

Courage to Serve

Matthew 10: 16-22

Jesus had commissioned the twelve for ministry, providing detailed instruction regarding the work they were expected to perform. Jesus had told them where to go, what to take, and how to conduct themselves as they ministered among men. Now Jesus offered insight into what they could expect as they ministered for Him. True to His nature, Jesus was always upfront with the disciples, revealing what they should expect, even though it likely was not what they desired or envisioned. Jesus was well aware that many would reject their message and resist their efforts of proclaiming the Good News.

Some of what Jesus revealed to these men would not happen immediately, but each of these men would deal with circumstances just like Jesus described as they served Him proclaiming the Gospel, following His death, resurrection, and ascension. No doubt these men would remember these words and draw strength from them as they served the Lord later in life.

Twenty years ago, this passage would not have resonated with the average believer in America. Jesus spoke of difficulties that most western Christians had yet to encounter. As we move through these verses, I am certain you will discover their relevance for our day and culture. In order to effectively serve the Lord, we must possess wisdom and courage. This passage provides practical insight for those ministering in today's culture. As we discuss the various [aspects](#) of the text, I want to consider: [Courage to Serve](#).

I. A Day of Obligation – In these verses Jesus points out several areas in which all believers are obligated. We share obligation concerning:

A. Our Commission (16a) – **Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:** Jesus reveals He is sending His followers out. This was a relevant command for the disciples, as well as all who would come to know Christ. Every born-again believer has been commissioned of Christ to share the gospel. We have been sent forth as ambassadors of the King.

- I realize many choose to deny their obligation to the Great Commission, but that doesn't change our obligation. If you are a child of God, you are responsible to go forth and be a witness for Christ! It is good that we are faithful to attend the house of God, but that isn't all we've been called to do. We are called to go forth and spread the good news!

B. Our Character (16b) – **be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.** Here Jesus deals with the character of those who follow and represent Him. He reveals very different, and yet very distinct characteristics of the believer. We are to be **wise as serpents**. We are to live among the world *quietly and cautiously, always with wisdom*. We are to be *vigilant in sensing danger, yet quick to avoid adversity*. There are times when we must stand our ground and defend the faith; but on the other hand, we must not cast our pearls before the swine, engaging in fruitless conflict that will only bring harm and reproach to the cause of Christ. We need a holy boldness to stand, tempered with wisdom to keep silent or flee when necessary. Remaining silent and avoiding conflict are not always signs of weakness, but often a sign of wisdom. [Eph.5:15-17 – See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.](#)

- We are also to be **harmless as doves**. Doves are a symbol of *peace and purity*. They represent a *humble nature* and we are to possess that harmless, gentle nature. Much damage has been done to the testimony of the church because professing Christians have not possessed a gentle nature. [Phil.2:15 – That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.](#) We must be vigilant and stand for truth, but it must be done with a heart of love and tenderness.

C. Our Commitment (22) – **And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.** Jesus reveals the Christian life will not be without persecution. He dealt with much adversity and so shall we, but we must endure the hardships of life. We must determine in our hearts to endure till the end. Don't misunderstand the text, Jesus isn't implying that we must work and endure to secure our salvation, but He is emphasizing that we must remain faithful to the call. The redeemed have an obligation to stand firm even during difficult times.

- There is a definite need for committed Christians in our day. What would it take for you to abandon serving the Lord? We face very little intense persecution and yet many have abandoned their faith. Many serve the Lord when they are in need, but when things are going well, they see no need for Him. Jesus declared that we are obligated to endure until the end. [Jam.1:12 – Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.](#)

II. A Day of Opposition – All generations of believers have lived in a day of opposition. Some have experienced persecution and opposition on a higher level, but the adversary will see to it that the work of Christ is opposed. Jesus confirms this in [V.16a](#). Sheep are vulnerable to attack from wolves in the absence of the shepherd. It is important that we stay close to the Lord as we live in this day of opposition. Jesus reveals the source of this opposition. It will come from:

A. Organized Religion (17) – *But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;* He warns that religious circles will bring intense opposition to the truth. The Pharisees brought much opposition to Jesus. The majority of His problems came from religious people, [Mark 6:2-3](#). As the apostles preached the gospel, they faced great opposition from the religious establishment. Throughout the history of the church, opposition abounded from those who held religious traditions higher than the truth of Jesus Christ.

