

MATTHEW 10:16-22a

WOLF COUNTRY

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”¹

It was late in the afternoon of the last day of October. I was in the bush, hunting elk on the final day of the season. About forty centimeters of snow already covered the ground. The sun was blotted out by glowering clouds, the temperature was dropping rapidly and snow had begun to blow sideways. I was sheltered in a copse of trees when I saw a cow moose tentatively step out of the bush into an opening about one hundred twenty metres in front of me.

The cow stood looking in my general direction. I knew she shouldn’t be aware of my presence as I had entered the trees from a direction that would not have allowed her to see me. Moreover, the wind was blowing hard, carrying my scent well away from her. However, she continued to look intently in my general direction. Then, she began to trot, moving very deliberately while angling across and to my left. She began to trot faster before breaking into a run, which was unusual behaviour unless she was alarmed. As she paralleled the shelter where I was secreted, I saw a large, black dog suddenly appear, dancing around the panicked moose. I caught only a brief glimpse of the scene before the moose and her pursuer were out of my view.

I wondered why such a large dog would be this far away from human habitation. Then, the realisation dawned that I was watching a wolf attack on the unfortunate cow moose. I hurried out of my hide, running through the deep snow in order to witness what was happening and perhaps allowing a shot at the wolf; the pelt would be a welcome prize. Arriving at the edge of the trees among which I had been secreted I was just in time to see the cow disappear into the trees about one hundred yards to the north, the wolf at her heels. That was when I heard the full-throated attack by the remainder of the pack. The unfortunate cow moose was in wolf country.

Those who have witnessed a wolf attack will agree that it can be a brutal spectacle. The execution of the attack seems almost to have been designed by an evil genius. The hapless creature to which the pack focuses its attention appears doomed; there seems to be no recourse save surrender to the inevitable. And yet, successful attacks by the wolves is not absolute—they do not kill prey as often as some might be led to imagine. One study showed that wolf attacks against moose were successful between forty-five and sixty-four percent of the time.² Nevertheless, wolves are excellent hunters, capable of devastating prey herds in relatively short time. No wonder the Master spoke of those who would threaten His people as “wolves.”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Hakan Sand, Camilla Wikenros, Petter Wabakken and Olof Liberg, “Effects of hunting group size, snow depth and age on the success of wolves hunting moose,” *Animal Behavior*, vol. 72, 2006, 781-789, http://www.researchgate.net/publication/223866744_Effects_of_hunting_group_size_snow_depth_and_age_on_the_success_of_wolves_hunting_moose, accessed 9 May 2015

Those who know me, know that I love black preaching. One preacher that I have come to appreciate is Reverend Jerry Black. One sermon delivered by Pastor Black stands out in my estimate; that message is entitled “Wolf Country.”³ I shamelessly appropriated the title for this message today. I encourage you to listen to Pastor Black’s sermon, it is a masterful challenge to God’s people as they walk through this life. Nevertheless, the effort today is mine alone.

For months, I have mulled over this message, weighing what I must say and how to say it. I have sometimes wished I was back among the black churches in the south so I would have the freedom to preach with the enthusiasm for which our brothers and sisters in the southern states are known. However, I am where God has placed me; and I shall deliver the message so as to receive a hearing from my fellow Canadians. My overriding concern is to encourage the people of God who are now living in wolf country.

WOLVES! “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” Jesus’ words in our text have been described as an ordination sermon for His disciples. For three years, these men had been with Jesus. They had witnessed Him in His service throughout Galilee and Judea. They saw Him set men free when they were bound with cruel chains of demonic power. They saw Him speak one word and give sight to blinded eyes. They had seen Him exercise power over nature, transforming events in a manner that can only be said to be awesome. They had often witnessed His power—power such as few people throughout history have ever witnessed.

In the presence of His disciples, the Master restored the power of speech when it had been stolen from men’s tongues. He had brought unimaginable joy to the lives of those who had once dwelt in the cruel silence imposed by deafened ears. Jesus touched men who were excluded from society after they were contaminated with a loathsome disease, and His touch cleansed them. Walking with the Master, the righteous band had never encountered a funeral procession that He did not break up by raising the dead to life. The disciples knew Jesus had the power of God over every facet of life. They didn’t just believe that Jesus had this power, they knew He had this power.

