

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 19 – The Church’s Other
Mission Field)

April 24, 2016

Sermon Text: Matthew 18:10-14

Scripture Reading: Psalm 109

Introduction-

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.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles

himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. **So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.** (Mat 18:1-14)

[NOTE: There is another account of Jesus speaking of a shepherd who has 100 sheep and goes after one that is lost. The chapter (Luke 15) goes on recording Jesus' words about other lost things: a lost coin, and of course a lost son, the prodigal. We might be tempted to say that Matthew 18 and Luke 15 are parallels, but I do not believe they are. Notice the different settings in which Jesus taught:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."** **So he told them this parable:** "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home,

he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' **Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents** than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luk 15:1-7)

Little ones who believe in Christ in Matthew's account, and sinners who repent in Luke's account. It is the Lord's teaching and parable in Matthew that we focus on this morning. In both cases Christ is rebuking people: the disciples in Matthew who were looking for power and fame in His kingdom, and the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes in Luke. But it is a mistake to equate the two and apply every point of interpretation from one on the other simply because both speak of 100 sheep and one that goes astray].

Alright then, let's turn to our thesis for this morning and we state it this way:

While the Lord sends His people out into the world to preach the gospel and make disciples, calling upon people to repent and believe in Him for salvation, He also very often (perhaps as often) commands us to minister in His name to His people who are oppressed, downcast, persecuted, weak, and suffering. And in fact it is

this latter mission field that is more often pointed to as the real test of whether we are truly the Lord's people or not.

Today in the visible church, with shocking frequency, we have the same "I will be first" fame-seeking that Jesus rebuked in His disciples characterizing many who claim to be serving Christ. And Jesus said that such an attitude ends up despising the weak, the little ones, marginalizing the lowly who believe in Him, and even causing them to stumble, most likely stumbling in regard to their faith in Him.

Is this not what we are seeing so commonly today? The very opposite of what Jesus calls us to? Woe to the one by whom the temptation and stumbling comes! How many little ones who believe in Christ, who have humble hearts and want to follow Him, are being hindered today by these "great ones" who are using the name of Christ to advance their own personal quest for fame and fortune? *Many*.

And let's not miss the somber "woe" pronounced against any who cause these little ones to be hindered from following Christ. Woe!! Eternal fire for anyone who despises these children of the Lord with humble hearts who are genuinely desiring to follow Him.

An Unbalanced Emphasis on Our Mission

As a kid growing up in the Baptist church, I often felt guilty. The preacher emphasized that every Christian ought to be "leading people to the Lord" and that every church should be seeing people saved and baptized regularly. We were to memorize gospel presentations. We should go out on Wednesday evenings knocking on doors. We should be ashamed if we were too bashful or embarrassed to do these things.

This seemed to be the entire emphasis of the church and of being a Christian. Get people saved. Witness to them. Get them to pray and receive Jesus. Send out missionaries to do the same around the world. It is still very much the case in most churches today. The "mission field" is about telling people about Jesus, about His death for sinners, and calling them to repent and believe in Him for salvation.

And we were told stories. Accounts of missionaries and other hero saints who risked life and limb for the gospel. And more, we were told "testimonies" of how vile, rotten sinners were saved and their lives totally transformed, and WE were supposed to be seeing the same things happen in our experience

and in our church and ministry and if we weren't, well, something was very wrong with US.

As a result, for many years, I considered myself a failure in my service of Christ. Even as a pastor. Why? Because while other churches were "growing" in number and the "model" churches that everyone looked to as their example were large in number, I did not see hardly any people coming to faith in Christ. That is how it has always been in my experience. As I look back over three decades of pastoral ministry, alongside many faithful Christians like you who watch for opportunities to tell unsaved people about Christ and who pray for the lost to be saved, the fact is that we have not seen large numbers of people converted. And there are numerous "Christian" pillars who would not hesitate to tell us we are have failed.

But I want to show you this morning that this is only half of the mission field work which Christ has commissioned us for. And in fact, *if the other half is neglected, everything goes down in flames*. Flames. Literally. Let me show you what I mean.

