

Matthew 10F

- Having spent several weeks studying the Kingdom program, we've got a pretty good idea now of how Jesus wants us to work in His absence
 - We understand our objective, we're clear on the message and we've got the method Jesus gave His disciples
 - Last week we learned a simple way to assess our results
 - Jesus said inquire who is worthy, but Jesus didn't mean who is worthy to *receive* the Gospel
 - Because no one is worthy to receive the Gospel...that's why it comes by grace alone
 - Jesus meant see who is worthy to receive your time and attention...who the Spirit is working in around you
 - When you find that person, you make an initial assessment by offering them your spiritual greeting
 - And if the person's response is encouraging, pursue them further hoping to bring them to the truth
 - And if they agree, help them begin their walk with Christ
 - Now after last week's sermon, someone asked me how much persuasion is appropriate in bringing someone to faith in Jesus?
 - Since we follow the Spirit as He leads us to opportunities, is it wrong to then press someone into believing?
 - The answer is, there is a place for persuasion but, like everything else in the Kingdom Program, it requires following the Spirit
- Think back to my metal detector vs. shovel analogy I gave you last week
 - In my analogy I compared the Spirit leading us to lost sheep, to the signals coming from a metal detector as you sweep the ground
 - We look for signals that the Spirit is preparing a heart before we invest significant effort in our work
 - Those "signals" generally take the form of a receptiveness to our spiritual conversation and a willingness to engage with us

- When we detect such an opportunity we pick up our shovel, so to speak, and start digging
- It's at that point, you are free to persuade, to push, to answer objections, to make your best case for Christ
 - But even then, you continue watching for signals from the Spirit
 - It's as if you have a shovel in one hand and a metal detector in the other
 - As long as you continue getting positive responses, keep digging
 - If the signals ever go cold – if the person stops listening or starts arguing or just walks away – then it's time to move on
- Here's how Paul combined personal effort with dependence on the Spirit:

[2Cor. 5:20](#) Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- First, Paul said he served as an ambassador for Christ, as though God were making the appeal through him
 - Paul knew he wasn't in control of this process...Christ determines the results and Paul was Christ's ambassador
 - Nevertheless, when Paul found a receptive audience, as he did in Corinth, he picked up a shovel and dug with all his might
- Paul says, I beg you to be reconciled to Christ
 - The Greek word translated beg could be also be translated implored, pleaded...and it can even mean prayed
 - Paul didn't just deliver the Gospel message, casually waiting to see what happened
 - He did everything in his power to pull his audience across the finish line of faith
- That's our model for seeking results in the Kingdom program
 - Remain sensitive to the Spirit's leading, recognizing the Lord is the one Who determines our results
 - But we give Christ our best efforts in that work

- That brings us to our next major point, one I've titled "Our Mindset" and it's found in v.16

Matt. 10:16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

- I'm calling this section "Our Mindset" but we could also label it "Our Enemy"
 - Because this step of the Kingdom program involves a certain understanding that our work will be opposed by a powerful adversary
 - It's a mindset that recognizes our opposition are *not* those we're trying to reach with the Gospel...
 - Nor are our enemies those who hate us or hate Jesus or hate Christianity
 - In fact, we don't fight *against* any human being...because we are fighting *for* everyone to know Jesus
 - No...as Paul explained, our enemy is something altogether different

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- Paul says our struggle isn't against flesh and blood, which refers to all physical creatures, whether man or beast
 - Our enemy is not physical; he is a dark, spiritual ruler, Paul says
 - Of course we know Paul is referring to Satan and to the demons who follow after him and do his bidding
- Satan wants to stop the progress of the Kingdom program by any means necessary, because the Kingdom program undermines his goal
 - Satan's goal has always been to be a god, so he opposes anyone or anything that glorifies the true Living God
 - Of course, nothing brings God more glory than men and women praising Him for His plan of redemption through Jesus Christ
 - Therefore, when we win new citizens to the Kingdom – or even just preach the Gospel – it will incite the enemy against us

