

# Sheep Among Wolves

Matthew 10:16-25

Halifax: 17 April 2005

## Introduction:

In our study of Matthew's Gospel,

- we have been looking at that time when Jesus first began to send out the twelve apostles to join Him in the ministry.
- Before chapter 10, they were disciples only—students who followed Jesus around,
  - watching Him work miracles and listening to His gracious teaching.
  - But in chapter 10, there is a great turning point!
    - Here, He calls them and empowers them to go forth proclaiming His name in all Israel, healing and casting out demons in His name!
    - Disciples they will remain, but now they are also His apostles, sent forth and commissioned to do His work.

## I. Surely they must have had grand expectations as they entered into this work!

A. The Long Expected Messiah was finally here...

- and He was sending **them** out to proclaim this good news to all Israel!
  1. How glad the people would be to hear the good news!
    - a. Surely, they would say what Zacharias said when he first learned that the Messiah was coming:
      - Luke 2:68-75: Blessed *is* the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who *have been* since the world began, That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life
      - This is what Israel had been waiting for so long,
        - and now, at last, He was here!
    - b. When Jesus first sent the twelve out, the multitudes were already coming to Jesus so that He could hardly even move about.
      - Of course **you** all know that rest of the story—

- **You** know how the opposition was beginning was going to rise and lead to Jesus' betrayal and arrest...
  - But this was from the thoughts of the twelve at this time.
  - While things may look one way to you who know what was around the corner for Jesus...
    - you must realise that for the twelve, Jesus sent was sending them out when He was at the height of His popularity.
    - Thousands were clamouring to be near Him, and many wanted to make Him King.
2. What a joyous, happy thing for these disciples, these lowly fishermen, to bear these glad tidings to their countrymen!
- a. In their minds,
    - What a grand reception they would have,
      - coming with such news and working such miracles by Christ's power!
  - b. Remember that these disciples were not yet very sanctified!
    - Many of them (as the gospel record clearly shows) were quite interested in the honour they would have as Christ's disciples!
      - Some of them were soon to approach Jesus about sitting at His right hand...
      - And even on the night that He was later betrayed, they entertained discussions about who among them would be the greatest!
    - They had visions of a kingdom like Solomon's with golden thrones and precious treasures...
      - and they had visions of themselves as being the chief administrators of this glorious kingdom!
      - What a grand and glorious future surely awaited them!
      - It was only a matter of time and they would be recognised and received by the nation of Israel.

TRANS> I believe from what we know of these men and of the times when Jesus commissioned them, we can say with confidence that these were their sentiments.

- B. And I believe I can also safely assume that many of you have probably had unrealistic thoughts about how you would be received as a disciple as well.
- Not that you expected to sit on earthly thrones...
    - but that you would be received

1. Perhaps you grew up in an unbelieving home and, at some point, came to know the Lord.
  - Right away, you were ready to go to all your friends and your family and tell them about your Lord.
    - This was all well and good...
    - But very likely some of you thought...
      - If I can just explain Jesus to them in the right way, they will surely believe.
  
2. And indeed, it is true, that is what they should have done with such news!
  - a. Here we are, miserable fallen sinners, headed for an eternity in Hell.
    - And there is your mother, vainly striving to be good enough for God and perhaps trying to pretend she is...
    - And there is your father, avoiding the problem altogether and trying to divert himself with hobbies and work....
    - And there is your friend, trying to avoid the problem by giving himself over to wine, women and song...
  
  - b. But now you have found the Saviour and you know how He came to give you eternal life, and that whoever believes in Him will be saved.
    - You know how He went to the cross to pay the penalty of His people's sins so that we might be forgiven...
    - And you know how He gives the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and make us into new creations.
  
  - c. Who would not rejoice to hear such glorious news?
    - Chances are, when you were first converted, there may have been many things that you weren't all that clear about...
      - you probably were just beginning to understand the hardness of your own heart and thought even better of your neighbours.
  
    - But you were certain about Christ and eternal life...
      - You could see so clearly how wonderful it is to have Christ...
      - Surely this would be something that all your relations would be delighted to learn about!
  
3. And I know that some of you have had these same sentiments since your conversion as I certainly have...
  - a. As you grew in the grace and knowledge of Christ, you came to understand new and glorious things!

- About the sovereignty of God, about biblical worship, about God's covenants, about the church, about marriage....
- And you couldn't wait to go and tell your Christian friends the wonderful things you had learned.

b. Surely, they will rejoice with great joy to hear it!

- But sadly, you know all too well that this is not the case.

