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Sermon Notes

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Trouble Ahead: The Kingdom Advances Through Suffering

Matthew 10:16-25

I. The Trail of Blood

A. Brutal History of the Kingdom's Advance

B. Christ Predicted It All

1. The Mission of the Twelve: Fulfilling Christ's Compassion
2. Complexity in Matthew 10: Already and Not Yet
3. Christ Predicted Suffering

II. Fearless Sheep Surrounded by Ferocious Wolves (vs. 16-20)

A. Christ's Original Vision: "Harassed and Helpless Sheep"

Matthew 9:36-38 **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

- **Tormented politically:** dominated by the Romans
- **Tormented physically:** tyrannized by disease and death
- **Tormented religiously:** fleeced by Scribes and Pharisees
- **Tormented spiritually:** by a host of demons, by Satan himself... tempting them to sin, then accusing them of the sins they committed
- **Tormented by their sins and the wrath to come...** worst of all... the record of their sins stood against them, and there was no one to save them

B. Christ's Stunning Solution: "Sent as Sheep Among Wolves"

vs. 16 "Look, I am sending you out as sheep in the middle of wolves."

1. To save the lost sheep, he sacrifices the saved sheep!!
2. Christ's confident sovereignty... sheep usually gobbled up instantly
3. Christ able to guarantee their safety until their mission is complete!!
4. But in the end, they are considered sheep for the slaughter!!

Romans 8:35-36 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

Christ keeps loving them, cherishing them, lavishing His Spirit on them even while they die

Greek: "**I myself** am sending you out as sheep among wolves... I am going to see to it that you are surrounded by danger. It is not my design to keep you safe and sound, secure at and ease behind locked doors. I will thrust you out in harm's way, and I will consider your death precious in my sight."

Acts 7:55-60 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

C. Government Gone Demonic: from Provider / Protector to Persecutor / Punisher

1. Ferocious Wolves: Satanic Forces of Evil

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Devil HATES church of Christ... seeks to halt every advance, attack every messenger

2. Ferocious Wolves: Evil Forces of Government

vs. 17-18 *"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.*

Councils = lit. "sanhedrins"... governments "Hand you over" = "surrender you" "Governors" "Kings"

Focus here is on human governments as the great opposer of the mission of Christ

a. many of the governments in the world are merely pawns of the devil

Meant to be servant of God for the good of the people

Romans 13:1, 4 *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good.*

End up being servants of devil for the destruction of God's people

Revelation 13:1, 7 *And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.... He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.*

b. first seen in the vicious attacks of Rome against Christians

c. seen in the 20th century: communist governments

d. wicked dictators

Clearest example: Adolph Hitler, probably demon possessed

William L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, reports that Hitler, when crossed or opposed, would sometimes go berserk and throw himself on the ground, rolling around, frothing at the mouth, and chewing carpets. These outbursts were so shocking that even powerful and wicked men like Hermann Goering were terrified to bring him bad news.

Hitler immersed himself in occultic practices like black magic

When speaking at the huge Nuremburg rallies, he would hit such a frenzied height, an overwhelming torrent of words and passion that some observers thought he was speaking in tongues

French ambassador to Berlin Andre Francois-Poncet said he believed Hitler was demon-possessed

Historian George Bruce concluded that Hitler had mediumistic powers that linked him with Satanic forces which spoke through him and gave him specialized information

What this demon possessed man did to the Jews is well known

What is not as well known is that he planned to exterminate Christianity once and for all once the war was won

3. Scene repeated again and again: hauled in front of authorities

- a. Christ before Pilate
- b. Peter and John before the Sanhedrin
- c. Paul before Felix and later before Agrippa
- d. Polycarp in Ephesus
- e. John Hus
- f. Martin Luther at Diet of Worms
- g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer before German tribunal

D. Christ's Marching Orders: Shrewd, Innocent, Cautious, and Trusting

vs. 16 "Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves."

vs. 17 "Be on your guard against men..."

1. Shrewd: careful, clever, not naïve
 - a. instinct toward self-preservation
 - b. catacombs, sign of the fish
 - c. systems of communication and haven of refuge
2. Innocent as Doves
 - a. free from any blame or accusation

- b. give no help to the devil, who seeks to destroy you anyway!!
- 3. Cautious and guarded against people you don't know
- 4. Totally trusting in the Father

vs. 19-20 *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, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

God would speak powerfully through them... evidence given again and again of supernaturally courageous and bold presentations of the gospel throughout church history

No concern or anxiety ahead of time

WHAT SHALL I SAY? HOW SHOULD I SAY IT?