- Jesus wants us to be spiritually, mentally and emotionally prepared for that opposition so that we will respond to it in the right way
 - Jesus gives us that proper mindset in v.16, and our study of this verse will be similar to our study of v.7 a few weeks ago, coming in three parts
 - Part 1 is the first half of the verse, where Jesus says He sends His disciples out as sheep in the midst of wolves
 - Once again, Jesus draws upon a metaphor of shepherding
 - And of all the threats a shepherd faced in his work of caring for the flock, probably the greatest threat was attack by predators like wolves
 - Wolves attack quickly, silently, viciously, and they can bring down a sheep in a moment
 - As one sheep is attacked, the rest of the flock is scattered by the commotion making life very hard for the shepherd
 - And to make matters worse, typically a shepherd would be held financially liable for any sheep lost to predators
 - So when Jesus spoke these words, the disciples immediately recognized what He was saying...they faced real danger in the Kingdom Program
 - They had a fierce and determined enemy who would prey on them
 - Moreover, they were like sheep...defenseless and comparably weak, so they needed to depend on the Lord for protection
 - Nevertheless, in the course of time, they should expect to suffer losses
 - That's how Jesus describes the way it's going to be in the Kingdom program...like sheep surrounded by wolves ready to attack
 - If we're going to remain diligent and effective in our work, we must first recognize there will be opposition
 - We need to understand that we operate behind enemy lines... we are playing on the enemy's field
 - We can't be naive about our enemy nor cavalier about the risks
 - So Jesus puts us on notice informing us we will face opposition, so that when it comes we won't be surprised or complain or give up

- Nor does He want us to act foolishly, stumbling into danger without considering the cost
 - While we won't find Satan waiting behind every corner, we will certainly experience his displeasure from time to time
- Now before we look at the mindset we need to face that foe, I need to address two misconceptions that often arise out of the first part of v.16
 - First, some assume that Jesus willingly sends His disciples out among wolves because our faith in Him has rendered us untouchable by Satan
 - Some will tell you that your faith in Jesus has given you power and authority and dominion over Satan, etc.
 - You may hear Christians talking about binding Satan or rebuking Satan in the name of Jesus
 - Some go so far as to assume we are conquerors of Satan, as if the sheep are more powerful than the wolves
 - This kind of thinking is a mixture of ignorance and arrogance, and it plays right into the enemy's hands
 - Obviously, Jesus didn't say we are sheep among wolves to embolden us or to reassure us that we can't be hurt
 - More importantly, the Bible clearly teaches that believers are not more powerful than Satan
 - In fact, the Bible makes clear that no created thing is as powerful as Satan

Jude 8 Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.

Jude 9 But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Jude 10 But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

- In Jude's day, false teachers downplayed the power of Satan and his forces; mocking him and dismissing him

- Jude says such men were guilty of reviling angelic majesties
- Jude is referring to Satan and his demonic forces
- Satan is the source of all evil, but he is still an angel of great power, according to the Bible
- And therefore, his angelic majesty demands respect, at least in the sense that we shouldn't underestimate his power
- In fact, Jude says Satan is so powerful that not even the great and powerful archangel, Michael, dared to oppose him directly
 - During a dispute over Moses' body, Michael refused to speak a word against Satan but left it to God to rebuke Satan
 - God made Satan so powerful that nothing else in the Creation has the power to oppose Satan
 - Only the One Who created Satan is stronger
 - So don't be fooled into thinking your faith in Jesus suddenly gave you personal power over Satan
- The second misconception floating around in the church says God will always defend us from Satan's attacks, so we need not worry about our enemy
 - While that sounds appealing, it's also wrong – at least in the sense that God doesn't *always* defend us nor can we be sure God will defend us in the way we desire
 - On the contrary, Scripture says Satan will have opportunities to oppose us, to attack us, and even to defeat us on earth at times
 - And again, the Bible is filled with examples of this truth, but certainly the most classic example is that of Job
 - Most of us have heard at least a little of Job's story...he's the guy that suffered through a series of terrible attacks brought by Satan
 - The Bible describes Job as a righteous man, a man of great wealth with a large home, many children and a successful business
 - Then in one day, Satan attacked Job and took everything
 - Satan killed all of Job's children, stole all his livestock and killed all his servants, ruining his livelihood and destroying his house