These disciples had watched with wonder when they saw the Master exercise power over nature, not occasionally, but frequently. They were present when He transformed the water in six stone jars so that it became the finest wine imaginable. There were no theatrics, no wave of the hand, no magic incantations—it happened because He willed it to happen. They had seen the Master when he fed a great crowd with a little boy’s lunch. And they saw Him do this on other occasions, as well. He multiplied biscuits and sardines to ensure that everyone present could be fed. On one occasion, while the disciples struggled against the waves to drive their barque to the far shore of the lake, Jesus came walking to them, striding on the waves. When they took Him into the boat, suddenly they were safely on the shore. On another occasion when the wind broke against them and the waves threatened to sink the boat, Jesus spoke a simple word, “Hush! Quiet!” The storm obeyed, resting quietly as a little puppy after it is rebuked.

And just as He had power over the body and power over nature, so He had complete power over the spirits. When demons lurked silently in religious people, Jesus spoke one word and cast them out. When men were driven mad by the presence of hundreds of demons, Jesus sent those foul spirits into swine so that the pigs committed “homicide” rather than be demonised. When demonic beings had stolen the control of a little boy’s life, Jesus set the child free and delivered him whole to his father so that the home could be restored once more.

³ Jerry D. Black, “The Wolf Country,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2E2Q_SMtCvA, accessed 27 March 2017

On multiple occasions, enraged men incited mobs to kill Him, the Master walked through their midst and they never laid a hand on Him. When His enemies sent armed men to seize Him, they returned empty-handed, marvelling and saying, “No man ever spoke like this!” They had seen Jesus, with a single Word, send vicious men slinking away though they thought they could trap Him into condemning a poor woman. The disciples had witnessed all this, and more.

Now, Jesus said He was sending them out. No doubt the disciples thought, “Wow! It’s about time!” Perhaps they imagined themselves striding tall throughout the land, casting a long shadow that would terrify those who were opposed to righteousness. Perhaps the disciples thought they would be enabled to call down fire from Heaven to consume the enemies of God. Perhaps the tendency of John and James to strike dead any who were unwilling to receive them would now be the attitude of all the disciples. They could hardly wait to start on their conquest!

But, no! Jesus said He was sending His disciples out as sheep. Sheep! Being sheep could be a bad thing in its own right. However, to make things worse, the disciples were told that they are sheep being sent out in the midst of wolves. Sheep among wolves! Can you say “Victims!” “Prey!” “Dinner!” Few animals in nature have a fiercer reputation than wolves. Sheep have little defence against wolves. Sheep can run, but wolves can also run, racing after prey animals. They have a ferocious growl and their howl terrorises prey, sending shivers down the spine of animals who hear that dreadful cry. Wolves have large fangs and a powerful bite that will tear muscle from the bone, crack bones and bring prey down quickly. That is perhaps the most intimidating feature of wolves—their mouths.

Wolves run in packs; where you find one wolf, there will be others. Sometimes wolves injure a sheep just to teach their young how to catch and kill with their mouths. The poor animal that is injured becomes a plaything for the young wolves, until it is mercifully killed or until it is left to die a slow, horrible death from the horrific injuries inflicted during the training. When a wolf brings down a prey animal, it will be quickly torn apart and the pack will feed on the poor beast, eating it even while it is still alive. Wolves are ferocious, vicious, cunning and deadly.

It quickly becomes obvious as we read the words Jesus spoke that He was not speaking of four-legged animals. He wasn’t delivering a lecture on animal husbandry or zoology; He painted a word picture describing the situation His disciples would face. Jesus was telling His disciples that He was sending them out into a world where fierce wolves are in the majority. The disciples are sent to face vicious, ferocious, predatory people who will seek to destroy them with their mouths. Fairy tales anthropomorphise wolves—one need but think of “Little Red Riding Hood” or think of “The Three Little Pigs.” Jesus lycanthropomorphises people—He portrays them as wolves. Disciples are to be thrust out into a world populated by people who bear the character of wolves. Within wolf country reside people who are vicious, lupine-like, pack animals.

