

He will never leave you nor forsake you. So, this was the beginning of my becoming a sheep and more is awaiting me, beloved. Let us go on to the next passage in Matthew chapter 10 and now let us go to verse 21 to 23.

Because times will get harder, beloved. You think times are hard now, they will become more difficult because the world is turning against Christianity. And there in Matthew 10, 21 to 23, it says, Now brother will deliver up brother to death and the father is child and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.

To death, beloved. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. This is what the Lord Jesus said, beloved.

Please remember, it's his word. It's his word he's giving to us. And then he said, but he who endures to the end will be saved.

When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. So here Jesus warned the sheep again.

He warns us, even our families might turn against us and betray us. But I must not give up nor lose heart, the Bible says. I must not give up nor lose heart.

Then Jesus says in Matthew chapter 10, verses 24 to 26, A disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his

household? Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed and hidden that will not be known.

So Jesus explains here that he was hated by many on earth. He wasn't just loved, he was also hated by many. And the religious community called him Beelzebub, which is another name for the devil.

And so Jesus told us, we're not above the master. If they did it to him, they will also do it to the sheep. And so we might be called names and even more.

But Jesus said, don't fear them. So don't give up and don't lose heart. Jesus says not to fear men in the next passage in Matthew 10, verses 27 to 31.

And there he says, whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. And what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. Speak out loud, don't be afraid.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? Are not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will? But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

So do not fear. Therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. Jesus now teaches us that we should speak up in the light because we are the light.

There's darkness all around us. How will light come in? Sheep must go also to wolves. He says, do not fear the wolves.

They can only kill the body, but not your soul. Then Jesus says, we must not only love God, but also fear God because he can destroy both body and soul in hell. Jesus ends this passage with a beautiful and wonderful promise, which is eternal.

So don't give up and don't lose heart. And he said, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear.

Therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. There may be temporary suffering for us, beloved, on earth. But the future is great rewards in heaven for those that die for the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a martyr's crown. There are other rewards. They will rule with Christ.

And he restores us in heaven with a new beautiful body. We have an eternity and a destiny without trials, without troubles ahead of us. But in the meantime, we need to be prepared and understand the whole Bible.

I need to be ready. I need to understand the word of God. There is a very beloved Psalm 23 that we always refer to.

And you might say to me, well, brother, yes, maybe Jesus said that. But in Psalm 23, we are all protected. There is nothing to worry about.

Well, let us read some verses in Psalm 23. And there in verse 4 in Psalm 23, it says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. And even if we were to die in Christ, he's still with us.

And angels will take us to heaven. And then Psalm 23, 4 then says, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

And now comes a key verse for us to understand. Because in verse 5 in Psalm 23, it says, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. And there God says, no, no, no, I'm not taking away the enemies yet.

I will deal with them later. But they will be enemies. But I will prepare a table for you.

And I was wondering what might be on that table. Maybe there would be a great dinner, good food. But then I realized that God would put on that table soul food.

Food for the soul. There would be spiritual help on that table for our sheep to make it to the wolves. And so here the Good Shepherd reminds us that he may not take away enemies we have to face.

But he prepares a table for us to help us face enemies. For sheep, there are wolves to face. For us, there are evil people and the powers of evil to face up to.

So don't give up, beloved. Because the Good Shepherd has prepared a table for us, let us reflect for a moment on what I believe all of the wonderful gifts are that Jesus has on that table for us. They're all listed in the Bible, by the way.

And so there is a Bible on that table, I believe. There is prayer. There is faith.

There's the Holy Spirit to empower us. But God said, how much more will I give the Holy Spirit to them that ask? So we got to pray and we got to ask. There is the armor of God on that table, including a belt of truth.

The breastplate of righteousness. The shoes for our feet to bring the gospel of peace to others. There is a shield of faith with which we can extinguish all the flaming darts and fire from the evil one.

There is the helmet of salvation to protect our head and our mind. There is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. There are the gifts of the Holy Spirit on that table, equipping us with specific spiritual skills.

There is the fruit of the Holy Spirit on this table, giving us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There's sufficient love on that table to forgive and help us love our enemies. And when we love enemies, we got to first forgive them, start in your household, then pray for them, bless them, and even do good to them.

That's what the Bible says in Matthew 544. Then on that table, and Brother Zach played that beautiful song of the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ is on that table, beloved.

It is for us to use in place of our own mind. And Philippians says, let this mind of Christ be in you. So we have a part.

If we oppose the mind of Christ, then we don't use it. But let this mind of Christ be in you. There's a plaque on that table saying, you sheep are ambassadors for Christ.

There's a plaque on that table that says, you are more than a conqueror. There is Jesus himself who says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. It's a wonderful table of helps.

