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Be Wise as Serpents and Gentle as Doves

Matthew 10:16

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for the gift that you've given to us of your church, the gift that you've given to us of your word, the freedom that we still have to gather together and open up your word. And Lord today, this morning I pray for the presence of your spirit, I pray that you would accompany us as we open up your word and that you would again make it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So how is the world treating you today? Chances are if you are a working person, if you're in decent health, if you've got a roof over your head and a steady job, you probably think the world, it's treating you okay. If you are a student and your grades are okay and yesterday I think just across the country everybody took their SATs, if your friends still like you and you have no enemies that you can't handle, you probably say the world is treating you okay as well. If you're a homemaker, I mean if your kids are behaving and you and your spouse are getting along and your household is not

in chaos, you probably say the world is treating you okay. But Jesus had an observation about how the world should be treating us and to be frank, it's kind of disturbing. This is what Jesus said in *John 15*. You probably heard me say this many times. He said: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours."*

See, according to Jesus the question "How is the world treating you?" that's a far more complex question for Christians. You see the child of God has a unique relationship with the world that he lives in; he is in fact at war with it. Jesus makes no bones about his standing before the world. He tells the disciples: *"Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* I mean if the master's hated, there's no question the servants are going to be hated as well. If the commanders are identified as the enemy, there's no doubt the privates are going to be labeled the same way, I mean, it really is a matter of identification. *"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because*

you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." You may not have realized it but if you belong to Jesus Christ, you have signed on with this world's greatest enemy. You've got a target on your back. I mean listen to what Jesus said: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."*

So how is the world treating you? You might think well, that's not very fair of a question. You might wonder, am I saying that God's people are supposed to be universal objects of scorn? That is if I'm a real Christian then I need to have lots of real pagans hating me. Well didn't Paul say to Timothy: *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted?* Does that mean that if I get along with my non-Christian friends, if I'm not a social outcast or an oppressed minority because of my faith then there's something wrong with my faith? *"But I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* Those are Jesus's words. Maybe it's just a matter of context, I mean, Jesus here is really, he's basically just speaking to his disciples, he's not really speaking to us, and we know the world hated the disciples and that they all died martyrs' deaths because they identified with Jesus and not with the world. I mean the disciples were a chosen group of men who belonged to God, men that God had called specifically to bear witness to himself and so it's no wonder that these guys were

hated. Jesus stated very clearly that he was praying specifically for these men. He said this in *John 17:9*, he said: *"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours."* But then he goes on to specify that he also wants to pray not just for the disciples but for every one of the believers who down through time he calls his own. This is what he says in verse 20. He says: *"I do not ask for these only -- meaning the disciples -- but also for those who will believe in me through their word,"* meaning us. The apostle Peter goes on to say something about these people who believe. This is what he says in *1 Peter 2:9*. He said: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

So we believers are the very people that Jesus was praying for who believe in him through the word, who are chosen out of the darkness to proclaim his light to a darkness that does not want it proclaimed. Peter goes on to say in *1 Peter 2:12*, he says: *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* Notice that Peter did not say "if they speak out against you," he said "when." He said we are to do good and expect evil to be spoken of us, because proclaiming Jesus

is what the world is finally admitting it thinks it is and that's hate speech. It hates everything there is about the name of Jesus, and if you start proclaiming that name by how you live and what you say, this world is not going to be happy. I mean didn't Jesus say that if you are of the world the world would love you enough to slap you on the back and say, "Hey, you're one of us!" But if they actually see Jesus in you, they're going to hate that.

So how's the world treating you? I've had to say that I and the world get along pretty well. I mean the fact is most of the folks that I rub shoulders with are either Christians in the first place are basically decent people. And we're talking about the UPS guy, the gas station guy, salesmen, teachers, neighbors, they all represent the world that we live in. I mean as far as I'm concerned they don't appear to hate me. Now does that mean that there's something wrong with me? Well the answer to that question, it's not really the answer "no," the answer is "that depends." You see the bottom line fact is we are part of a world that's at war, and this battle is as real as any in history and it's gone on as long as man's history has gone on and it's going to continue until the end of time. I mean you hear me speak about it all the time because it defines our very existence. Jesus is the Lord of light and Satan is the lord of darkness. He's also the prince of this world. He's the ruler of the kingdom that is right here right now