- And if that weren't enough, Satan inflicted Job with painful sores over his entire body leading Job to curse the day he was born
- Job is the classic example of the Lord permitting the enemy to attack us despite our faithfulness...in fact, *because* of our faithfulness
 - But what many Christians overlook in that story is how Job came to Satan's attention in the first place

Job 1:8 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

- The Lord was the One Who brought Job to Satan's attention, which then led to Satan's attacks
- What we're learning is that not only does the Lord *permit* the enemy's attack's from time to time, the Lord *causes* those attacks

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.

- Therefore, we can't assume God will always protect us from the wolves...on the contrary we should expect attack from time to time
 - The Lord uses those trials for our spiritual good as a test of faith
 - And the Bible says by our response to those trials, we may glorify the Lord and He may bless our obedience

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James tells us to consider it all joy when trials come

- Notice he doesn't say *feel* joy, because you won't feel joy in the midst of a trial...Job certainly didn't
- James meant count your circumstances as joy because in a day to come, the result of your endurance will be great joy
- This is a classic "eyes for eternity" passage in the Bible, because you can only understand what James is teaching by thinking in eternal terms
 - James says as we endure trials, we will receive a result that leaves us perfect and lacking in nothing
 - In earthly terms this statement makes absolutely no sense, but in eternal terms it makes total sense
- James is saying that when we endure trials in faith, we give opportunity to be sanctified or perfected in our spiritual maturity
 - And as a result of our endurance and the maturity it produces, we will not lack for eternal rewards in the Kingdom
 - So as you face trials, count it as joy because the Lord has granted you a tremendous opportunity for gain in the Kingdom
 - That's a gain you can only obtain through enduring trials
- But if we are to receive those benefits, we must be prepared to endure the trials with godliness just as Job endured his trial in obedience
 - Enduring well depends in part on proper mental preparation, including having an awareness and appreciation for our enemy
 - Jesus says you will be surrounded by Satan and his demons, so be prepared
 - Don't let the enemy discourage you, don't play into the enemy's hand, and don't give up at the first sign of trouble...
 - Think of Jesus' warning like the way a dentist or doctor warns you before you get a shot by saying "this might sting a little"
 - Their warning gives you opportunity to prepare mentally for what's coming so when you feel the pain, you can handle it well
 - That's what Jesus is saying in v.16...
 - He started with the word "Behold" meaning pay attention, take note...you *will* face opposition

- Be prepared to deal with it
- Which bring us to Part 2 of the verse...how do we prepare to deal with an enemy who is more powerful than any other creature?
 - Jesus says be as shrewd as a serpent
 - The Greek word translated as serpent is *ophis*, and it's the common Greek word for snake
 - In fact, we could have translated this verse to say "be as shrewd as a snake" and in fact the NIV chose that translation
 - But most English translations render the word as serpent, not snake, because the translators recognized Jesus was alluding to something
 - Jesus wasn't complimenting the intelligence of snakes...snakes have far less intelligence than many other animals, to say nothing of humans
 - In fact, snakes are probably second only to poodles for dumbest creature
 - Jesus wasn't talking about literal snakes...He was alluding to the wisest of all creatures, who famously indwelt a snake once

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

- Satan indwelt a snake in the Garden of Eden to deceive Woman into eating the forbidden fruit
 - The serpent in the Garden was the craftiest beast of the field in the sense that Satan was in the snake
 - And the Bible says Satan is the most intelligent being God ever created (Ezekiel 28)
- So Jesus is telling His disciples we should emulate Satan's shrewdness
 - Shrewd means wise, discerning, being thoughtful and informed – not being naive or foolish
 - But it's more than merely being as wise as Satan
 - Jesus used Satan as our comparison to say we must learn the enemy's tactics so we can anticipate how he will try to stop us

- We have to be creative in our own thinking, taking advantage of what we know about our adversary so we can find ways to thwart him
- I can illustrate with a simple story about a wise, older gentleman who was dealing with rowdy teenagers in his neighborhood

The retired man lived near a junior high school, and as a new school year began, three young boys decided to beat and knock down every trash can on the man's street as they made their way home from school each day.