Note: This should not be taken out of context to refer to pastors or Bible teachers never needing to prepare sermons or Bible lessons!!

Main point is clear: you will be over your heads and will drown if left to yourselves... but the Spirit of Power will overwhelm you and give you both the message and the boldness

E. Christ's Purpose: Witness to the Lost

- 1. Reason for the Persecution: The Name of Christ

vs. 18 *On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.*

Lit. "For my name's sake"... "For the glory of Christ's name and for the advance of His Kingdom"

Christ wants His name on display before governors and kings

All of this is orchestrated!! For His name's sake!!

- 2. Christ's Purpose: WITNESS to the LOST

- a. even governors and Kings need to be saved

1 Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

They are the last ones you'd expect to be saved... but Christ wants them to hear the gospel too

b. Christ's strategy: governors and Kings can open the door to far greater witness

3. Christ's Scope: Worldwide!! [i.e. Gentiles too]

vs. 5-6 *"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.*

But here:

vs. 18 *On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.*

Christ always had the Gentiles in mind... even here at the beginning of the mission

The words of Matthew 10 thus go far beyond the initial ministry of the Twelve

4. Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles...culminated in witness directly to Caesar

a. original call through Ananias: a chosen instrument to carry Christ's name to the Gentile Kings... especially Caesar

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

b. on trial for his life, Paul appealed to Caesar

c. en route to Rome, terrible storm hit... angel reaffirmed Paul's mission

d. final witness to Caesar

2 Timothy 4:16-17 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.

e. why? Lost people in Caesar's household

Philippians 4:22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

Christ desired a bold, clear proclamation of His name to the Roman emperor... so that His kingdom might advance even there... and so it did

Summary: Christ intended that the gospel be declared to the Gentiles and their kings... since Rome was the center of the Gentile world, He ordained many messengers to go witness to the emperor. Through a long trail of blood, the gospel of Christ eventually conquered Rome, as proven when the emperor Constantine declared himself a Christian

III. Betrayed Fugitives and an Unfinished Task (vs. 21-23)

vs. 21-23 *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

A. Shocking Betrayal: Hated by All

1. Love for sin conquers loyalty to family members
2. Deepest love commitments eclipsed
3. "Betray" = surrender to government authorities

Most shocking aspect of persecution... the ripping to shreds of vital relationships; someone who was close to you, whom you loved, with whom you shared meals and a home, hopes and dreams... someone turns on you and turns you in. They consider you

Just like Christ experienced with Judas, Paul experienced with Demas, King David with Absalom

4. True family is the family of God

Matthew 12:46-50 *"Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

5. Summary: Hated by ALL

- a. sweeping statement by Christ... do not expect to be well received
- b. "all" not meant to be taken to mean "every single solitary person"
- c. however, hatred for the gospel and its messengers will cut across every social strata...
 - Rich and poor alike will hate gospel messengers

- Young and old alike will hate gospel messengers
- Male and female alike will hate gospel messengers
- Family members and total strangers alike will hate gospel messengers

B. Persevere or Perish: **He who stands firm to the end will be saved!!!**

1. Suffering for the gospel a mark of true Christianity

Illus. Forty martyrs for Christ in Sebaste...; winter, Roman emperor Licinius determined to persecute Christians; Thundering Legion stationed at Sebaste; 40 men in company declared to be Christians; sentenced to spend night naked on a frozen lake; large fire kindled nearby and warm food and bath ready for any who would renounce; they began to sing a hymn:

"O Lord, 40 wrestlers have come forth to fight for Thee. Grant that 40 wrestlers may gain the victory!"

Through the bitterly cold night, the song kept rising, though growing ever more faint

"O Lord, 40 wrestlers have come forth to fight for Thee. Grant that 40 wrestlers may gain the victory!"

Toward end of night, one of the forty gave up and came crawling back... entered house where Roman centurion Sempronius was; Sempronius went out and could hear a faint hymn

"O Lord, 40 wrestlers have come forth to fight for Thee. Grant that 40 wrestlers may gain the victory!"