under your feet. And this kingdom is called by God "the darkness." The gospel of John contrasts the two kingdoms by saying in *John 1:5*: "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*" And that word translated "overcome," actually it's a hard word to translate. Some of the translations have it as "understood" or "apprehended" or "comprehended" because the idea that it's trying to translate, it's not very easy to render in English. The idea is of a light that's shining steadily into a darkness that detests it, that fears it, that tries to cover it, that tries to block it. That light is everything the darkness fears and loathes. I've used the analogy many times on a physical level but it's truly appropriate, if you just look at the reaction that the creatures who live under rocks have when you flip over a rock in the middle of a day, you know what happens, those creatures, they scramble, they scurry to get back into the darkness because the light is actually painful to them. We're the ambassadors of the Lord of light and the light that we shine is spiritually painful. I mean we live literally in the camp of the enemy in what the scripture calls "the darkness." And so sharing the gospel is not just telling folks about Jesus, it's literally flipping over the spiritual rocks in their lives and exposing them to a light that at first seems like nothing but pain. It's not just spiritual mumbo jumbo. The primary fact of our existence is this struggle between light and darkness that we're right in the

middle of. Jesus told his disciples that when the darkness sensed his presence in them, that is when the darkness sensed the light of Jesus in them that's also in us, they were to expect the same reaction that all warring factions experience from their enemies, they were to expect fear and loathing and rejection. Because *"if the world hates you, know that it hated me first."* So we believers are no different, I mean, we're at war right here and right now, in fact we have always been at war but it seems to be today a war that now everyone is starting to recognize. You can call it a war of cultures, you can call it a culture war but it's the same spiritual battle that the disciples were engaged in. And it's not just a war between cultures, it's really between different competing kingdoms with different understandings of what good and evil is.

Now for years the cultural consensus lined up pretty much with the Christian consensus, but you and I know those days are over. And more and more our present day culture has been able to flip the script and redefine good and evil, love and hate in ways that favor the darkness as loving and the light as hate-filled. How else can you explain a recent Kent State University poster that depicts various forms of hate speech which includes a person who's holding a sign that says "You Need Jesus." By what stretch is that hateful? Well, by the same stretch that defines marriage and gender and abortion by all new metrics that are now the polar

opposite of scripture. And all have been redefined not by the metric of God's sovereign right to rule over his creatures but by the only metric that counts today and that's the metric of human autonomy. "I," "me" and "myself" form the center of the only universe that really matters, and anything that challenges my autonomy by suggesting that I would have to answer to a higher power is automatically off limits. Understand, this is exactly the way the darkness wants it. And right now darkness and light are competing for the hearts, the minds and the souls of our culture. And even though that's the way it's always been, what has never been so obvious before is that the enemy's timing right here, right now is spot on. Because we're in the latter stages of God's abandoning us as a culture which I've stated over and over again is exactly how Romans 1 describes our situation. We've abandoned God by suppressing the truth of who he is, who he has revealed himself as in the scriptures and he has in turn abandoned us to the worst possible fate, that's our own fallen sense of what is right and wrong. I think it's pretty obvious that the culture isn't working any more. And when you watch the news you start to think that everything is upside down. Realize you're not mistaken. There's a reason why things are the way they are and they all have to do with God's judicial abandonment. God has said if you suppress the truth of who I am, you will pay a societal price, and we are now paying it. Three times scripture says God gave them up, God gave them up,

God gave them over and in each case we descended deeper and deeper into a moral pit for that exact reason. We've suppressed God's truth in church, in school, in the marketplace and in the culture, and God's response is to abandon us to our own folly as our punishment.

The first abandonment was to hyper sexualization and this is described in *Romans 1:24*. It says: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.* Is there any doubt that that's happened? I mean exchanging the truth of God for a lie, that's what led to the second abandonment and that's to perverse sexualization and that's verse 26. It says: *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.* Ten years ago you had no idea what "LGBTQ" meant at all. Now it's everywhere. And that led to the third level of abandonment where we find ourselves today, and that is an abandonment by God to a nightmare of a broken moral framework now disconnected from God's

restraint or insight. Again verse 28, it says: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.* I mean have you tried to imagine a whole culture with a collective consciousness wholly given over to hyper sexualization, perversion and a mindset that sets out what to do what ought not to be done, you will discover the darkness that we're now living in, and you'll discover that it successfully reinvented itself as the good just as Isaiah predicted when he said: *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!* I mean today nice folks embrace abominable positions and they do so with ease. I mean just last month I was looking at the Religion News Service posted about the first ever Pentecost service in a church conducted in drag. Let me just read you, this is RNS, Religion News Services:

"A few things were different about Sunday's virtual service at Hope United Methodist Church in Bloomington, Illinois. For one, there were a few more wigs on screen. There also was 'A little bit more makeup,' said Ms. Penny Cost" -- by the way that's a little play on words. She renamed herself Penny Cost because it's Pentecost. Get it? " -- said Ms. Penny Cost, that Sunday's preacher. Hope Church celebrated Drag Sunday on Sunday (April 11) with a message by Ms. Penny Cost and music, readings and prayer by other drag artists

from central Illinois and beyond. 'It is our way of celebrating and uplifting the voices of drag artistry within the church,' Ms. Penny Cost said during the service." (April 15, 2021 by Emily McFarlan Miller.)

You and I know, I can come up with dozens of these. The fact is we've become jaded about being jaded. And nothing seems shocking any more because we've grown used to a daily diet of it. And God describes this latter state of moral decay by stating in *Romans 3:18*: "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*" Folks have been conditioned by innuendo and the deceit of media so they're now just ripe for the harvest. And this is the world that Jesus sees. He sees through all the props, through all the smoke and all the mirrors to the heart of the world and we need desperately to be able to see the world as he sees it.

So how do we do that? How do we respond to this culture? Well there's four different ways that Christians can respond to the world and really only one of them is God's way. Let me just illustrate three incorrect reactions that I've seen observed towards the world. The first one is outrage. I mean the press has been accurately subtitled "the outrage industry" because that's largely what they do. They stoke outrage on both sides. Author Sarah Sobieraj accurately described this phenomenon by saying,

quote: "This unique brand of incivility has become the mainstay of an entire genre of political opinion media that is not really about dialogue or information, but instead takes the form of a wildly entertaining verbal jousting match, with the victor of the day being the team that most effectively paints the other side as dangerous, misguided or inept." The problem is it's all diagnosis with very little cure. If you sit down every night and you watch the news and your reaction to watching the news is outrage, perhaps it's something you should avoid or at least cut down on. See, you can't advance the kingdom of light with the kingdom of darkness's weapons, and rage and aggression is one of them. I mean Galatians 5:20 catalogs the fruits of the flesh as opposed to the spirit, and that catalog includes -- quote -- "fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions." That attitude ignores the most fundamental distinctive we possess and that is grace. The only difference between the best of us and the worst of us is the grace of God. We don't earn that grace; God gives it freely to us without a cause. And we who have been forgiven a great debt, we're in no position whatsoever to demand payment of our debtors and certainly not by aggression. I mean, God expects to be taken seriously when he says in *Matthew 5:44*: "*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*"

Well, second reaction of Christians in this world is appeasement,

trying to play both sides against the middle to search for a common ground between the two kingdoms. Now that's fine politically. Wonderful. It is disastrous spiritually because there is no common ground. *2 Corinthians 6:14* says: *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."* Sounds almost fanatical, doesn't it? I mean what part do believers have with unbelievers? Come out from them and be separate? I mean how are we supposed to understand what God is saying here? I believe misunderstanding this text accounts for much of the third wrong reaction to the world and that is isolation, because separation and isolation are two very distinct things. Separation recognizes on the most fundamental level there is we are not part of this world. We are first and foremost members of the kingdom of God and secondary everything else. It's our job, it's our privilege to engage with the world in order to

ransom and rescue those in the world in the same way that we were ransomed and rescued. Jesus has already given us our marching orders in the Great Commission. He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* I mean it's virtually impossible to obey that great commission and not rub shoulders with the world. Isolation literally cuts off the salt and the light that we're supposed to be but many believers see that as a virtue. It's not. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul wrote -- quote -- *"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people."* That's where lots of folks stop. They just put a halt right there and that's what they take away from that and that's what they believe. These are folks who consciously or unconsciously just don't want to have anything to do not just with the sexually immoral but with any other type of icky people. That's not where Paul stopped. This is what he said. He said: *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people -- not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler -- not even to eat*

with such a one. Paul's saying almost the exact opposite of what a lot of believers think. He's saying just as Jesus did, we are to associate with sinners. Because after all we are sinners saved by grace. Well, who are the folks that he says we are not to associate with? These are not just sinners. These are professing Christians caught up in sinful life-styles who think that they can bank on the blood of Christ to pay not just for the sins they've committed in the past but for sins they're likely to commit in the future.

