

Friday, March 3, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 9

Matthew 10:16–25

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!

Reflection

Many Christians think that the heart of the good news to the culture is “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” If Jesus’s crucifixion doesn’t alert us to the fact that that can’t be the message—why kill him?—then perhaps Jesus’s warning to his apostles will. The message of Jesus, of the kingdom, understood clearest from the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 to 7, is at odds with much of the philosophy of the day.

As Jesus points out, if they attack and disparage the teacher, then the disciples, who do not have the same status even though they share his authority and power, will also be persecuted for their message. The devastating effect of the message of the kingdom will be most clearly seen in the home among family members. Because sin has a blinding effect (we become like the idols we worship), there are those who will not receive the kingdom. They will want to maintain the status quo. There will be some who have sold out to the system in order to enjoy wealth and power, they will fight to keep it. A message to give it all up in order to follow Jesus seems demonic.

But when persecution comes, the apostles are to trust the Spirit to give them wisdom, understand their trials as opportunities for witness, keep moving forward with their mission, and trust in God’s vindication. They are not to be naive, believing that God is going to keep them safe no matter what. Nor are they to become like those who are persecuting (wolves). They are to be wise, knowing the nature of the world they are engaging with the gospel, so they are not taken off guard when attacked (as serpents). But they are also not to cause harm by attacking back—they must embody the message of peace, “blessed are those who are persecuted . . .” Most importantly, they are to be on their guard. Not to avoid persecution, but to maintain the right witness in the midst of it.

There is a promise in the text too: “you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” This comes from Daniel 7:13 and speaks to the Son of Man going from the earth to God (heaven). This fits within the Jewish Apocalyptic literature (think Revelation). It is the promise of vindication. Even though they will suffer, God will vindicate their faith(fulness). Think to the opening of the book of Acts when the apostles see the resurrected Jesus taken up into heaven. Their faith in Jesus is vindicated both in the resurrection and in the ascension.

Our message of the good news is also a hard word for the culture today. “Repent and believe” still means abandon your way as the wrong way and received Jesus as Lord as the (only) right way to gain true life. This means that we too should expect to be at odds with those who are invested in the system of sin staying the same. We may even suffer in some form for maintaining such a claim. Don’t worry, remain faithful, keep witnessing. One day, when Jesus returns, we too will be vindicated—shown to be right and true. In the meantime, embody the kingdom with wisdom, but harmlessness.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we like the power but would rather not have the persecution. Forgive us for the times we have changed the message of the gospel, remained silent, thought we could be both with the world and with you, or harmed others in your name. Strengthen us to maintain our witness and our trust in you. Amen.