Finally, the man has enough of their vandalism and decides to take action. He walks out to meet the boys. He says, "You kids are a lot of fun. I'll give you each a dollar if you'll promise to come around every day and beat these trash cans." The kids continue to do a bang-up job on the trashcans.

After a few days, the man tells the kids, "This recession's really putting a big dent in my income. From now on, I'll only be able to pay you 50 cents to beat on the cans." The noisemakers are displeased, but they accept his offer.

A few days later, the retiree approaches them again. "Look," he says, "I haven't received my Social Security check yet, so I'm not going to be able to pay more than 25 cents. Will that be OK?"

"A stupid quarter?" the drum leader exclaims. "If you think we're going to waste our time beating these cans around for a quarter, you're nuts. We quit."

- That's a cute story and an even better illustration of how we can find creative ways to combat the chaos and opposition the enemy tries to sow
 - For example, I know of missionary teams who travel into dangerous places where the enemy has set the culture against the Gospel
 - Traditional Christian evangelism in these places is all but impossible due to government restrictions and persecution
 - On the other hand, these countries are very welcoming to Western businessmen who bring the prospect of greater wealth
 - So the missionaries were shrewd...they decided to travel under the cover of businessmen entering the country to buy and sell goods

- They printed business cards, they carried briefcases full of product samples...
- They even made websites advertising their wares so that if immigration authorities did a random check, all looked fine
- As they move around the country, these “businessmen” naturally made many contacts in shops, cafes, marketplaces, taxi cabs, airports, etc.
 - And of course, with each of these contacts they would inquire to know if the person was willing to hear the Kingdom message
 - They gave a simple spiritual greeting, and if they got a positive response, they pressed further without giving too much away
 - They worked shrewdly, understanding they were surrounded by powerful wolves capable of attacking from any direction
- And even here at home in our everyday life, we too need to be shrewd in how we work the Kingdom Program so that we don’t play into the enemy’s hands
 - For example, men in ministry typically follow guidelines for not meeting with women one-on-one to avoid giving the enemy opportunity
 - For the same reason, churches do background checks on ministry workers
 - And as you might preach Jesus to coworkers in a workplace setting, you keep a low profile to avoid unhelpful attention
 - When I travel to teach in muslim countries, I have to be careful not to say things about Islam that might be reported back to the authorities so I don’t lose my chance to visit again
 - I call this approach the James Bond mindset...working as a secret agent on enemy ground...that’s the mindset Jesus is calling us to have
 - And I think it’s the most fascinating part of working the Kingdom Program
 - I love the cat-and-mouse game, the working behind enemy lines, the matching of wits with the enemy
 - Now, of course, this isn’t a game, and we can’t hold a candle to Satan’s wisdom or power
 - But we have the Holy Spirit, and He Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4)

- So while the Bible calls on us to respect the enemy's power, it never tells us to fear him...in fact, it commands us not to fear
 - Go out into that world full of wolves, just go with wisdom and discernment, preparing to face your enemy knowing his ways
 - If we walk by the Spirit we can navigate the enemy's traps and pitfalls...
 - So long as we don't shoot ourselves in the foot
- Which brings us to the third part of v.16...Jesus says we must also be innocent as doves
 - Just as the term serpent was an allusion to something more, so too does the dove represent something greater
 - In Scripture the dove often represents the Spirit of God
 - So in effect, the Lord is asking us to be as innocent as God Himself; or we could simply say "do not sin"
 - But more than that, we must learn the Spirit's ways so that we operate in concert with Him at all times
 - So Jesus is telling us that as we go about the Kingdom program, we must combine the shrewdness of Satan with the innocence of God
 - Obviously, the Bible directs all believers to put away sin because as Paul says, should those who died to sin still live in it?
 - But besides that, now we're learning that in the Kingdom Program our sin can do great harm to our mission
 - Now we all have sin...none of us are perfect, so clearly Jesus wasn't suggesting only perfect people may serve in the Kingdom Program
 - But the problem isn't the existence of sin... the problem is when our methods or lifestyle come into conflict with our message
 - When we work to reach lost sheep in dishonest or unloving ways, our behavior stands in contradiction to our message
 - We have a word for someone who says one thing and does another: hypocrite
 - And nothing neutralizes your message faster than hypocrisy