I came across an article this past week; it perfectly illustrates the kind of mindset that Paul is addressing. This was the headline for the article. It says "Real Estate Agent Allegedly Wanted Hitman to Kill Former Mother-in-Law." Subheading: "Real estate agent believed her ex and former mother-in-law were going to take her to court for full custody of the children." This is an article by Yaron Steinbuch in the New York Post. This is what she says: "A realtor and self-described 'pistol-packing cheer mom' from Missouri allegedly tried to hire a hitman to kill her ex-husband's mother and make it 'look like an accident,' according to reports. Leigh Ann Bauman, 44, was recently charged with conspiracy to commit murder in connection with the alleged plot to kill her former mother-in-law because she was convinced she was causing a strain with her relationship with her daughters, The

Daily Beast reported. The world-record-winning power boater from the Lake of the Ozarks was allegedly preparing to pay \$1,500 for the hit in March by asking a pal for leads on a possible hitman." Here is where this connects with us. "She told the friend 'she knew it was wrong as a Christian, but she would go to church and ask for forgiveness after it was done,' according to a probable cause statement cited by the news outlet."

As bizarre as this seems, there's lots of folks who think this is what Christianity is. It's a get-out-of-jail-free pass for Jesus to clean up any mess that you make. And in her case it was literally murder that she thought she could magically get away with by using Jesus as her personal sin eraser. These are the folks that Paul says you need to avoid even associating with and not at all people who are struggling with sin. You see, the last thing that God wants us to do is to isolate ourselves from this sin-sick world because, after all, we represent the Great Physician. We represent the only one who has a cure for this sin-sick world. And the bottom line is you cannot administer that cure from the safety of isolation, you have to be in the world but not of it.

So if aggression and appeasement and isolation are false answers to the question of how we believers are going to interact with this world, what is God's answer? Well, Jesus stated it very clearly.

After a long period of preparation Jesus sent out the twelve apostles into the world knowing they had a very difficult task ahead of them and so he gave them instructions and the instructions included this specific warning in *Matthew 10:16*. He said:

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."

But it also included this specific recipe for how we interact with the world. He said: *"So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."*

So the answer to the question of how we are to respond to a world that hates the light and loves the darkness is not aggression, it's not appeasement, it's not isolation, it's wisdom. Wisdom is the key to being in the world but not of it. And a true disciple of Jesus Christ, a man or a woman who is after God's own heart should be fanatical about accumulating wisdom. And that's what David was, that's what Solomon was, that's what Paul and the rest of the disciples were all about. I mean that combination, that combination of single-minded dedication and godly insight is God's answer not to how the world treats us but to how we treat the world. *Be wise as serpents but gentle as doves.*

All right. So what is wisdom? What is it actually? I mean we know it's not intelligence, we know it's not knowledge, it's not cleverness, it has nothing to do with being good at Bible Jeopardy.

I've said it over and over again, there's two words that define wisdom well and those two words are "skillful living." It involves nothing more than living the life that God has given to you and living it skillfully. Others define wisdom as doing God's will God's way or the ability to integrate God into every area of your life. You know, sometimes you can define a concept better if you understand its opposite, and the opposite of wise is not stupid. The opposite of wise is not ignorant either. No, the opposite of wise is foolish, and a fool is someone who by definition has no place for God. *Psalm 14:1: The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* *Romans 1:22* describes those who refuse to acknowledge God by stating: *"Claiming to be wise, they became fools."* So wisdom isn't intelligence and foolishness isn't stupidity. Both of those are spiritual conditions related to how well we integrate God into our lives or not. Wise man does it well. A fool does it badly or not at all. I mean just think about it, aren't we all seeking a way to integrate God into our lives? Isn't that our major quest? Wouldn't it be great if we all had this supernatural ability to skillfully weave the presence of God into every single crevice of our lives? To be able to handle all the complexities of 21st century living in ways that please God and advance his kingdom and give us great joy and deep satisfaction. If I told you you have to sacrifice, you have to study, you have to work, you have to struggle, you have to strain, would it be worth it to be truly

wise? Well, God thinks so. This is what God thinks of wisdom. He says this in *Proverbs 3* starting at verse 13. He says:

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed. He goes on to say: My son, do not lose sight of these -- keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught. Security and sweet sleep and no fear of terror or ruin and God-based confidence, they all come from wisdom.