I’m talking to some people who have faced those wolves. I’m talking to people who have been slandered, and the slashing attack left them crippled and wounded. I’m talking to people who have survived vicious lies that stripped bare the soul. I’m talking to people who have received criticism—ferocious, mean-spirited calumny meant to leave them bloodied and in need of healing. Agur writes of such human wolves who seek only to destroy.

“There are those whose teeth are swords,
whose fangs are knives,
to devour the poor from off the earth,
the needy from among mankind.”

[PROVERBS 30:14]

How often the Psalmists speak of the pain of the righteous when they are attacked by wolves. Even a brief reading of the Psalms reveal numerous times when the Psalmists wrote of the vicious attacks against God's servants delivered by the unrighteous. Here is one such verse.

“The wicked plots against the righteous
and gnashes his teeth at him.”

[PSALM 37:12]

Someone knows what I'm talking about. Someone identifies with what the Psalmist says.
Another example will be found when the Psalmist writes.

“At my stumbling [malicious witnesses] rejoiced and gathered;
they gathered together against me;
wretches whom I did not know
tore at me without ceasing;
like profane mockers at a feast,
they gnash at me with their teeth.”

[PSALM 35:15, 16]

David writes in a Miktam as he fled from Saul,

“My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts—
the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.”

[PSALM 57:4]

Someone has been there; someone has known what it is to face those “whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.” Someone has been wounded by such attacks.

In another instance as he fled from Saul, David wrote,

“There they are, bellowing with their mouths
with swords in their lips—
for ‘Who,’ they think, ‘will hear us?’”

[PSALM 59:7]

Haven't you experienced those who, “bellowing with their mouths” exposed “swords in their lips?” Vicious attacks were designed to destroy, to rip and shred you when you were trying to do what was right. These are those among whom we are sent. So, a prayer rose from your lips.

“Deliver me, O LORD,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue.”

[PSALM 120:2]

And when God delivered you, you rejoiced, praising Him and exulting,

“Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth!”

[PSALM 124:6]

God is faithful; He promised to deliver His child and He does deliver His child. Though the child may suffer injury and perhaps loss, yet the child has the promise of acceptance by the LORD God of heaven and earth. The child of God knows that she or he has an eternal home with God.

I’m saying plainly that we are going to face more of these wolves rather than fewer. The cruel attacks will grow more intense, more vicious, more frequent as the end of this present age nears. Predators will increase, growing ever bolder and more aggressive. Christians must not succumb to the smooth, velvety lie that says if you become a Christian all your troubles will be over. I’m warning you that when you become a Christian your troubles will just be starting!

Among the devotional writings of numerous ancients is a saying attributed to Jesus. Whether the saying was actually spoken by Jesus or whether it is from another source, it presents a truth that should be taken to heart by all Christians. The saying that is preserved attests, “Whoever comes near me comes near to the fire.”⁴ Well, isn’t that the truth! What is evident from the teaching the Master has provided is that His disciples can anticipate opposition, and the opposition that followers of the Christ will be called to face will be intense and it will be persistent. The intent of those who attack the Faith is to silence the voice of the faithful because they can neither stand against the wisdom of the Spirit nor bear the exposure of their sin.

WHERE IS “WOLF COUNTRY?” Jesus said, “I am sending you out ... in the midst of wolves” [MATTHEW 10:16a]. He warned, “Beware of men,” men and not wolves, “for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles” [MATTHEW 10:17, 18]. Jesus also warned, “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” [MATTHEW 10:21, 22a]. Watch out for wolf-like men, spiritual werewolves, if you will.

Call it Vancouver. Call it Calgary. Call it Regina. Call it Winnipeg. Call it Toronto. Call it Montreal. Or call it Dawson Creek. If it is this side of the River, it is wolf country. When we are saved, God does not immediately remove His child from the dangerous environment in which that child previously lived. He leaves us here, assigning us by His Spirit to a congregation, to a fellowship. In that assembly, we will be fed; there we can find rest; there we will be afforded a measure of protection. But make no mistake, the child of God lives in wolf country; and the wolves are always ready to attack, to slaughter and to destroy the flock.