TRANS> Before sending His disciples out, Jesus tells them what to expect from their own countrymen—their fellow-Israelites...

- You will remember that they were not being sent to the Gentiles,
  - Jesus was sending them to those who owned the covenant first.
  - He was sending them to God's people...
    - Yet, even among God's people, Jesus declares:

## II. **“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.”**

A. It is a remarkable thing,

- but even among God's people you who belong to Christ are in the midst of wolves.
1. By “God's people,” of course, I do not mean those who are true believers, elect from the foundation of the world.
    - a. “God's people” in that sense are not wolves but sheep...
      - 1) If Jesus was sending them among the elect only, the disciples would be sent forth as sheep among sheep.
        - Things would have been very different then—more the way they had expected!
      - 2) You see, those who are God's people in the sense of those who truly believe have been born of the Holy Spirit.
        - Their stony, wicked heart has been taken away and they have been given a tender heart that responds to God.
        - With this new heart, they hunger and thirst for God's word!
          - They rejoice in the truth when it comes to them, and receive those who bring the gospel to them.
          - If that were the case, the disciples would have enjoyed a very warm reception from all those to whom they were sent...
            - And so would you—

TRANS> But I am not using the designation “God’s people” to refer to those who truly believe...

- b. When I speak of “God’s people,” I am referring to those who have received the sign of the covenant and so are marked out as His people.
  - In the Old Testament, it was those who were circumcised.
    - In the New Testament, it is all those who are baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.
    - It is “God’s people” in this covenantal sense to whom Jesus was sending His disciples to proclaim the Good News.
      - Some of them were elect, but most of them were not.
2. It is a terrible thing, but Jesus true disciples are like sheep in the midst of wolves even when they are among those who confess the Lord’s name!
  - a. It is important to see here that Jesus does not say He is sending them **into** the midst of wolves...
    - His words indicate rather that they are **already** in the midst of wolves as He sends them out:
      - “I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves.**”
      - In other words, He is sending them out **anyway**, even though there are wolves all around.
    - This is almost always the case with sheep—
      - Wherever sheep are found, wolves will be lurking about, waiting for an opportunity to cease them.
      - Sheep attract wolves and draw them out from all around...
  - b. Jesus calls them wolves because they are of a vicious, ravenous nature.
    - 1) Among God’s people, there are always wolves who want to destroy the sheep if they can get past the shepherd.
      - They are natural predators of sheep and do not care how they get them as long as they get them.
    - 2) This is the picture that Jesus gives to his disciples of what they can expect among the covenant people.
      - But of course they do not really grasp what He is saying...
      - They knew how Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the prophets before them had been treated...
        - They know how they always had wolves hunting them down!

- But now that Messiah had come, surely things would be better!
- Not so!
- Jesus tells them that still, they will be as sheep among wolves.

B. Jesus spells out to them the opposition they can expect to receive.

1. First, He makes it clear that the opposition will come from men.

- You see in verse 17 that He says, “beware of men.”
  - a. When he spoke of wolves, He was talking about human beings.
    - He was not talking about literal wolves, nor was He talking about demons.
    - He was talking about people—people who would act like ravenous beasts toward His disciples.
  - b. Christian, you must not ever be surprised—
    - 1) The whole human race, by virtue of our fallen nature, is viciously opposed to Christ and to all who follow Him.
      - Jesus speaks of this hatred in verse 22...
        - He says, “You will be hated by all men for my name’s sake.”
        - There is a universal hatred of Christ in the natural man.
    - 2) The Bible declares that we are all by nature the children of wrath.
      - It says that the natural man is at enmity with God and cannot be subject to the law of God.
      - Every human being has this antipathy at the root of His nature until he or she is born again.
        - This hatred often lies hidden away under many layers of hypocrisy and good manners,
        - but it is always there until the heart is renewed by the Holy Spirit.
    - 3) And this hatred is especially directed against Christ, and that for many reasons...
      - a) First, it is directed against Him because He is the One who reveals the Father more clearly than any one or anything else...
        - He reveals the Father in Human flesh because He truly took to Himself our nature, yet He is full God.
        - Sinful human beings cannot bear to see a man who is absolutely without sin because it condemns and exposes their own corruption.