1. We have already heard from Jesus in Matthew 18 regarding care for His little ones *who believe in Him*. They already

know Christ. See that? But they are downcast. They are oppressed by false shepherds. Their ability to follow Christ is being hindered. They are despised by the religious leaders. It is our task, our mission, to go after them, bring them out of their treacherous circumstances, and help them to follow Christ.

But there is more. Listen to Christ here at length as perhaps you haven't heard these words before:

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water **because he is a disciple**, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." (Mat 10:42)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

NOTE: And what is the King going to say? "Those of you who led 10 people to believe in me, come forward and get your bronze medal. Now those who led 50 people, come get your silver. And

now for the real honors – 100 or more, come on down!” NOPE!

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, **'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'**

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty

or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'

Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, **as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.**' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mat 25:31-46)

See it? What is the basis of separation of sheep and goats? Their true nature was shown in their love for or lack of love for the people of Christ and specifically in regard to the people of Christ who were the little ones, the ones of no reputation, the ones who were persecuted for Christ's name, imprisoned, naked, hungry and so on. There is in fact no mention at all here of "soul-winning."

Evil ministers to the evil ones and disregards the sufferings of the righteous.

The problem I've encountered, regardless the denomination, is the idea that the people who should receive mercy are the abusers, rapists, murderers, etc. Because when I go to a pastor and question his or her offering the right hand of fellowship to one of these in a sermon, or in their actions, they claim that they are being

merciful, then they tell me that I'm still too close to the pain of my own suffering and that is clouding my judgement. *sigh* Thanks for your continued work in this area. I keep praying that soon the church will listen. (A commenter at ACFJ blog)

Not long ago I heard of a pastor who molested several ladies over a few years and it all came out one day. Then I heard another pastor preach and referring to that particular 'pastor', explaining how the first thing he did when he heard of his sin was to call him and assure him he was praying for him. I was horrified! This is WRONG and DECEIVING! The message it sends to the audience listening to this mercy counterfeit is that we ought not to judge the "poor perpetrators". It would have made such a difference if he had said he'd called the VICTIMS and told THEM words of support! and quoted 1 Co 5.5 that he had delivered such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Where are the true men in the church.. ? (Commenter at ACFJ blog)

Very good, and right on. Jesus said that the commandment to love the

Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength was the greatest commandment, and the second was like it – Love your neighbor as yourself. But then he said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." If you meditate on that a bit, it is clear that everything in scripture – EVERYTHING – is for the purpose of increasing our love for God and our love for neighbor.

And one other – Jeremiah said this:

23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:
24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.
(Jer 9:23-24 KJV)

Jeff, what you are describing is what I have also seen in the conservative scholar world. We pride ourselves in our wisdom, but do not know the Lord. If we cannot be moved with compassion and cannot be grieved over injustice, then we do not know

the Lord, no matter how well we can parse Hebrew verbs.

PS – I absolutely love parsing Hebrew verbs, but that skill is useless if it doesn't stir me to worship and good works. (Pastor Sam Powell, First Reformed Church, RCUS, Yuba City, CA)

Do you begin to see the ramifications and implications of these things? *All the Law and the Prophets*. Listen again-

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 22:35-40)

EVERYTHING in Scripture, in other words, hangs on and depends upon the application of Scripture in light of these two great commandments. ANY interpretation that forgets these principles *is necessarily errant*. Love for God. Love for our neighbor. This is

why the Pharisees' handling of Scripture was skewed. For example:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. (Mat 12:1-14)

Let's look at another one:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (Jas 1:27)

And another:

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:6-8)

And still another:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isa 1:16-17)

Of King Josiah:

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD. (Jer 22:16)

And then of course the parable of the Good Samaritan which is so often told with the assumption that everyone in the church would certainly be the one to stop and help the victim. Notice this is the very same message we have been seeing consistently this morning about his neglected, non-elective, and forgotten mission field of the church:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.**" And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, **he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luk 10:25-37)

These past few years of ministry here in this church have turned out to be the most fruitful I have ever experienced in all these years as a pastor, and I think that you all would agree that this has been your experience too. We are missionaries to the oppressed. We are

active in the work of Christ that is a non-elective for every Christian. And the results? Most days I can barely keep up with the response and answer the thank you's from people who have been rescued by Christ's truth.

