

## Sent Ones: Preparing for the Battlefield

From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"

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Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ

On Sunday March 6, 2022

### Introduction

In our last session, I mentioned that I've had a lot of friends in the military over the years. The military of a country has one main purpose: to protect the citizens of their country. In the best of times, soldiers don't have to march into battle - But sometimes, they do. And the leaders of the military have to make sure everyone is ready. That involves preparation.



Preparation might involve going on long marches in desolate areas. Preparation might involve practice with weapons, like firing a rifle or operating a mortar launcher. Sometimes, soldiers can train in special locations set apart for the military. Sometimes though, they practice wherever they can. One picture I found involved some soldiers going through all the actions they might have to execute if they were involved in a battle. Only, they were in a park in Boston. You could see office buildings in the background. There was a lake with a sailboat. There were onlookers in the background - They looked like they were out for a stroll when they ran across the mock battle. In another picture, soldiers were practicing repelling from a high place. Only, it was a parking garage near their office.

Once, I had some army friends tell me that they had to crawl on the bellies under barbed wire while all kinds of explosions were going off around them. The explosions were created by special fireworks that are designed to simulate the sound of a mortar coming in and exploding nearby. The idea is get soldiers as close to the real thing as possible, so they will be psychologically ready when the real thing comes.

In the end, all members of the military must be ready for battle.

We're working our way through the book of Matthew right now, and we're in chapter 10.

There, we find information on the apostles of Jesus, his "Sent Ones". We're in a series where we're learning about the twelve men that Jesus chose to take his gospel out into the world. In our last session, we looked at the marching orders that Jesus gave to his sent ones. He chose them. He trained them. Now, they were ready for their first mission - They were to travel around Israel spreading the message of the kingdom.

We mentioned during that study that the first mission of the sent ones involved staying local. It was an important mission, but it was limited in duration and geography. There were certain things about that mission that were meant to prepare the twelve for things they would see later. It could be compared to the training that soldiers go through today as they prepare for future battles.

In today's session, we're going to see Jesus describing those future battles in more detail. So, today, our message is entitled: Preparing for the Battlefield. Let's read what Jesus had to his Sent Ones.

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. (Matthew 10:16-23)

So, Jesus is preparing his sent ones for the battlefield. Let's learn what he's teaching his men.

Before we do that, let's mention a couple of things. First, there are some tough topics ahead. As we went through the text, you heard things like flogging and arrest and betrayal and death. Those things are tough! So, we need to be reminded of something. In the end, who wins? Jesus wins! If we're with Jesus, who wins with Jesus? We do! So, always remember that: Jesus wins. If we're with him, we win with him.

The next thing we need to understand involves prophecy, and the way that prophecy is sometimes mentioned in the Bible. Reading the Bible is often like standing on a mountain and looking at mountaintops. Some of the mountain tops are close by. Some are far away. When you look at mountains this way, you see the peaks, but you don't see the valleys - You don't see what's in between the mountains.

Some of the things Jesus is going to say to us involve prophecies of the future. Some Bible prophecy involves a mix of things that are soon to happen and things that are a long time off. And there is considerable time between the events. We'll see some of that in what Jesus says.

So, with those things in mind, let's begin.

## **I. The Battlefield Will Involve Vicious Enemies.**

The first thing Jesus warns his sent ones about is the nature of the battlefield: It's filled with vicious enemies.

16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10:16)

Look at that: "Sheep among wolves" This is a picture that Jesus used before. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of false prophets. He said that those people are like ferocious wolves. So, we talked about this a bit back then. For now, we'll highlight just a few points.

### **Wolves**

Wolves are many things. For now, what stands out about them is that they're eating machines. Wolves have no compassion or empathy for their victims. Wolves have no concern for other animals or people. A wolf will attack an animal and start to eat the minute the animal is down. A wolf simply uses its sharp teeth and claws to tear apart its prey. Often times, the animal isn't dead yet. The victim can scream and moan and struggle. The wolf doesn't care.

We don't see them a lot in modern civilization, but in the days of Jesus, they were all over. At night most people didn't go out. That's because there were wolves and other wild animals in large numbers.

That brings us to:

### **Sheep**

We've also talked about sheep in our study of Matthew. For today, we only need to be reminded of two things. First, sheep are not the brightest animals on the planet. Here's an example: It's not unusual for certain birds to land on the back of a sheep and start to eat the sheep from there. They tear open a hole and just start to dig in. The sheep doesn't know what to do. It could roll over - It doesn't. It could jump up and down - It doesn't. The other sheep could help - They don't.