It would be bad enough to be on the receiving end of slander, of calumny, of vile invective, of malice; to have our name smeared with mud and muck would be bad enough. However, the assault against Christ’s sheep, though intended to harass and wound individuals, is an attack against the community of faith. Jesus is warning His disciples that they will surely experience a sustained assault against the righteous flock.

⁴ Uwe-Karsten Plisch and Gesine Schenke Robinson, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2008). Among ancient writers, this particular saying is preserved by Origen (ca. 185-253/254), Didymus the Blind (around 398); and Pseudo-Ephraem the Syrian.

It has been said, and said truthfully, “If you don’t want trouble, don’t say anything, don’t do anything, don’t be anything.” Apparently, that message has been adopted as the watchword to guide the ministry of many churches in this day. The professed people of God are too often timid, quiescent, cowed by the howls of wolf-like people as they rage through the world. Nevertheless, Christians must not be silent people—God has commanded His people to speak the truth in love and to identify with righteousness. Therefore, the world hates Christians because they cannot be silent in the face of evil. One contemporary translation powerfully presents the Master’s teaching as recorded in **JOHN 15:18-24**. You have heard me read these words before, but I’m asking you to hear with fresh ears what Jesus said. Listen to what the Master says.

“If you find the godless world is hating you, remember it got its start hating me. If you lived on the world’s terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God’s terms and no longer on the world’s terms, the world is going to hate you.

“When that happens, remember this: Servants don’t get better treatment than their masters. If they beat on me, they will certainly beat on you. If they did what I told them, they will do what you tell them.

“They are going to do all these things to you because of the way they treated me, because they don’t know the One who sent me. If I hadn’t come and told them all this in plain language, it wouldn’t be so bad. As it is, they have no excuse. Hate me, hate my Father—it’s all the same. If I hadn’t done what I have done among them, works no one has ever done, they wouldn’t be to blame. But they saw the God-signs and hated anyway, both me and my Father” [**THE MESSAGE**].

Jesus followed this warning to His disciples with a strong statement of caution. Jesus said, “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you” [**JOHN 16:1-4a**].

Consider Jesus’ instructions in light of attitudes revealed in contemporary culture. Christians who hold to the biblical teaching about sex and marriage, now have the same status in contemporary culture—and increasingly in law—as racists. We Christians are called “haters,” “bigots” and new names are constantly invented—names meant to wound and to destroy the conscientious follower of Christ the Lord. It is inevitable that believers in Jesus Christ will lose their livelihood—some already have—and that these believers will face other forms of bullying if they don’t go along. Many in our increasingly secular culture want to chase Christians out of the public square altogether.⁵ And many more are perfectly content to be silent so long as they are not immediately inconvenienced by those same attacks.

The inescapable conclusion is that those who are most vocal in demanding tolerance are the most intolerant of the Faith. Increasingly, the attitude expressed within society is that you are welcome to believe whatever the Faith may present, but you are not allowed to permit that teaching to inform your life. You can worship on Sunday morning, but you must not carry what is taught from the Word into daily life. Your belief might hurt feelings; your Faith may offend. Your commitment to righteousness will threaten how others feel about themselves. In modern society, feelings are now more important than facts. Truth is seen as fluid; truth is whatever someone wants it to be. One’s personal thoughts, especially thoughts based on feeling, assume precedence over every argument, especially feelings confronted by religious faith or practise.

⁵ Eric Metaxas provides an excellent summary of this point in an editorial entitled, “Hope for the Homeless,” Breakpoint, March 28, 2017, <http://breakpoint.org/2017/03/breakpoint-hope-homeless/>, accessed 28 March 2017

Peter instructs disciples, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” [1 PETER 3:15, 16]. Notice that Peter says “*When* you are slandered.” This sentence is not conditioned on experience; Peter has given the child of God a pointed statement of reality. The emphasis for conscientious Christians, whether in words spoken by Jesus or whether in the writings of His holy Apostles, is that the one who follows the Christ will be slandered. We are in wolf country; this side of the River is wolf country.