- It cuts through all their vain delusions that they entertain about their own goodness.
- b) Secondly, the hatred is directed against Him because He is the One who offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins...
- Of course, this ought to make men love Him...
    - And for those whose heart is renewed, it does...
  - But for all others who are left to their own nature, His offering of Himself for our sins is the very reason for hating Him...
    - “The very idea that God would require the death of His only Son on account of human sin...”
      - The natural man despises the very thought!
  - Although understand...
    - There are indeed many natural men who **claim** to love Christ and even the cross—
    - But in such cases, they often love Him as an example they believe they are capable of following—even if not to the same degree, at least to a sufficient degree.
      - In other words, by religious exercises and or their own goodwill,
        - they believe they can make themselves acceptable to God...
        - Some of them even believe that they already are acceptable to Him.
      - But if these are presented with the Christ of the real gospel, Christ as the One who was crucified to propitiate God,
        - they sneer at it and cannot bear it.
- c) And this hatred for Christ is so strong that it is directed also against all His true disciples who believe the true gospel...
- Who confess that they cannot save themselves...
    - Who confess that all their iniquities were laid on Him and that by His stripes alone they are healed.
  - Jesus says to these true followers,
    - “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

- “You will be hated because you bear witness to me in the gospel you confess and in the life you live...”
- “You are hated by all for my name’s sake.”

TRANS> Now of course Jesus doesn’t mean “all” every person without exception...

- All the elect truly love both Jesus and His followers after they have come to believe.
  - But when Jesus says “all,” He means “all sorts of people” and “all people who are not born again.”
- This hatred won’t always be displayed in the same way.
  - There are many things that restrain it and keep it in check...
  - But Jesus is saying:
    - “beware of men” because this hatred is there.
    - It is a hatred against you, not particularly as a human being, but in particular against you as a follower of Christ...
      - By your confession, you bring Christ up and so stir up this hatred.
      - Do not expect to be loved by all as a Christian, expect to be hated by all.

2. Jesus speaks of three places this hatred will be seen...

a. First, it will be seen in the religious context.

- In v. 17 He says, “They will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.”
- 1) God’s people have always had their own courts by which to try religious offenders—and well they should!
  - Those who bring false doctrine or who live scandalous lives are to be brought before the elders and dealt with according to God’s commands.
  - At the time of Christ, the Romans had given the Jews civil authority to scourge offenders with a whip, but not to execute.
  - But ideally, there is to be a separation so that the church can only punish offenders by excommunication (putting them out of the assembly)
    - and the civil magistrate is given authority to impose fines and to punish them in their bodies—even with death for capital offenses.



- 2) But the point is, the disciples' of Christ would be turned over to **religious** authorities who punish for religious offenses in the name of God!
- In other words, they would be accused of breaking God's law when they were in fact being faithful to Him!
    - Paul says that he was scourged on five occasions with 39 lashes of the whip in the synagogue.
    - We read of Peter and John receiving this punishment also for speaking in the name of Christ.
  - Church history is full of accounts of men like Martin Luther who was punished by the Pope for nothing other than bearing witness to the truth of the gospel...
    - and the two Margaret's of Scotland who were punished for affirming that Christ, not the king of England is the only head of the church...
    - and John Gresham Machen who was deposed as a minister from the United Presbyterian Church for his clear testimony against unbelief in that denomination.
- 3) Christian, for you this means that you need not be surprised if opposition comes against you from the church—for being true to Christ!
- If it comes for denying Him, it is well deserved...
    - But Jesus is telling His disciples it will come to them for no other reason than their fidelity to Him.
    - It is very difficult to be officially accused by God's representatives when you are actually serving Him...
      - There is such an injustice about it...
      - But Jesus tells His disciples to expect it!
  - Beware of men—
    - even so-called Christian men!
    - Sometimes, they are the very worst—
      - if they are trying to be justified without true faith in Christ or by faith plus their own works...
        - they will be all the more opposed to anyone whose testimony is that Christ alone justifies by faith alone!
      - Jesus is saying, don't think you have done something wrong just because other covenant people are opposing you....
        - Beware of them because they will oppose you.

- You are like sheep among wolves.
- b. But the hatred will not stop in the synagogues—they will also turn you over to the civil authorities.
- This is what He speaks of in verse 18:
    - “You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.”
- 1) Of course, Jesus Himself fulfilled this in His own person when He was handed over to the Romans to be crucified.
- Since the Jews were not given authority by the occupying Romans to execute offenders, they brought Jesus to the Romans to do it!
    - This shows how far their hatred went—
      - It was not enough for them to scourge and ridicule...
      - They were minded to eliminate the Lord completely, even if that meant handing Him over to Romans!
- 2) This same sort of malice against Christians has been evident through the ages...
- a) In the early days of the church, the Romans began to blame Christians for all their problems because the Christians refused to worship the gods of Rome.
- Many believers had the opportunity to bear witness to Christ by shedding their blood...
  - And whenever they did, many more were converted so that Tertullian said in truth,
    - The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.
    - Jesus said they would bear witness to the gentiles in this way!
- b) Do not despair when you see the foundations for more persecution being laid by our government...
- Not that we should court persecution, but when it comes, it gives us an opportunity to show the world how much Christ means to us.
  - This often leads many more to trust in Him...
- c) And let me add that just because in our society there is great opposition against shedding of blood even for legitimate offenses...
- do not suppose that the malice of men against Christ will not rise to such a height in the days to come—perhaps even in our own lifetime!