- We continue to see this in our day. There is an abundance of religious practice in the modern world, but little truth being shared and lived. The religious circles continually attack those who stand solely upon the Word of God. You might as well look for opposition if you stand upon Jesus being the only means of salvation. We must remain committed to the truth regardless of worldly acceptance. The religious realm wants to silence our voice, but we must speak the truth!

B. Oppressive Rulers (18) – *And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.* Jesus tells them the day will come when they will be brought before governors and kings because of their testimony. Paul stood before governors and kings, defending his faith. In the last days, a one world government will be intolerant of Christians.

- Governmental opposition existed in the past; it will in the future, and we are even seeing it come about here in America. There are those in government who want to dictate what we can preach from the pulpit. They want to silence our voice in preaching the truth. Our nation was founded upon Christian principles, but those very principles have been largely abandoned. America and our government are becoming less and less tolerant of true believers.

C. Offensive Relatives (21) – *And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.* Jesus also warned them of their own families turning from them because of their devotion to the Lord. This will reach new heights in the Tribulation, but many have been rejected by their own families for serving the Lord. No doubt there are some here today who have been shunned by close family because you have stood on your faith in Christ.

- I was blessed to be raised in a Christian home, but I have met folks whose family couldn't accept the fact they had been saved and no longer desired the ways of the world. Some were raised in religious homes that denied the truth of the gospel. Upon salvation, they were rejected because they had received the truth and abandoned the lie. The fact is this world will not accept us because of our stand for Christ. Often, we are rejected by family or close friends. Those who aren't saved have little tolerance for the Lord. You may suffer opposition from those close to you; just look unto Jesus and serve Him. He too was rejected of His own.

III. A Day of Opportunity – We are living in difficult days, but they are also very exciting days. I have decided to live my life in light of my hope and assurance in Christ. There may be suffering down here, but I am assured of a better home. What a privilege it is to be a Christian. I want to look at the opportunities we have. We discover:

A. An Opportunity to Serve (16a) – *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:* We have received a divine call from our Lord. He is the One who purchased my redemption. He bore my sin and secured my salvation. It is because of Christ that I have hope in this life. Living for Him will have its share of difficulty, but we have the honor and privilege to serve the Lord. The trials I endure are nothing compared to what He suffered for me.

- I do not view my Christian service as a burden, but rather a blessing. I am not ashamed to identify with the holy Lamb of God. I want to do all I can to be of service to my Lord. Jesus has called upon us to serve Him. What an honor to have the opportunity to serve the King!

B. An Opportunity to Share (18) – *And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.* The persecutions we face not only build our faith; they also provide opportunities to be a witness for Christ. Many believers down through the years have borne witness to a redeeming Savior as they stood before men of authority. We have received the gospel of Christ; we are saved and headed toward heaven. Living for the Lord allows us the opportunity to share what Christ has done for us.

- He still has the power to save today and there are countless souls who have never trusted in the Lord. We need to do all we can to reach them before it is eternally too late. *Mat.10:27 – What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.* Let us seek every available opportunity to witness!

C. An Opportunity to Surrender (19-20) – *But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* ^[20] *For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.* Here Jesus offers a special promise to those who will face opposition. He will empower them and provide the very words for them to speak. In these verses I see a promise to those who have completely surrendered to the will of God. They are no longer trusting in themselves or their abilities, but leaning solely upon the Lord.

- I don't invite opposition and I certainly don't enjoy it, but we are living in an exciting time. As the days become more difficult, we must learn to trust in the Lord more than ever. This life will continue to bring greater hardships, but we have the promise of divine intervention. I want to be

close enough, and submissive enough to find the Lord's help for every need. We have the glorious opportunity to submit our lives unto the Lord and draw strength from His mighty power! You will never make it in this world without the Lord's help. We are in a day where we need to submit ourselves and fully surrender our lives unto the Lord.

Conclusion: Clearly much of what Jesus spoke in this passage is yet to come, but we are living in days like we've never experienced. These are days of obligation to serve, even in the face of opposition, but they are also days of opportunity. I trust you are aware of the day and desire to make the best of them, having the courage to stand for the Lord.

Are we willing to stand for Jesus and share the Gospel with those who need to hear? Are we committed to continuing in the faith although many are not? Are there needs in your life today? Are you the witness Christ would have you be? It is impossible to serve Christ apart from a personal relationship with Him, available only through salvation in Him. If you are not saved, I urge you to respond as the Spirit leads.