That brings us to the second thing we need to know about sheep: They're just about defenseless. There is nothing sharp on a sheep. No sharp teeth. No sharp claws. Add to this, they're not very fast. So, if a predator can get to a lamb, the lamb is lunch. You can understand, most sheep would avoid a wolf, much less a pack of wolves.

This is the picture that Jesus starts with: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves." That, my friends, is a scary picture. Jesus is saying in no uncertain words: "People who follow me can at some point be in harm's way." Why will we be in danger? We'll talk more about that as we go.

## **Our response**

How should we respond to this? Jesus tells us:

Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Mathew 10:16 (b))

Jesus started by giving us a set of images: Sheep and wolves. Now, he gives us two more. Let's look at them.

### **Snakes.**

In ancient Israel, snakes were symbols of cunning. We can go all the way back to the garden. The serpent in the garden of Eden was crafty and tricky. Now, he was also a liar. Is Jesus saying that we should be liars? No. He's not saying that. I think that he's placing this image next to the image of sheep. As we said, sheep aren't too bright. Whereas a sheep is too stupid to know it's being eaten by a wolf, snakes are much better at defending themselves. That's because they're alert.

So, Jesus is giving his followers a very clear message: Turn on your brain! We must engage our minds. Wake up! Jesus warns us that we must be on the alert. There are people out there who will lie to you and trick you and possibly much worse. Note: Jesus does NOT say "Stay home". He says, "Go" - Just be ready for the enemy.

Imagine that a shepherd looks out and sees a pack of wolves. He warns all the sheep to watch out. But one sheep protests - He says, "Those are my friends!" What kind of a sheep would think the wolves are his friends? Answer – a deluded sheep. That sheep is not just dangerous to itself - It's dangerous to the whole flock.

In my forty years of ministry, I've had numerous times that I've tried to warn people that they're listening to horrible people. Sadly, often times, they don't listen. Friends, we must turn on our brains!

On the other hand, does that mean we need constantly on the offensive, ready to attack? No. That's where the next picture comes in. "...be as shrewd as snakes, and as innocent as doves." The dove has always been the symbol of innocence and peace. We are not to be trouble-makers looking for a fight.

Paul tells us this in Romans:

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:17-18)

We are to “do what is right in the eyes of everyone.” We are not to be law-breakers and cheats. We are not to take revenge when we are wronged. We are to attempt to live at peace with everyone. We are to be gentle and as innocent as doves.

So, Jesus starts by warning his sent ones that the battlefield will involve vicious enemies. His sent ones must make sure they have the right attitude. Jesus then goes on to explain what the enemies will look like and where they’ll come from.

## **II. The Enemies will come from corrupt and false religions.**

The first group of enemies will come from religion - Corrupt and false religion.

Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. (Matthew 10:17)

Synagogues in the days of Jesus were important places. Anywhere that Jewish people gathered, whether in Israel or in territories around the world, they would start a synagogue. These synagogues were surprisingly powerful. As you would expect, they were places of study and worship. However, they were also places where local court proceedings took place. If someone broke a law, they were brought before a council made up of synagogue leaders. If those leaders found someone guilty of breaking a law, they could invoke a punishment. That punishment could involve whipping, or flogging. Under Jewish law, a person could be whipped with up to 40 lashes. Traditionally, punishers would only go to 39, just to make sure they didn’t go over the limit. Jesus warns his men: This could happen to them.

Now, if the leaders of the synagogue were godly men, and followers of Jesus came preaching about the kingdom, you would expect that the leaders would encourage the message. Sadly, most of the religious leadership in the days of Jesus were corrupt. So, when the followers of Jesus came along, they could be seen as troublemakers. And so, they could receive this incredibly painful punishment.

Here is where we begin to see the mix of current and future events. There is no record of this kind of punishment happening to the followers of Jesus while Jesus was on the earth. But, once he went up into heaven, all kinds of punishments were invoked. The apostle Paul said that he was whipped on a number of occasions (II Corinthians 11:23-26). So, the followers of Jesus saw all kinds of punishments invoked at the hands of corrupt religious leaders.

Through out the ages, this has continued. Sadly, Christians are persecuted to this day all over the world. And more sadly, the persecutions are instigated by false religions. Believers in India are often persecuted by Hindus. Believers all over the Middle East are persecuted by Muslims.

Will persecution come to America someday? Sadly, it might. And when it comes, we have plenty of corrupt and false religions that may be involved.

So, just as Jesus warned, many of the enemies on the battlefield come from corrupt and false religions. But remember – who wins in the end? Jesus does! And what will happen if we're with Jesus? We will win with him.

### **III. The Enemies Will Involve Governments**

Next, some of the enemies on the battlefield will come from governments.

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. (Matthew 10:18-19)

Again, we see future events. None of the disciples appeared before government rulers while Jesus was on the earth. However, after he left, this began to happen with regularity.