WHAT CAN SHEEP DO? The words of the Master appear hard for us to obey. Jesus taught us, “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” [MATTHEW 10:16b]. That seems easy enough; and perhaps we imagine that we can be wise and innocent. I would guess that almost every Christian thinks of herself, of himself, as wise. Innocence is somewhat more difficult to claim, though most of us quickly become indignant if we think someone is accusing us of doing wrong.

However, the practical is difficult for us to achieve. Jesus instructed His beloved saints, “When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” [MATTHEW 10:19, 20]. These instructions are too often ignored within the Christian communities—however, they are essential.

Pastor Black spoke for many Christians when he wondered why Jesus didn’t say that He would send His disciples out as grizzly bears. Grizzly bears are strong; they have sharp teeth and long claws. Wouldn’t it even the odds somewhat if we Christians were sent out as grizzly bears? Or perhaps if Jesus had said He was sending His disciples out as lions, the odds would be far different. Perhaps we would then have a chance against the vicious wolves. However, Jesus said, “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.”

Wolves are gonna’ wolf! Wolves are gonna’ do what wolves do. Wolves are going to attack. The sheep may appear helpless, but we must always remember that the sheep have a Shepherd. The sheep have a Strong Defender. Christ’s Sheep have an unseen resource Who will deliver them and turn the vicious attacks of the wolves back on themselves. David saw this when he wrote one particular Psalm.

“Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint;
preserve my life from dread of the enemy.
Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
from the throng of evildoers,
who whet their tongues like swords,
who aim bitter words like arrows,
shooting from ambush at the blameless,
shooting at him suddenly and without fear.
They hold fast to their evil purpose;
they talk of laying snares secretly,
thinking, ‘Who can see them?’
They search out injustice,
saying, ‘We have accomplished a diligent search.’
For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep.

“But God shoots his arrow at them;
they are wounded suddenly.
They are brought to ruin, with their own tongues turned against them;
all who see them will wag their heads.
Then all mankind fears;
they tell what God has brought about
and ponder what he has done.
“Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD
and take refuge in him!
Let all the upright in heart exult!”

[PSALM 64:1-10]

Jesus gave specific instructions for His flock when they have been sent out into wolf country. It is well for us to remember that His sheep are sent out—they are not to sit and soak, but rather they are sent out to serve. Jesus had just informed the Twelve, and He informs us also, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay” [MATTHEW 10:5-8]. The flock is not to enrich itself; the sheep are to bless others. We are to find His lost sheep, ministering freely and for the benefit of those who are wounded and injured and dying as result of their sin.

Sent out into wolf country, the sheep are to “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” We who follow the Master are to be prudent and innocent as we fulfil our mission. Christ’s sheep are to be shrewd, avoiding needless conflicts. When conflict comes, the sheep are to remove themselves from the danger if possible. Our responsibility is not to go looking for a fight; we are not to deliberately provoke the wolves, we are not to seek trouble. However, when trouble comes, and the Master makes it clear that trouble will come, the sheep are to rest in Him.

Being prudent and harmless does not mean being uninformed. Jesus was quite specific in stating that the sheep can expect to be “dragged before governors and kings for [His] sake.” Before those who are powerful in society, Christ’s sheep will bear witness to Him. Jesus does not say, “*If* you are dragged before governors and kings”; He says “*When* you are dragged before governors and kings.” The sheep are sent out knowing that they will be haled before powerful civic and national leaders because they are Christians.

The Apostle to the Gentiles warned the assembly at Ephesus, and thus, he warns all who follow the Master, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” [ACTS 20:29-32]. Think of that! Men pretending to be godly leaders appointed by the Master will even infiltrate the churches in order to destroy the flock!

Listen! The more recognisable you become as one of Christ’s sheep the greater the likelihood that you will be called to give a command appearance before powerful individuals who are aggrieved with the message you carry; and if Christians are to be compelled to give an answer before powerful civic and national leaders, should we be surprised if minor functionaries, business leaders and such will seek to curry favour with other wolves by attacking God’s sheep?