It's a wonderful table from God to equip us Christians to do that which is difficult for us. You see, we sheep are not so helpless. We are fearful.

We are fearfully and wonderfully equipped to do the work of sheep among wolves. However, God may also require the ultimate test from us, beloved. And here in closing is a story from North Korea where there were sheep in hiding.

A former wolf who became later a Christian wrote down for us what happened. Soldiers from the North Korean army were dispatched to widen a highway between Pyongyang and the nearby port of Nampo. They were demolishing a vacated house in Yonggang County.

When they demolished part of the basement there between two bricks, they found a Bible and a small notebook that contained 25 names, one identified as the pastor, two assistant pastors, two as elders, and 20 other names, apparently all believers, identified by their occupations. The soldiers turned the Bible and notebook over to the military police to investigate. The believers were tracked down at their places of work through the listing of occupations.

All 25 persons were picked up without formal arrest and brought to the construction site. This happened in November 1996. The 25 were brought and set up in rows of spectators.

The soldier who later became a Christian was watching in the first row. The five leaders were to be executed, the pastor, two assistant pastors, and two elders. They were bound hand and foot and made to lie down in front of a large construction steam rollers.

The condemned were accused of being Protestant Christian spies and conspiring to engage in subversive activities. Nevertheless, they were told, if you abandon your religion and serve only Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, you will not be killed. None of the five responded.

Others who wrote about the story said a song sprang up like, My God, nearer to thee, my God, nearer to thee. The steam rollers started to roll. Some of the 20 fellow believers assembled to watch the execution, cried and screamed or fainted when the skulls made a popping sound as they were crushed beneath the steam roller.

The soldiers who became a Christian thought at the time that those church people were out of their minds. He thought that religion was an opiate and that it was very foolish for them to give up their lives for religion. The other 20 prisoners that had watched were being sent to a prison death camp.

The soldier who became a Christian later on told the story, and he made a sketch of what happened then. Beloved North Korean Christians are still suffering terribly under today's leadership, and they face great persecution and death. My question to you and to me also, I'm a sheep.

Will I be ready? Will you be ready? Will we be able to stand before Jesus and say it was an honor to suffer for you, Lord? We can learn from Jesus because he did it himself for us, beloved, and we can learn from the persecuted church. But Jesus said in Matthew 22, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. The North Korean sheep endure to the end.

Will you and I, will Jesus say when he comes back to this earth and when he comes to Canada, will he find faith in Canada? So we can learn from Jesus himself to increase faith, to go to that table in Psalm 23, and to pick up all the things that Jesus is leaving for us on that table to help us. And then we can also

learn from the North Korean Christians who pray our persecution and suffering are our joy and honor. We want to accept ridicule, scorn, and disadvantages with joy in Jesus' name.

We want to wipe others' tears away and comfort the suffering. We want to be ready to risk our lives because of our love for our neighbor so that they also become Christians. We want to live our lives according to the standards set in God's word.

Perhaps you are a non-Christian who is watching this service, and may I encourage you to become a Christian. May I encourage you to become a sheep, and you might answer me and say, why should I do that? If what you preach is right, then I will be persecuted, and I may even have some troubles in this life. Why would I want to become a Christian? But beloved, heaven and the destiny that we're looking for are not our current troubles.

Our destiny is on the other side. Our destiny is with the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, and the heaven without tears, sorrow, pain, war, and death. So yes, you can decide to not accept Christ as your Savior.

But then the alternative you face for eternity is separation from God and a place called hell. This is what the Bible tells us. And so I'm just simply repeating to you what the Bible tells us.

So I urge you that you would turn to Christ, that you give your life to Christ. And now, beloved sisters and brothers, I think that perhaps the Lord has spoken to each one here this morning. He has spoken to me anew and again.

So let us close in a word of prayer. And let us ask God to help us in our walk and to encourage us and to strengthen us and to lead us in the way that we ought to go. And so, beloved, let us pray now.

Oh, heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this challenge, for this message for Christians today. And you send us as sheep among wolves. So, Lord Jesus, you also promised you would never leave us nor forsake us.

So please give us courage and understanding and joy even in the midst of these instructions. For you have shown us on the table of Psalm 23 all of the wonderful things that you put there to help us to do that which you have ordained. Because you also want wolves to have another chance and to become Christians.

So be with us all. Help us all. Encourage us this day.

And then help us to study and grow in your words so that we will also be the recipient of your help when the time comes when we speak with others. So help each one of us, Lord. Cleanse each one anew from any negativity, from any thought that is wrong, Lord.

And then fill us anew with your Holy Spirit so that we would go forth in power to do your work. And I pray this in Jesus' name for all of us, including myself.

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