Here's an example:

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. (Acts 12:1-3)

Here we see that Herod wanted to impress the religious leadership. So, he had some of the disciples arrested. Among them was James, the brother of John. His crime? He stood for Jesus and preached the message of the kingdom.

Jesus makes an important point of this: The crime is not anything personal. He says, "on MY account" (v 18). The crime is preaching Jesus. Some people hate Jesus so much that they hate any mention of him.

The apostle Paul stood before a number of government officials, all the way to kings. Paul was unique because he was the only apostle who was a Roman citizen. In those days, all Roman citizens had a special right: If they felt they were wrongly accused in court, they could appeal to higher and higher levels, eventually to Caesar himself. Paul did just that. At one point, tradition says he made it - He stood before the most powerful king in the world of his day.

Jesus tells his followers that, if this happens, they will get special help: "...do not worry about what to say or how to say it." (v 19) It would be tempting to be worried if you stood before a government leader with the possibility of severe punishment or even death. But Jesus tells his people not to worry. Why? "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 will come to the aid of those

who stand for him, no matter where they are. In these times of terrible stress, the Holy Spirit will help. God does not leave his people alone.

So, some of the enemies will come from governments. But remember, who wins in the end? Jesus wins!

Let's move one.

#### **IV. The Enemies will come from family.**

Jesus warns us that some of the enemies will come from family.

21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. (Matthew 10:21)

This one may be scariest of all. The saying goes, "blood is thicker than water." I'm not sure why water is in there, but this is supposed to mean that families stick together. You may have friends in other places, but if those friends threaten your family, family is supposed to win. Jesus warns us that this will not be the case.

Tragically, there have been numerous examples of this throughout history. And even today in some places, this is true. In some extreme Muslim cultures, there is a custom called "Honor Killing". If a family member is unfaithful to the Muslim faith, remaining family members have not just permission, but a responsibility to punish the offender.

In America, we don't see this taken to the extreme of death. However, I've heard of families that have been broken up over this. Married couples sometimes divorce. Family members don't want to talk to each other. That's sad. However, Jesus warned us.

#### **V. The enemy will come from everywhere.**

Jesus closes this section of his instructions with a summary:

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. (Matthew 10:22-23)

Look at that: "You will be hated by everyone..." Now, this is hyperbole. It's an exaggeration to make a point. There will always be believers who will understand. However, there will come a day when the followers of Jesus will have no place to turn.

But remember, who wins in the end? Jesus. And what happens to us if we are with Jesus? We win with him. Jesus promises us: "...the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." Jesus is not talking about an earthly salvation here. He's talking about our souls.

We believe that people are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. They are saved when they come to believe that Jesus loves them. And that he loves them so much that he was willing to die on the cross to save us from our sins. This happens when we are born again. We have new life inside us given to us by God's Holy Spirit. That life, that work of the Holy Spirit, allows us to hang in through the harshest of persecution. So, standing firm to the end does not earn us a place heaven. If we have true faith, we will stand firm to the end.

Jesus wins in the end. If we have faith in him, we win with him. So, let's ask God for that kind of faith.

Jesus gives us some final notes: "When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another." We are not obligated to seek out persecution. We are not obligated to stay in places where we are abused. Sometimes, we can't leave. In those cases, we ask for God's help. However, sometimes we can leave. If that's the case, do it!

And finally: "Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes." What does this mean? Jesus is saying that the battles will not end quickly. As we said, the things we've looked at today are a mix of present and future. There was an initial practice round, which we discussed when we looked at the marching orders given to these men in the last session. After this, Jesus had to die, be buried, and then rise from the dead. After that, he spent some final time with his disciples and apostles. Then, he went up into heaven. He ascended. We are now living in what some call "The Church Age". For twenty centuries since the ascension of Jesus, the gospel has gone out into the world.

One day, Jesus will come back. All the true followers of Jesus will keep sharing the gospel, the message of the kingdom, until that day.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

So, we've watched as Jesus prepared his sent ones for the battlefield. He has warned them that there will be battles. When the battles come, the battlefield will be filled with enemies. Just like soldiers who constantly prepare for war, followers of Christ must be ready.

Are we ready? If you are not certain that you are born again, do it today. Let us help you. There is some important information on how to contact us at the end of this article.

If you are a follower of Christ, commit yourself to stand with him. Commit yourself to spread the message of the kingdom. Do not be afraid! Call out to Jesus. Let him make you strong!

And always remember: Who wins in the end? Jesus wins! And what will happen for us if we are with Jesus? We will win with him!

So, let's commit ourselves to be ready for the battle.

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Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:  
[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)