

“Like sheep among wolves.” The wolves were starting to circle. The **authorities** in particular were starting to get **upset** with Jesus. They had accused him of blasphemy when he had forgiven the sins of a paralyzed man. They were upset that he was eating with tax collectors and sinners. And they accused him of doing all his work through the power of **Satan**, the ruler of the demons. But even common people from the **crowds**, who had once praised him, were starting to get **annoyed** with Jesus. They had ridiculed and made fun of him when he told them a young woman he had come to save was sleeping and not dead. And then when we had gone to the foreign side of the Sea of Galilee, the people became angry and demanded Jesus leave their region after a herd of pigs had charged into the sea and drowned. This wasn’t what we had anticipated when we had started following Jesus. We had thought the Messiah, the Christ, was going to be **loved**—a conquering hero embraced by the crowds and leaders of our people. But currently things were trending in the **opposite** direction. This sucked for Jesus, he was having a rough go of it. Maybe he wasn’t the Messiah after all—too bad for him.

Jesus noticed that we were starting to distance ourselves from him as the rejection from the authorities and crowds escalated. So he called us together for a little talk. We had been following Jesus everywhere. But so far we were just **spectators**, interested fans of Jesus, standing on the perimeter observing everything that was happening and everything he was doing. Jesus was **not** okay with this. As we had watched from our **safe** position on the sidelines, we had been impressed with Jesus’s authority as he taught and as he healed. But now he gathered us together and told us **his** authority was also **ours**. He received this authority and power from our heavenly Father and it was for **us** as well. He said **his** mission was **our** mission. We needed to stop being mere observers and start **participating** in the life of the Kingdom. That’s why he had called us to follow him. He said it was time for us to go out and **practice** everything we had been learning and observing in him. We were shocked and overwhelmed and **scared**. He was the one who was supposed to be the Messiah—not us! How were we to do everything he was doing? **He** was the miracle-worker, **he** was the great teacher—we were **nobodies**, we were nothing! But he insisted, we must go—if we were to follow him, then this was **our** task and mission as much as it was his.

As we went, Jesus said we needed to focus on the Creator’s people. Before we tried to reach the other nations we needed to work on getting the log out of the eye of the Creator’s people. As the Creator’s people, we needed to work on fixing ourselves and our own problems and hypocrisy. If the Creator’s people did not have its act together, then it had nothing to offer the other nations of the world. Jesus said our message was simple, the exact same as his, **“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”** He said our task was simple, the exact same as his, **“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the unclean, and cast out evil spirits.”** He said we had freely received from the Creator everything we had and we must reflect that generosity back to all those we encounter.

Just as Jesus was doing, we needed to live a **worry-free** existence. We must let go of all possessions and trust in our heavenly Father to provide for us and protect us. Jesus said we must take **nothing** with us as we lived the life of the Kingdom—no food, no money, no extra clothing, no shoes, no staff to protect ourselves. We were in our **Father’s** hands—he would be with us and watch over us at every step. We needed to go into the cities and live this life of **faith** and **peace**. If people received this life of peace, then we were to stay and do the healing and saving work of the Kingdom. But if people rejected this life of peace, then we must walk away, leaving them in our Father’s hands.

Jesus said to us, **“I am sending you like sheep among wolves.”** He said we needed to be smart and wise, if we were to avoid being corrupted by the world. It would be easy to become **wolves** ourselves—to respond to evil, hate, and violence with **more** evil, hate, and violence—but it was absolutely essential that we lived as vulnerable and trusting **sheep**, who turned the other cheek and loved our enemies. It wouldn’t be easy. We would be arrested by the authorities. Our own friends and families would turn on us and even kill us. We would be disowned by all people for living the life of the Kingdom—people would **hate** us because our lives would make them feel convicted, guilty, and uncomfortable. The wolves would **attack**. But if we patiently endured in the life of the Kingdom, the life of sheep, the life of loving our enemies, we would be **saved**. Whatever happened to Jesus would happen to us. We would face all the same things. We were not greater than him, our teacher. We must **become** like him, **live** like him—we must **follow** and **imitate** his example in everything.

Jesus told us over and over, **“Do not be afraid.”** He told us that nobody could hurt our souls—they could only hurt and kill our bodies. Our bodies were in our Father’s hands. Our souls were also in our Father’s hands. The Creator was the one we needed to fear. Living this life in the Kingdom was the only thing that mattered. He said all our hairs were numbered. Our Father was carrying us like he did even the birds of the air. He said it repeatedly, **“Do not be afraid.”**

We would be forced to choose allegiance to our **heavenly Father** or allegiance to our **society** and **culture**—we would have to choose between our heavenly Father and our **families**—we would have to choose between our heavenly Father and our **own lives**. The Creator’s truth and Word was a sword that was going to slice through our lives and the lives of all people, all families, all cities, and all nations. Our lives would never be the same again. Our families would never be the same again. If we chose our heavenly Father, we would be **saved**. But if we chose our family or nation we would be **lost**. If we were seeking our **own souls**, our own lives, we would be lost forever. But if we were seeking **our Father’s Kingdom** and his will and Word in everything, then in the process we would find our own souls.

This wasn’t just Jesus’s mission and ministry that we could just observe from afar, this was **our** mission and ministry. Jesus had called us to himself and we were joined and united with him now. What happened to Jesus, would happen to us. His work was our work. His persecution and rejection was our persecution and rejection. It was time for us to stop watching from afar, we needed to get out there and practice everything we had heard and seen in Jesus—we must go and be **“like sheep among wolves.”**

When Jesus called you to follow him, he called you to **unite** with him—to become **one** with him in his life, work, and mission. Everything that Jesus does, we must do as well. We are his students and we must become like our teacher. He has come to carry our sicknesses, we too then must carry the sicknesses of each other. We have been sent to heal the sick, to cleanse the unclean, to cast out evil spirits, and to raise the dead. We do not get to sit on the sidelines and cheer Jesus on from afar. We are not his fans and spectators. We are his followers, his disciples, his students, his co-workers. Jesus carries the cross and is the Lamb of God, he was a sheep before the slaughter of the wolves—he calls us to join him, take up our own cross, and be lambs of God as well, **“like sheep among wolves,”** laying down our lives in love for others. **Amen.**