- Jesus was warning the disciples that it is in the nature of men to do such things—
  - and the nature of men has not changed.
  - I do not say this to scare you, but for the same reason Jesus did—to prepare you so that you won't be taken by surprise.
    - Increasingly we will find that to be faithful to Christ, we must break the laws of the land.
    - When you are delivered over, it is that you might bear witness to Jesus Christ before unbelievers.
    - Do not be surprised when such opposition comes...
      - You are like sheep among wolves.

TRANS> But Jesus goes on to show that the malice of men against Him will not remain confined to the church or the civil magistrate...

- c. It will even be found in your very own home among your very own nearest relations.
  - In verse 21 He says:
    - Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.
  - 1) The home is the place where love, affection, and security ought to be found above all other places, but how many homes have been divided because of Christ!
    - In many Muslim countries today, believers are baptised with the knowledge that their own parents will seek their death—
      - sometimes even by their own hands.
      - A friend of mine ministered to a boy in Nazareth who awoke to find his mother standing over him with a knife to slay him in the night because he was baptised.
        - The boy escaped and was taken into a Christian home.
  - 2) Jesus tells His disciples that this is the kind of thing they will have to face as His apostles—the malice of their own families.
    - Many of you have known a certain measure of opposition from your families because of your faith.
    - They ridicule you and sneer at you for your fidelity to Christ and try to get you to renounce your testimony.
      - This just goes to show that hatred for Christ is greater than natural affection.

- Do not be surprised by it when it comes....
- You are like sheep in the midst of wolves.

TRANS> Jesus will have no surprises.

- You cannot expect to be well-treated in this world—even by other professing Christians!
  - You must beware of men!
- But it is not enough simply to **know** that you are among wolves....
  - The Lord has also given us council about how to live under this danger.

### **III. What must you do since you live among wolves?**

- I want to look at five things.

A. First, you must be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

1. What two creatures are more dissimilar than the serpent and the dove?
  - Yet, it is a blending of these that Jesus calls for in His disciples.
    - a. The wisdom of the serpent alone is but craftiness and deceitfulness for selfish gain...
      - He is the one who plots and cheats to the hurt of others as the serpent did with Eve in the Garden of Eden.
    - b. The innocence and harmlessness of the dove, on the other hand, is little more than weakness if it is not mixed with the wisdom of the serpent.
2. But Jesus is telling you to blend the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove as you live among wolves in this world...
  - a. This means that you must always be wary of the fact that men are by nature wolves and guard yourself from their craftiness and deceitfulness.
    - They desire to draw you away from Christ, but you must be as sly as the serpent in avoiding them.
    - How often do we see Jesus in the gospel,
      - evading His enemies and escaping their grasp,
      - answering their questions in such a way that they could not trap him...
      - exposing their malice and trickery.
  - You are not called to be naive, but to exercise wisdom and prudence.
    - You are not to be swept in by the deceit and trickery of men because you understand what is in man...

- God has revealed to you your own corruption and you must not suppose that this corruption is not to found in others.
- b. But at the same time, you must never employ this wisdom for selfish gain so that you become the crafter, the schemer and the deceiver.
- Paul, who was very wise, renounced craftiness and handling the word of God deceitfully.
  - He would not peddle the word or market the word as so many do today in order to make it more acceptable to his adversaries...
    - No doubt, he would have saved himself a lot of grief from the wolves if he had made a few modifications—
      - if he had simply added the requirement that the Gentiles be circumcised—
        - the serpent’s wisdom would suggest, “You can still preach Christ and avoid a lot of trouble...”
      - or if Paul had used the methodology of the Greeks to win converts among them...
        - he would have gained their respect, says the wisdom of the serpent without the harmlessness of the dove...
    - But Paul would rather be persecuted than to distort the gospel or the will of His Lord in any way!
- c. How sad it is to see believers who lack either of these qualities...
- One is tossed about by every wind of doctrine and brought into the snares of the enemy because the serpent’s wisdom is missing...
  - Another is scheming and devising and manipulating even to get people into the kingdom!
    - staging miracles and distorting the gospel.