Evil passes by Christ's little ones who are oppressed and suffering. Evil turns away. Evil will not be bothered. Evil seeks only things that will bring gain and glory to itself. But all who follow its path will end in hell. Love for the Lord and love for His people is not an option. And I have to say that the vast majority of local churches and supposed Christian ministries are failing miserably here. Unless they repent, unless they turn and cease making the little ones stumble, they will end in hell. They will be, it will turn out, the goats.

I think that for the first time I have begun to see the truth of the Lord's words to His disciples and to us (and I suspect you have as well) –

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. (Joh 4:35)

They really are. But we must go into the right fields. We close with this excerpt from a blog post by Phil

Monroe, a professor at Biblical Theological Seminary in PA. It is an illustration of the very kind of ministry we have been speaking of:

Recently I travelled to Amman, Jordan to meet with Christians involved in bringing Scripture-engaged trauma healing curriculum to their communities. Participants represented the countries of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Nearly all are involved in serving both Christian and Muslim refugees. Remember too that while Jordan is a stable country, it is a place where believers number no more than 2 percent of the population.

Whenever I travel somewhere to teach, I always come home (re-) learning as much if not more than I teach. Here are a few of my recent lessons,

The heart of the Gospel is caring for the stranger among you. Believers are active in caring for the 4 million refugees in Jordan and many more outside of the country. Food, water, education, pastoral care, and medical care are being provided. And the care is not just given to other believers but also to those who are Muslim. I listened to believers describe how

they have earned respect from these refugees and how the character of Christ is being made known, in deed but also in word. In Syria, along the coast, churches are educating gypsies and providing food and water to the internally displaced.

Comparing to ME culture, I am not very generous. I had an extra day in the country after the training. Several participants wanted to be sure that I was well cared for. They sought to provide me with experiences in the country, food, kindness, and more. I saw generosity in action. May I exude the same here!

We don't know what it is like to be minority. Sometimes in the US, we Christian can feel we are really under attack. But, comparatively, we are not. Imagine having to stop and show ID to go into a neighborhood, a stop solely based on your faith. Imagine that via Islamic/government rule, rape victims must marry rapists. Imagine a system that provides national ID numbers to children born of rape that forever identifies them as such. How does the church choose to respond to care for victims when the system is set up to harm them further? And yet, I see the church there flourishing, even if ever

under pressure and small by comparison.

Christians question why the US does not seem to do more to help them. We met with 36 Iraqi refugees one evening. We shared a meal and some good conversation. But it was also serious in that these families told us of losing everything they had to ISIS and others who ran them out of their towns. They told of a community of 60,000 believers who had to leave good jobs, houses, cars, and churches behind to run for their lives. These that we talked to now live in shipping containers on the property of a Catholic church. They cannot work. They cannot move about. They are stuck and only surviving on the graces of this church community. They lament over the loss of their church community of 12,000. Why, they ask. Why wouldn't the USA, a predominantly Christian nation, not help them more? Of course this is a complex political question but do remember that the instability there is much the result of our military actions to remove the former president. These people just do not understand how we stand by and do nothing as a country (note: there are many NGOs actively working to care for this community).

Similarly, our new found Palestinian friends told of their common experiences in trying to move about the West Bank. They told of their struggles and their isolation. Though they did not say as much, they do wonder why their own brothers and sisters in other parts of the world seem to neglect their plight.

If you want to be on the forefront of a mission field that really is ripe for harvest, turn your eyes to taking the love and truth of Christ to the myriads of victims of evil who are all around us today. You will find a receptive and thankful audience:

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (Jas 2:15-18)