Here is how to respond when the fierce wolves attack. ***Refuse to be anxious!*** We serve a God who is too wise to make a mistake and too good to needlessly hurt His own child. I am learning to say with the Psalmist:

“I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!”
[PSALM 31:14, 15]

As a twice-born child of the True and Living God, nothing can happen to me that does not lie within the permissive will of the Lord God. I am His sheep; He is my strong Protector.

Then, the Master promised that ***what needs to be said will be given to you in that hour.*** We do not need to study how to respond to injustice or to vicious attacks. What is forgotten by many is that we are not called to be eloquent or powerful in speech, for it is the Spirit of God who will speak when we are attacked. God promised Moses, “Now therefore go, and I will be your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” [EXODUS 4:12]. The LORD God appears to have done a pretty good job at that time; and He will speak through you when you are walking with Him and doing that to which He has appointed you.

Haled before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John spoke boldly. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter challenged the leaders of the nation, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” [ACTS 4:8-12].

Now, note the impact of Spirit-filled men on wolves. “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognised that they had been with Jesus” [ACTS 4:13]. The same Spirit of Christ lives in you if you are His sheep. When He speaks, it is the Spirit of the Father speaking through His child! You may never stand before a Prime Minister or a Premiere, but one day you may well stand before a wolf who is seeking to do you harm. Know this, when that day comes, the Spirit of your Father will speak through you as surely as He spoke through Peter and as He spoke through John. And should it be within what you hoped to be the congregation of the righteous that you must confront the wolves, remember that when Stephen spoke, the fierce wolves “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” [ACTS 6:10]. The same Spirit Who empowered Stephen’s speech is the Spirit Who lives in the child of God in this day.

We will not remain in the wolf country; we are only passing through this fallen world. We are on a pilgrimage that leads to our Heavenly Home. For this reason, Jesus said, “Have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” [MATTHEW 10:26-31].

Of course, you are of more value than many sparrows! Jesus gave His life in *your* place! He did not die for sparrows; He sacrificed His life for people, for sinners who are in the image of God! Let me point to the remainder of this chapter. Jesus encourages His sheep while they are in the wolf country, “So, everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” [MATTHEW 10:32, 33].

He knows where we are; He knows what we are doing. He does not ignore His sheep. Not only does the Master know where we are, but He is coming very soon for His own. Very soon, His people will be taken out of this wolf country. We are assured in the Word of God, “This we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17].

Then, coming upon this wolf country will be awful, frightful judgements such as have never been seen. For seven years, evil shall reign. Anyone who fails to submit to the coming world ruler will be hounded and tormented until they are either killed or somehow manage to escape. At the conclusion of that awful period, this world ruler shall gather the nations to destroy Israel. It will be a mistake on the part of the nations, for God has promised to defend that little nation. Messiah Himself shall return and destroy the nations that seek to destroy Israel.

John saw this and wrote of it for the comfort of Christ’s sheep. “I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” [REVELATION 19:11-16].

Jesus shall reign, fulfilling that Second Psalm.

“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,
‘Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.’

“He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
‘As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.’

“I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’

“Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

[PSALM 2:1-12]

When He comes, He shall put down all rebellion and we who are the redeemed shall reign with Him. Isn’t that what we read when John writes in the Apocalypse? “I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also, I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years” **[REVELATION 20:4-8a]**.

Two leaders will lead their respective bodies—the Body of Christ and the body of the Antichrist. These two armies shall meet at Armageddon; the Christ shall lead the redeemed, the Body of Christ, and the Antichrist shall stir up the host of this fallen earth to follow in his train. It has always been a battle between good and evil. For every Cain, there is an Abel. For every Pharaoh, there is a Moses. For every Ahab, there is an Elijah. For every Herod, there is a John the Baptist. For every Nero, there is a Paul. Always it is the believer facing unbelievers, the justified and the unjustified, the saved and the unsaved, the redeemed and the lost. To which body do you belong?

“Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” **[1 CORINTHIANS 15:24]**.

My prayer is that you are counted among the redeemed of Christ; and you are if you have faith in the Risen Lord of Glory. This is why God now calls all who will receive it, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” **[ROMANS 10:9, 10]**. The Word of God invites all who are willing to receive the offer, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” **[ROMANS 10:13]**. Amen.