TRANS> You are among wolves—be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

B. Second, as you live among wolves, you must not worry about what you will do when they seize you and drag you before the civil magistrate.

- Look at verse 19 and 20:
    - Matt 10:19-20: “But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”
1. Of course this promise pertains to the apostles in a very important and unique way in that they were enabled to speak by divine inspiration.

- While you are not able to do that, the principle nevertheless applies...
    - The Lord is pleased in His providence to give special grace to His servants when they are put to the test...
    - And many who were of very ordinary gifts have given remarkably clear and persuasive testimonies when called before rulers and governors.
    - The one thing that is certain:
      - The Lord will be with you and His grace will be sufficient for you.
2. You ought not to be anxious about unbelievers...
- a. I have known Christians who are afraid to speak up about their faith because they are afraid they will not be able to answer the adversary.
    - Yet, in Peter's first epistle, where he is addressing those under abusive authority, including common slaves,
      - he urges them to be always ready to speak up and give a reason for the hope they have in Christ.
      - He tells them that the most important thing to do is always sanctify Christ as Lord in their heart when they speak of Him...
        - You do not need to know a lot of science to tell the sceptic that you believe God created the world.
          - Just believe and repeat what God has said...
          - The unbeliever is trying to suppress a truth that is self-evident to all who are honest with all his fancy theories.
          - He is desperate, and your simple belief in the truth will unsettle him!
  - b. History is full of examples of those who gave very excellent testimonies before being plunged into a martyr's death.
    - If God can supply them with words in such a circumstance,
      - do you think He will be unable to supply you with an answer for your mother-in-law?
  - c. But if you are always worried about what you can say,
    - If you always feel that you have to know all the answer beforehand, you will surely faint and say nothing...
      - You do not need to answer them on the basis of their wisdom,
        - but simply tell them of your trust in Christ and belief of His word.
      - Then let them sneer and mock and carry on to their own destruction.

TRANS> You are among the wolves...

- First, Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves...
  - Second, Do not be worried about what you will say when called to give a reason...
- C. Third, do not give up just because you were rudely treated, but keep on going...
- That is the principle that Jesus applies in verse 23:
    - Mat 10:23: When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.
1. He had already told them not to waste their time on those who would not receive them.... to shake the dust off of their feet.
    - It is one thing if you have someone who is truly inquiring and trying to understand.
      - It may be well to meet with them many times...
      - But there comes a time to flee, especially as in the apostle's case, when your life is in danger...
        - You will remember how Jesus avoided going up to Jerusalem where persecutors were waiting because His time had not yet come...
        - And you will remember how Paul left cities where he was persecuted and went on to another.
          - If a servant of God has no reception in one place, he must move on to another.
  2. But note well—Jesus does not say, “If you are persecuted in one city, give up.”
    - a. That is often the tendency of those who are rejected and persecuted...
      - Rather than going on to the next city or the next person, they say,
        - “I tried that, but it didn't work.”
        - They act like persecution means they are no longer to testify of Christ to the people around them!
          - Sometimes, they even act like they have put in their time and are entitled to retire!
      - But that is not so!
        - You are called to avoid the ones who are persecuting,
          - but there are always others for you to go to!
    - b. When Jesus says, “go on to the next city and preach there...”
      - He says it with a great deal of urgency!
        - Jesus was going to come and judge Israel in just a few decades for their rejection of Him.

- This seems to be what He has in view when He says,
    - “For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”
    - Obviously, He is not talking about His coming to judge the world at the end of this age...
      - but He was urging them labour to get the gospel out to all the cities of Israel before He comes to judge Israel in 70 AD.
- c. Do you see how this applies to you, Christian?
- There are always more people in your life for you to tell of your hope in Christ.
    - Just because one is unkind and persecutes you in no way calls you to give up!
    - It simply gives you opportunity to move on to the next person.
      - Don’t shut your mouth because of a little opposition...
      - There are plenty of other people that need to hear.
        - If someone turns out to be wolf, move on to another.

