

Comfort for Sheep among Wolves (Part I)

Matthew 10:26-31

Halifax: 24 April 2005

Introduction:

Over the last several weeks,

- We have seen how Jesus sent out the twelve disciples.
 - It was their mandate to declare to all their fellow Israelites that their Messiah had come!
 - They were also given power to heal the sick and to cast out demons as a witness to everyone that they were sent by the Lord.

How much these twelve men had to give to the world!

- By declaring the coming of King Jesus...
 - They were in effect offering Him and all His benefits to everyone who would believe their message.
 - All who believed would obtain the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit from King Jesus.
 - With their sins forgiven,
 - they would be reconciled to God, even though by nature they were sinners who were under His wrath and curse...
 - And with the Holy Spirit given to them,
 - they would obtain a new heart to love God and live for God forever and ever.

But we saw last week that even though they had so much to give,

- they would be despised and rejected by all.
- Jesus told them that they would be like sheep in the midst of wolves...
 - That they would be hated by all for His sake.
 - That they would be scourged by Jewish courts as transgressors of God's law...
 - That they would be brought before governors and kings for His sake to be tried as criminals...
 - And that even the members of their own families would turn them over to be executed.
 - They would be called Baalzebub, or Satan, even as Jesus Himself had been labelled.

My friends, if you are Christ's disciples,

- He has also sent you out into this world to represent Him in word and deed.
- None of you have been sent forth to preach as inspired apostles in the same way these men were,
 - but you have certainly been called to represent Jesus in this world and to spread His light all around wherever you go.
 - And to the extent you do, you also will be despised by all for His sake.
 - Do not resent it if you are rejected and called evil...
 - Why should you expect to receive better treatment than your master?

But Christian, you know what you are like...

- It is all well and good to talk about spreading your light when you are at church or in your prayer closet...
 - It is very encouraging to think about all that you have in Jesus Christ to give to your neighbour!
 - You realise that you and every other believer are like a fountain from whose innermost being the river of the Spirit pours forth!
 - But what happens as soon as you go out and opposition starts to come?
 - A bit of ridicule from your neighbour when he discovers that you actually believe in creation...
 - A nasty little comment from your mother for the way you are teaching your children...
 - A passionate claim by a co-worker that all who believe the Bible's teaching about homosexuality are guilty of hate crimes and ought to be turned in to the authorities...
- Do you not find that your enthusiasm for representing Christ in this world starts to wane a little?
 - Do you not find that you start to become less inclined to believe that you really do have something worthwhile to give to the world?
 - Do you not find that that river that Jesus promised would flow out of the inmost being starts to dry up...
 - and that light that is supposed to shine starts to grow dim?

Well let me tell you,

- The Lord Jesus does not want His disciples to shut down, to stop giving!
- After telling His disciples all the opposition they would face in Matthew 10:16-25,

- He presents them with much encouragement to keep on going!
- And Christian,
 - these encouragements from our Lord are recorded for you by the Holy Spirit in Matthew 10:26-42 so that **you** might benefit from them also.
 - The Lord has given them to you also here in His word,
 - to encourage you to keep on serving Christ even when people oppose you and hate you for it.
 - Jesus wants the river to keep flowing out of you and your light to keep shining, even in the middle of opposition.
 - He knows that the fear of man can easily stifle you!

So He begins His encouragement by giving you three reasons why you need not fear man.

- These are recorded for us in Matthew 10:26-31.
- We will look at them this morning, but before we do,
 - I want to give a brief definition of what this fear is.
 - The thing you fear at any given time is the thing you believe to have the greatest power to do you harm or good.
 - If it is a person, it is the one whose displeasure you try to avoid—
 - either by pleasing him...
 - or by staying out of his way.
 - Your happiness, you conclude, depends on avoiding his disfavour.
 - And so you shape your whole life with a view to just that.

Now of course when sheep are in the midst of wolves, they have much reason to fear!