Their prayer was answered. Sempronius the centurion was touched by his comrades' bravery, and the Holy Spirit moved upon his heart. Declaring himself a Christian, he went to the frozen pond and took the place of the one defector. When the long night was over, 40 glorious spirits, Sempronius among them, had entered into the presence of Christ.

2. True Christians able to withstand anything until the end

Hebrews 3:14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

John 10:27-29 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

It's not those who start, but those who FINISH who will be saved!

Persecution has one good effect: it burns away the chaff from the church... Only God's omnipotent grace can support your faith through all these trials:

"Through many dangers toils and snares I have already come. 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home!"

C. Flee! I Choose the Day and Hour of Death

vs. 23 *When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

1. "When" = "whenever"... i.e. persecution is certain, just the time and place is not
2. Persecution a terrible trial: Ministry in that place ended... it's time to RUN
3. Fleeing commanded... try to save your life if you can
4. Christ chooses the day and hour of death... it's for us to try to stay alive as long as possible
IN ORDER TO MINISTER AGAIN TOMORROW

"flee to the next"

I.e. Flee to serve again in the next town... Paul the best example of this ever!!!

Acts 14:19-21 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. 20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. 21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.

D. A Perplexing Statement: The Unfinished Task

vs. 23 *I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

1. Matthew 10 very difficult: is Jesus simply addressing apostles or is this for all time?
2. Best solution: You will always have more work to do... there will be no end of preaching opportunities!

Challenging enough: the work will never be finished from our human perspective... but when Christ comes, the end of preaching and suffering comes

The door on Noah's Ark will be shut, and everyone on the outside will perish

IV. What Did You Expect? Your Master Was Crucified! (vs. 24-25)

vs. 24-25 *"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!"*

A. Christ's Logic: What Do You Expect in This World?

1. They have already insulted me verbally
2. Someday soon, they will kill me with extreme prejudice
3. I am the head of God's household... you are merely servants in my house
4. Argument from the greater to the lesser

B. Christ's Teaching

1. Wanted the disciples to be clear ahead of time
2. Constantly taught this point so they would be ready, not shocked

John 16:1 *"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. 4 I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you."*

3. Wanted them to be aliens and strangers in this world of sin
4. First loyalty to Him above all else

Mark 8:38 *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

C. Christ's Example

1 Peter 2:21-24 *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

Christ's patience under suffering sets an example for us too... it is be our suffering that the Gospel advances through a hostile world. We conquer spiritually by being conquered physically.

Be prepared to suffer, and you will endure it and be fruitful in it!!

V. Application

A. A Message Born in Blood

1. Christ forged the Gospel message by dying on the cross
2. His blood was shed at the hands of wicked men, persecutors
3. That blood covers all of your sin if you trust in Him

Come to faith in Christ! This is the only message that can save a sinner from the wrath of God, and it was born in the blood of the lamb of God, Jesus Christ

B. A Message Borne by Blood

1. This message cannot be carried from one hostile city to the next without suffering
2. The remaining bastions of unbelief in the world are openly hostile to the Gospel

Illus. 10-40 window: Communist China, Hindu India, Militant Islam

3. These hills must be taken by those willing to die
4. This is a message borne by blood

C. What Do You Expect?

1. Big error of cushy American lifestyle: expecting an easy ride through the world
2. Examples:
 - Are you shocked when the liberal media slants stories against pro-life movement, or depicts Christians as bigoted

What did you expect?

- Are you shocked when you share the gospel with your boss and get a poor review a month later?

What did you expect?

- Are you shocked when as a high school student you share your faith and everyone mocks you and you have no friends

What did you expect?

- Are you shocked when you read reports of Christians tortured by roving bands of Muslim extremists in the Sudan?
- Are you shocked when more and more elected officials in Washington and the state capitals start espousing abortion and gay rights?
- Are you shocked when you hear that there were more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in all the previous nineteen centuries combined?

What did you expect?

- Are you shocked when a commitment to support missionaries with prayer and finances means you will have to make radical sacrifices in your lives?

What did you expect?

D. Marching Orders

- 1) Be willing to suffer to speak the gospel
- 2) The bolder you are the more you will suffer
- 3) Count yourself dead to this world
- 4) Freedom from anxiety... God's grace is sufficient!!