TRANS> So we have seen that because you are sheep in the midst of wolves:

- You must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves...
- You must not worry about how you will answer...
- You must not give up because of persecution...
- These are the first three principles and the fourth is:

D. Fourth, you must not resent persecution.

- Jesus drives home this point when He says (vs. 24-25)
    - A disciple is not above *his* teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *will they call* those of his household!
1. The Lord reminds you here that you are only a disciple, He is the teacher. You are a servant, He is the master...
- Yet, it is a disgusting characteristic of His disciples to expect that they ought to receive better treatment than He did!
  - This is a very wretched attitude!
    - “A servant is not greater than his master!”
    - If the master teacher was not honoured in this world,
      - should his disciples expect to be honoured?



- Should they resent being mistreated and abused when their master was mistreated and abused?
- Of course not!

2. But what complainers we are!

- a. A little persecution comes and instead of rejoicing as the master told us to do, we start to whine and carry on as if something has gone wrong!
- b. We will keep quiet about the gospel—or modify it so that people will like it better...
  - Is that not the reason the gospel has been so grossly distorted in our society?
  - Is that not the reason the Alpha programme is so weak on the doctrine of sin and the punishment it deserves?
  - Is that not the reason the Roman Catholic Church brings in the Virgin Mary and the Saints?
  - Is that not the reason the united church openly supports homosexuality?
    - They did these things to make a gospel that people will like better because they didn't want to be rejected.
- c. The Bible tells you that if you live Godly in Christ Jesus you will be persecuted...
  - So don't act like something has gone wrong because persecution has come!
  - People won't like it if you follow Christ—and it is often in one particular area that they will take offense...
    - That is why it is so tempting to compromise—because it is only in one little area...
    - But once you do that, you are not longer honouring Christ as your Lord and Master.
    - Instead of resenting persecution,
      - you should accept it as the natural consequence of being a sheep in the midst of wolves.
      - and you should give thanks that you are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

TRANS> So here now are four things you should do as sheep in the midst of wolves...

- First, Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves
- Second, Do not be worried about how you will answer if you get put to the test...
- Third, Do not give up simply because you are persecuted
- Fourth, Do not resent the fact that you are persecuted.

And now we come to fifth and final thing to do as sheep in the midst of wolves...

E. Fifth, keep yourselves encouraged in the many comforts that Christ gives you in the face of persecution!

1. Jesus has loaded His address with such comforts....

- For the most part, He lays these out in verses 26-42.
- We will examine these next week in detail, but for now I will simply state them:
  - In verse 26, He promises that God will bring everything to light.
  - In verse 27-28, He explains how much stronger God is than our enemies.
  - In verse 29-31, He tells us how far the Father's care for us extends.
  - In verses 32-33, He promises that He will confess us in heaven
  - In verses 34-39, He tells us that we will find our life by losing it.
  - In verses 40-42, He promises that the friends of the gospel will be rewarded.

TRANS> These are the comforts that we will look at next week...

- but there is one in our text that I want to look at more closely—
  - It is a kind of summary of all the rest...

2. It is found at the end of verse 22 where Jesus says:

- “He who endures to the end will be saved.”
  - a. Yes, if you are going to follow Jesus Christ in this world, you will be a sheep in the midst of wolves.
    - That will be your situation in life until you die.
    - There will be many that will oppose you and ridicule you,
      - and there will be times when their malice will break out of all boundaries and cause you pain and sorrow.
    - You will be tempted to compromise and to give in but you must not...
  - b. Jesus says, “He who endures to the end will be saved.”
    - Not everyone will be saved—
      - Not everyone who is baptised will be saved...
      - Not everyone who confesses Christ before persecutors will be saved...
    - The one who endures to the end will be saved.
      - It is not sufficient to follow Christ for a while and then draw back because you find discipleship too hard.

- If you are truly born of the Spirit, you have a new heart and though you may waver and falter,
    - you will not draw back to destruction.
    - You will continue in the faith despite the wolves...
      - They will try to deceive you and they will try to devour you...
      - And though they may destroy this body,
        - they will never separate you from Christ.
        - You will continue to follow Him and to trust in Him along for your salvation...
          - Not that you will be perfect,
          - But that you will not turn away to destruction.
- c. The great promise to you is that you will be saved.
- 1) The day will come when the wolves will be cast into the Lake of Fire,
    - and when you will be delivered from them and from all your sorrows.
    - You will be brought into the kingdom of glory where Christ dwells and you will serve Him forever and ever with great joy.
  - 2) How wonderfully true is that saying of John Bunyan as he was being ushered down the aisle of the church by the authorities for the crime of preaching the gospel...
    - Better to be the one who is persecuted than the one who is persecuting!
    - Yes, you are sheep in the midst of wolves for now...
      - but if you endure to the end, you will be saved.