- Jesus has already told us all the horrible things men will do to us.
 - He is not pretending that there is not danger...
- Yet, He tells His disciples not to fear them!
 - And He gives three good reasons why they should not fear...
 - Here is the first one:

I. First, you ought not to fear man because he will eventually be proven wrong.

A. It can be very difficult sometimes when everyone is telling **you** that **you** are wrong.

1. Think about what Jesus said concerning His disciples...
 - It was not just that people would be persecuting them...

- They would be accused of **wickedness** by those in the synagogue who claimed to be speaking for the Lord...
 - And they would be tried and convicted as criminals...
 - Even their own families would be telling them how wrong they were.
 - With Jesus their master, they would be called Baalzebub or Satan!
2. You know about this, don't you?
- What happens when your friends and family find out that you believe the Roman Catholic mass is idolatrous?
 - Very likely, they will tell you how wrong you are.
 - What happens when the people at work find out that you believe that without Jesus Christ, people will go to Hell?
 - Very likely, they will tell you how intolerant and bigoted you are.
 - They will say that you are evil.
3. They will put pressure on you in various ways to try to get you to change.
- Sometimes, they will even start looking to find things that are wrong about you...
 - And sometimes they will even come up with things that are not true...
 - Paul was accused of profaning the temple at Jerusalem...
 - The early church was accused of cannibalism because they ate the bread that represented the Lord's body and drank the wine that represented His blood.
 - They were even accused of burning down Rome because they proclaimed that God would judge the world with fire and would destroy the world.

TRANS> When you keep being told that you are wrong and that you are evil for following Christ,

- the pressure can become very great to dim your light!
- When church leaders, government officials, and your family are all telling you that you how wrong you are,
 - Jesus says:
 - "Do not fear them!"

B. The truth about everything will be revealed.

- In verse 26, He says:

- Matthew 10:26: “Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

1. Don't miss the simplicity of His first command here!

- He simply says, “don't fear them.”
 - In other words,
 - “Don't worry about what they are saying.”
 - “Don't be intimidated by them.”
 - “Don't change what you are doing and saying for Jesus Christ just because people don't like it.”

2. The reason is likewise very simple...

- “For nothing is covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

a. The truth is going to come out from the midst of all the falsehood!

1) Even though now, lies can be made to sound very convincing—

- Christianity can be painted with a black brush and the world can be painted with a gold brush...
 - especially when the media and the public institutions and the religious assemblies are all speaking against the truth.
 - But Jesus is making it clear that their lies will be exposed in the light of truth!
 - To a certain extent, that is what you are doing already when you bear witness to the truth...
 - But Jesus is saying that the day will come when they will not be able to maintain the lie!
 - The lie will be seen for what it is.

2) What's more, wickedness and evil motives that are now hidden away will become very clear and evident to all.

- All the slanders and false accusations will be brought to light in their true colours.

b. Whenever God brings things to light, He is glorified and Christ is honoured.

1) When the Spirit opens your eyes,

- a) You are able to your sin in its true colours... and your need of a Saviour.
 - In Romans 6, Paul talks about how believers are now ashamed of their former behaviour—

- The lies and the falsehood are all seen in their true character.

b) But also, when the Spirit opened your eyes,

- You were able to see the glory of Christ the Saviour!
- You were able to see His righteousness and love,
 - His purity and innocence...
 - The truth of His word.

TRANS> But this is the great thing about the day of judgement at the end of the world...

2) On that day,

- Everyone will be able to see the truth...
 - You will see it even more clearly than you do now,
 - And unbelievers will not be able to deny it.

a) There will not be slightest shadow of doubt that sin is utterly sinful and wretched...

- No one will even question it because:
 - “there is nothing covered that will not be revealed.”

b) And there will not be slightest doubt that Christ is worthy of all glory and honour and blessing!

- Even the unbeliever will be constrained to bow and will be sickened by his stubborn refusal to serve this Saviour in this world.
- He will be sure of the justice of his own sentence of judgement, and so will everyone else.
 - “All that is hidden will be known.”

3) You see then that there is no reason to fear other people when they accuse you and call you evil and condemn you for following Christ.

- You will have your day in court and the truth will prevail!