- When someone notices that we preach about the Kingdom but live like the world, they will immediately lose interest
- We can see that Jesus has placed these two commands – be shrewd as Satan and innocent as God – in opposition to guide our thinking and behavior
 - In reaching the lost, we want to use every trick in the book, every scheme we can imagine, every tool at our disposal...without crossing the line into sin
 - Sometimes finding that line can be difficult
 - Think back to my example of the missionaries posing as businessmen...was that lying?
 - Well, it could be, and the missionaries recognized they were getting close to the line
 - So to make sure they could honestly represent themselves as businessmen, they went a step further in their plans
 - They actually started real businesses...a t-shirt printing business, a consulting business, an advertising business
 - The businesses were real in every sense of the word...they even sold to a few customers in the nations where they visited
 - But of course, these missionaries put almost no time or attention into running their business, and they made no effort to turn a profit
 - In the end they could honestly declare they were businessmen without sinning
 - And then they took advantage of their occupation to shrewdly penetrate unreached areas of the world
 - That's being as shrewd as a serpent and as innocent as a dove
 - Nothing they did compromised their witness or their message
 - Yet they were as crafty as the enemy in getting around the barriers he erected against the Gospel
- Finally, we need to remain as innocent as doves because if you let sin take hold in your life, the enemy will use your sin against you

- Many men and women have seen their opportunities to serve the Kingdom Program ruined by sin
 - We see the stories all the time...pastors cheating on wives with the church secretary
 - Elders taking money out of the building fund to buy a nice car
 - Youth leaders compromised with their students, associate pastors lying about their background on resumes, etc.
- And outside the church staff, individual Christians engage in all manner of secret and not-so-secret sin thinking no one will ever know
 - Besides being hypocritical, that behavior runs the risk of letting the enemy get the upper hand
 - Because you may think no one knows what you say or do in private, but God knows, and in many cases, so does the enemy
 - His agents are everywhere, and when they discover your secret shame, your spiritual weakness, the enemy loves to exploit it to bring shame to Christ and to weaken the Church
- So when we sin, we give the enemy a weapon he can use against us in stopping our Kingdom Program work
 - It's like we took a loaded gun, cocked the hammer, pointed the barrel at ourself, and placed the gun in the enemy's hand
 - We're daring him to pull the trigger
 - Maybe he will reveal your sin to your spouse somehow, or to your boss or to your pastor or to the I.R.S...
 - And just like that, your sin has now sidelined you in the work of the Kingdom
 - Jesus asks us to be innocent not only because it brings Him glory when His children obey Him
 - And not only because it keeps us from being hypocrites
 - He doesn't want us to be disqualified in our work by playing into the enemy's hand
 - How will you respond to this week's message from Scripture?

- Obviously, we need to develop wisdom in the face of the enemy's schemes against us
- And we need to double-down on our efforts to keep ourselves from sin, especially in ways that compromise our message
- But here's a simple way to get started...spend the next week observing how the enemy is at work to stop you in the Kingdom Program
 - Just as you get up the courage to tell a co-worker about Jesus, his phone rings or a friend interrupts your conversation
 - As you get ready to come to church, you get into an argument with your spouse or the kids start screaming or the car battery is dead
 - Don't look past moments like that...see them as attacks because they almost always are...and then respond in godliness
 - Don't play into the enemy's hands, don't give up easily, build wisdom, put away sin