Now if I told you there are three requirements that God lays out before he grants wisdom, would you know what they are? If I told you God's requirements for wisdom is, number one, you have to lack it; number two, you have to ask for it; number three, you have to

believe he gives it to anyone who asks. If I said that, would believe it? *James 1:5: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives liberally without reproach, and it will be given to him. If any of you lacks wisdom, that's number one. Let him ask God, that's number two. Who gives liberally without reproach and it will be given to him, that's number three. Let him ask in faith without doubting.* Do you see any sacrifices, study, struggle or strain in those requirements? I mean I don't. I have to tell you, I think one of the major stumbling blocks to acquiring wisdom is that it's just too simple. I mean, lack wisdom and ask for it and believe you're going to get it. That's it. God says in effect it's just too hard to live in the darkness and be the light on your own. He says you need wisdom. We think well, it can't be that easy. There's got to be more to it than that. Well actually there is. There is a fourth condition that God adds and it's by far the hardest. It's actually believing that God's going to give you the wisdom when you ask. Why is God so generous with his wisdom? It's because he knows this world. He knows he's sending us out like sheep among wolves. And how do we handle the wolves? We do so with wisdom and gentleness. Therefore be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

Now at the risk of sounding egomaniacal, I just want to make the case that I have wisdom. And I believe that God has given it to me

and I believe it for one reason and that is every single day for the last 45 years -- and my wife will back me up on this -- I have asked for it. Every day for 45 years I've asked for wisdom as a husband, as a father, as a church leader. And God didn't just give me that wisdom, he also gave me a desire to ask for more. The reason why I ask for wisdom is because of requirement number four: If I doubt that he gives it to me, I'm not going to receive it. Listen to what he says. He says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* You see, if you want wisdom, you have no choice but to believe that he's going to give it to you. *Let him ask in faith without doubting.* I mean I knew I was getting this wisdom from God when I started asking God for the faith to believe he's going to give it to me in the first place. I said, God, I'm doubting that you are giving me this wisdom, so please, Father, give me the faith to believe that you're going to do it. So you see, I have no choice, I have to tell you that God has given me lots of wisdom. I mean I hate how that sounds but that's the way he works. That's how you get wisdom.

Now there's a question that I raised at the beginning of this message. The question was: How is the world treating you? And the answer seems to be, well, it's supposed to hate us. I mean *"I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* Make no mistake about it, the world hates the God who dwells within us and in that sense the world hates everything we stand for. We may not see it starkly because we're right in the middle of it but if you step outside of this culture, you'll see it. If the world hates God and I have God in me, why does my neighbor hate me? Why is that? Well there's a reason why my neighbor doesn't necessarily hate me. It's because my neighbor is not necessarily the world. In fact my neighbor might just be the harvest of the world. This is what Jesus said in *Matthew 9:35*. This is what Matthew said: *And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."* Now this is an incredibly mixed harvest: There's wheat, there's tares, there's sheep, there's goats, there's wolves, but all of them are lost without Christ. Our job is to be the laborers of the harvest, to go into the world

with the gospel that God loved us so much that he left heaven itself, came to this planet and lived a perfectly flawless life so that he could go to a cross to lay down his life and give us that option, so that by faith we can claim his righteousness as our own and stand before a holy God with his righteousness to our account and not our own sin. But you know transmitting that and translating that to that world outside is an impossible task without wisdom. *2 Corinthians* says: *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?* Well that last sentence basically says it all, I mean, none of us is sufficient for this task, the task of being the aroma of Christ, it requires a wisdom that is literally supernatural. But if there's anything that you take away from today, what I really want you to understand is that very wisdom is literally yours for the asking. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

The next few weeks we're going to be examining wisdom in depth. We want to see what it is, we want to see how we use it, how we use it to advance the kingdom because the question really isn't how is the world treating you, the question really is: How are you treating the world? How are you using the wisdom God promises just for the

asking? We're going to spending the next few weeks learning how to put into practice those words of Jesus. They apply just as much to us. *"Behold I send you out as sheep among wolves. Be wise as serpents and gentle as doves."* Let's pray.

Father, we want to do that. We want to be wise, as wise as serpents. We also want to do it your way which is to be gentle as doves. And we can't do that. We don't know how to do that. That world out there is way too complex, way too complicated for us on our own strength to be able to think we can just go ahead and do it. But Lord, you have said all you need to do is ask, I'll give you that wisdom. And so I plead with us this morning that we would greet every single day with that simple request, Lord, give my the wisdom that I need this day. And I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.