C. And so, this being the case, you have every reason to speak the truth now— courageously, frankly, and freely!

- Jesus says:

- Matthew 10:27: Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

1. Do not be ashamed of the gospel!

- It is the power of God for salvation—and it is true!
 - Don't be ashamed to live and practice God's word.
 - Jesus reveals His truth to you in the quietness of your heart, as you hear His word preached and study His word...
 - But then He calls you to make it public—to live it out in your home and in your community—
 - to speak the truth and defend the truth far and wide.
2. Christian, you have so much to offer to the world, so don't let the world silence you!
- They will call your good “evil” and your doctrine “evil,”
 - but that should not stop you because you know that it is not evil!
 - God will uphold His truth and He will uphold all of you who are of the truth...
 - who believe the truth and practice the truth...
 - Following Jesus is good and beautiful and right—
 - One day **everybody** will know it!
 - Do not fear them!
 - There is nothing covered that will not be revealed!
 - That is the first reason you do not need to fear man.

II. Second, you ought not to fear man because in the end, he has no power to hurt you.

- Matthew 10:28: And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

A. You see here that there is a great limitation placed upon persecutors!

1. It is true that they can do a great deal.
 - a. Jesus does not pretend that your enemies are but straw men.
 - He declares plainly that they can kill the body!
 - That is pretty serious!
 - b. And of course, they can do everything else that is less than that.
 - They can take your property, they can scourge you and beat you, they can ruin your reputation.
 - Jesus fully admits that they can do these things...

- but He also shows that these things are really very trivial.
2. He explains that they **cannot** destroy your body and soul in Hell.
- a. **Hell** translates the word “Gehenna.”
- 1) **Gehenna** was a valley south of Jerusalem.
- It had been the place where children were offered by fire to idols,
 - but when the Jews repented of their idolatry, they had turned the place into a garbage dump.
 - It was the most horrible place they knew...
 - a place where fires burned and where worms and maggots abounded.
 - It was therefore a very fitting symbol for the place of God’s final judgement.
- 2) But it is obvious that when Jesus speaks of Hell,
- He is not talking about an eternal place...
 - In other places, He speaks of it as a place where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies!
 - It is like Gehenna, only infinitely worse because it is never ending!
- b. And note what He says about it in our text...
- 1) He says that it is the place where God destroys both soul and body...
- He doesn’t say where God **kills** both body and soul...
 - but where He **destroys** them both...
 - God does not destroy their being in Hell, but their well-being.
 - It is the place of everlasting destruction for body and soul.
- 2) This is a mighty contrast to what man can do!
- The contrast is completely lost for those wrongly teach that Hell is mere cessation of existence!
 - What is the difference between having your body killed and having your body and soul destroyed in Hell if destruction in Hell is nothing more than cessation?
 - In that case, you might not fear at all! Death would be relief!
 - Yet, it is clear that Jesus is making a great contrast between what man can do and what God can do...

- So great that He says that all the killing and torturing and scouring and taking of property that man can do is nothing in comparison to the destruction that God can do in Hell!
- The difference is so great that Jesus advises you not to fear man at all who can only kill you!
 - He says:
 - “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”
 - The harm man can do is **nothing** in comparison to the harm that God can do!

B. This being the case, you have no reason to fear man.

1. God alone possesses the power to bless and to curse at last!
 - a. If you are wise, you will give yourself to pleasing Him.
 - 1) Instead of always saying,
 - “What will people think of me if I do this or that...”
 - You will always say,
 - “What will the Lord think of me if I do this or that.”
 - 2) Instead of asking,
 - “What will man do to me if I follow Christ in this or that?”
 - You will ask,
 - “What will God do to me if I reject Christ.”
 - 3) In other words, your eyes will be upon pleasing God instead of pleasing man because you will fear God instead of fearing man...
 - a) You will believe that God’s favour is more important than man’s favour.
 - And you will live as if that is true!
 - You will avoid what displeases Him...
 - And you will pursue what pleases Him.
 - b) And of course, I don’t mean this in a bone headed way.
 - Jesus has warned His disciples to beware of men because they would do horrendous things...
 - He has told them to flee to the next city when they are persecuted in the first...

- But He is insisting that they not be so solicitous about men that they deviate from their duty to God.
 - It is often the case that your duty to God involves seeking to find out what pleases your neighbour and do that for Him...
 - But you should never do something to please or neighbour (or something to avoid his displeasure) if it is something that would displease God.
- b. The point is that what God thinks about you and what you are doing is the only thing that should really matter.
- His favour is everything!
 - The absence of His favour should be your greatest fear...
 - because He can destroy both body and soul in Hell.
2. The principle is,
- “Your fear for that thing can cause you a little discomfort should always give way to your fear of that thing that can cause you much greater discomfort.”
- a. Let me illustrate this for you.
- Suppose you are staying in a cabin at Jasper National Park (in the Canadian Rocky Mountains).
 - You have gone out on a little hike and realise that a storm is coming. You fear the storm because you don’t want to get wet!
 - As you are rushing back toward your cabin, you suddenly notice that a grizzly bear is on the front porch!
 - If you have any sense at all, you will forget all about your fear of getting rained on!
 - You will change your plans because you fear the bear more than you fear the rain!
- b. The folly of the person who chooses to reject Christ because of concern about what others will think is a much greater folly than the folly of the person who confronts the bear to get out the rain.
- 1) Be laughed at, be scourged, be tortured, be maimed, be killed...
 - but don’t ever reject Jesus Christ!
 - Sure, man can harm you—
 - he can even kill you...
 - But what is that compared to an eternity in Hell?
 - 2) The wise man is the man who can tell which path is best to take...

- and who takes the best path.
- Matthew 10:28: Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

TRANS> So now you see two reasons Jesus gives you not to be afraid of man...

- First, because everything that is hidden will be revealed...
- Second, because man can only kill your body, but God can destroy both in Hell.

III. Third, you ought not to fear man because what you do matters very much to God.

A. Sometimes it may seem like God is not very concerned about you.

1. As long as you are in this world, you must walk by faith...
 - a. That means that God is not there visibly telling you what He thinks of you.
 - There is no voice from heaven or smile in the clouds for you...
 - And not only that, but the wicked often prosper and the righteous are often vexed with many afflictions.
 - b. Walking by faith and not by sight means that you must interpret everything through the lens of God's word.
 - Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.
 - Practically this means that rather than looking at how things are going for you right now to determine whether God is pleased with you...
 - You must look at God's word to determine if He is pleased with you.
 - A person high on cocaine may have a rush of great peace and comfort, but that does not mean he is right with God.
 - It means he is deceiving himself.
 - It means he is walking by sight instead of by faith.
2. Now if you walk by sight,
 - a. It will often seem as if God doesn't care too much about what you do...
 - but it will seem like people care quite a lot about what you do!
 - You don't hear God yelling at you or threatening you,
 - but you sure do hear about it when you do something that displeases your neighbour!
 - b. In other words, even though God might have the power to bless and curse,
 - You don't see Him exercising that power very much...

- And so you assume that what you do is not as important to him as it is to the people around you!
 - If you slough off at work, you will lose your job...
 - But if you slough off in prayer, God will not send you home from church.
- c. And so it is easy to think that if you don't please God,
 - it won't matter much because it seems as if God doesn't care that much what you do...

TRANS> But if you look at God's word (and especially at Matthew 10:29-31) you will see that God cares very much about all His creatures, and especially about people!

B. Jesus shows us here that God is very concerned about you—even about the details!

1. Each little sparrow, as little and insignificant as it might seem,
 - is preserved by the will of God.
 - a. God has each one of them there for His purposes,
 - and at the appointed time He takes each one away according to His purpose for that sparrow.
 - It does not always look like it to us because to us the sparrow falls at random...
 - but if we receive the word of God, we know that it is not random at all.
 - In v. 29, Jesus says:
 - Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.
 - God will not allow it to fall until He has finished using it for His divine purposes.
 - b. Jesus goes on in verse 30 to show that God's providence extends even to the hairs of your head!
 - Matthew 10:30: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered!"
 - Most of you have about 140,000 of them...
 - that is the average...
 - and each one of those hairs fulfils its purpose for God!
 - It does not fall out until He is finished with it.
2. Jesus concludes this thought, therefore, with these words in verse 31:

- Matt 10:31: “Do not fear therefore; you are more value than many sparrows.”
- a. If God is carefully using sparrows and the hairs on your head for His purposes,
 - how much more is He using you for His purposes?
- b. It is not so much that hairs and sparrows and even men are so great...
 - for we are but dust and ashes—like a flower of the field we flourish...
 - Isaiah 40 says that the nations are less than the dust on the scales in comparison to God!
 - And he is not talking about some high tech scale in science lab...
 - but a scale at the market where dust is absolutely irrelevant.
 - But what makes sparrows and men so important is the majesty of God whom they are created to glorify!
 - His majesty is so great that there is not one atom, not one hair, not one sparrow, not one man, that does not in some way give glory to Him!
 - And the act of giving glory to God takes its importance because God is so important!
- c. Clearly, you, as a person, made in the image of God, have much more to do with glorifying God than a sparrow or a hair on your head.
 - There are two ways people give glory to God
 - 1) Some people give glory to God as vessels of mercy and some give Him glory as vessels of wrath.
 - The vessels of mercy are the ones He saves through Jesus Christ—
 - And they will glorify Him for all eternity as an object of His grace and kindness.
 - They will be restored, despite the fall, into the perfect image of God and will shine as trophies of His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.
 - The vessels of wrath are the ones He leaves in their sins—
 - They will glorify Him for all eternity as objects of His displeasure.
 - He shows to all the universe His holy wrath by pouring out upon them what their sins deserve.
 - 2) But you see, the point is that both the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy are extremely important!

- They are here to give glory to their creator, and that is just what they will do.
- There is not one extra one,
 - not one that could be left out.
 - not one that has no purpose.

C. But what does all this have to do with fearing man?

1. Well Christian, it means that when you suffer anything by the hand of man,
 - it happens precisely according to God's plan.
 - It happens in order to bring glory to Him...
 - There is nothing random about it at all!

2. At the very moment the scourge touches a Christian's back, it is for the glory of God...
 - a. That moment and the pain associated with it is all for His sake.
 - It did not happen because He wasn't paying attention!
 - It happened because he was paying very close attention and had a very specific purpose for it!

 - b. As a vessel of mercy, He will use it in your life—
 - to make you more patient, to prove your character, to give you hope, to show you His love in a way that only can be known in suffering...
 - It will give you growth in grace and prepare you for greater glory.
 - It happened by design—it happened for God.

 - c. And, that blow will also be used to bring glory to God through the one who inflicted it upon you...
 - If He is a vessel of mercy, it will be used to lead them to a greater repentance in the days to come...
 - And it will demonstrate the greatness of God's mercy to saw such a one by the blood of Jesus Christ...
 - and it will honour the blood of Christ and the sufferings of Christ which are able to save all who come to God by Him.

 - If, on the other hand, the one inflicting the blow is a vessel of wrath,
 - then this blow will yet another act for God to demonstrate the glory of wrath upon—

3. And so you see that you don't need to fear what man does to you...

- Because He does absolutely nothing without the Father.
 - If you belong to Jesus Christ, it is all for God's glory and your own good.
 - Do not walk contrary to the Lord to avoid the persecutor's wrath!
 - Not a hair of your head will perish without the Father.
 - And if it is the Father's will,
 - let them take your life also!
 - It is His purpose for you.

Conclusion:

And so Christian, you see that there is no reason for you to fear man!

- His lies will all be exposed in time...
- The worst he can do is kill you...
- And whatever he does do to you is according to gracious and wise design of your heavenly Father.

Is this not the way it was for Jesus?

- Though men told lies, did God not vindicate his teaching
- Though men killed Him, did God not raise Him up to live?
- Did His affliction come by accident?

What is there for you to fear?

- Do not be intimidated!
- Do not let mere man put you to silence!
- You have a glorious gospel to spread.