

Introduction: In this week's Bible notes we discover that, like the disciples of old, we are Jesus' precious lambs who are "sent out among wolves", (Mt. 10:16). How does Jesus cope with sending His precious lambs out into such a forbidding spiritual world of danger? Ah, Jesus' confidence that *His sheep indeed would be preserved* comes from His entrusting them to, "the Spirit of His Father" in Matthew 10:20! It is the Holy Spirit who is the great companion and protector of Christ's flock on earth. May we be greatly encouraged to *realize the great security for us* in having the Holy Spirit take His place in our lives. May we sense how secure our path is, and how careful the Spirit's shepherding oversight is.

**Monday: read Matthew 9:35-10:10.** Driven by compassion at the sight of the lost crowds who come out to seek Him, Jesus urges the disciples to, "pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers", (Mt. 9:38), and then, in answer to such a prayer, sends forth workers Himself in Mt. 10:1! This is how His compassionate heart was moved towards the torn and lost sheep of Mt. 9:36: He commissioned the 12 to go out as 'under-shepherds' to those very same harassed and exhausted sheep! Moreover, this key motivation of compassion prompted one scholar to write of this commissioning in Matthew 10:1 with these words:

"The mission of the 12 as evangelists had as its direct design to meet the spiritual necessities of the people, whose neglected condition lay heavy on Christ's heart. The compassionate Son of Man had observed how the masses were scattered and torn and it was His desire that all should know that a good shepherd had come to care for the lost sheep of Israel." (A.B. Bruce)

Meditate and Pray: *O dear Shepherd, behold how many lost sheep lie torn and bleeding; starved and beaten by their false shepherds. Many turn to academic wisdom and careers; or to false sexual intimacy, or view politics as their Savior – all the while starving without the good news of the Gospel! In holy anger towards such shepherds who feed only themselves, snatch these lambs to safety with your mighty rod of power! Please use the rod of your Word to reclaim lost sheep to the safety of your fold! Send forth faithful workers out into the fields, and enable them to find your sheep wherever they are scattered! Send out your Good News so that many lost sheep for the first time hear your voice and follow you. Amen.*

**Tuesday: read Matthew 10:1-20.** In commissioning the Twelve to go forth to the lost sheep of Israel, Christ granted them authority, (10:1), to reclaim such from the misery, disease and sin which kept them from the Kingdom of God. This word, "authority", literally means, "out of the original stuff" (Keller's definition), and points to the fact that it was *from the very authority of Jesus Himself* that the Apostles received power to do miracles and preach the good news.

To put it in Old Testament terms, just as the first elders of the nation of Israel were given a portion of the Spirit of God who guided Moses (Numbers 11:25), so that they "prophesied," (that is, gave evidence of being controlled by the Spirit), so the disciples were to do their apostolic work after the manner of their leader Jesus, with authority *given to them through the same Spirit of God that clothed Him with power!* In fact, they were not even to worry what they would say when called to testify before synagogue rulers, governors, etc, since it would be, "the Spirit of God the Father", (Mt. 10:20), who would show them what to say!

Meditate and Pray: Have you ever pondered the rich generosity of God the Father in bestowing upon you His Holy Spirit? Let us thank Him for the gift of His Holy Spirit to ALL His church. Though we are not apostles, and have no revelatory authority, we nonetheless possess the Spirit of wisdom and power, sent from the all-powerful throne of the Father! He it is who can refute all who would attack our Christian life and witness. Let us "be of good cheer" in realizing that this Spirit is the great Defender of Christians in this wicked world. Sing about God the Father's gifting us with this precious, Guardian Spirit, in hymn # 330:

*Holy Ghost, dispel our sadness;  
Pierce the clouds of nature's night;  
Come, great Source of joy and gladness,  
Breathe Your life, and spread Your light.  
Loving Spirit, God of peace,  
Great distributor of grace,  
Rest upon this congregation; hear, O hear our supplication.*

*From the height which knows no measure,  
As a gracious shower descend,  
Bringing down the richest treasure  
Man can wish, or God can send.  
Heavenly Glory, shining down  
From the Father and the Son,  
Grant us your illumination; rest upon this congregation.*

*Come, O best of all donations  
God can give or we implore;  
Having your sweet consolation  
We need wish for nothing more.  
Come with unction and with pow'r,  
On our souls your graces show'r;  
Author of the new creation,  
Make our hearts your habitation.*

**Wednesday: read Matthew 10:11-15.** What then would be the result as the Apostles were sent out to testify of Christ before a wicked, hostile world? There are two very different results of the Spirit's accompanying the Apostles in their witness to the world.

The first, in verses 11-14, is a deep, enduring **peace** from the message of the Gospel – on the Apostles' lips and in their lives. This peace was to be bestowed on the houses to which the Apostles took the Gospel message, according to Matthew 10:13. If their message was received by their hosts with the ready ears of saving faith, then that peace would abide on the new converts in that house. In other words, the blood-bought 'peace', as promised by the Old Testament's prophets, would rest on those homes where the Apostles stayed, just as the blood of the Passover lamb protected the homes of the Hebrews on Passover night!

On the other hand, those who rejected this message of Gospel peace as it was preached to them, would experience the removal of God's presence and peace – which would return to the Apostles – even as they shook the dust of such a reprobate home off of their feet in Matthew 10:14-15.

*Meditate and Pray: Oh, dear Prince of peace: Cause your peace to abide on our homes, and may you send messages of hope upon our church families even when we are tempted to give up in the midst of this evil, violent generation. Cause our children and grandchildren to receive the message of the Gospel and rejoice in the faith once for all delivered by those Apostles who wrote the New Testament. Help us as parents to cry out believingly for Christ's peace-making blood to be poured out as a protection on our homes. Amen.*

**Thursday: read Matthew 10:11-15 & 10:40-42.** This peace which Jesus promises is a fruit of *receptivity* to the Gospel in the homes to which He sends the Twelve. It is also one of the vital blessings of the Christian life.

It is good, therefore, to pause and ponder the nature of such peace, with words from Rev. John MacArthur on this passage:

*This greeting of peace was the age-old Jewish greeting 'shalom', which is usually translated simply as **peace** but which carries the much deeper meaning of total well-being and wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. The household that gladly received the apostles was to have its greeting of peace confirmed **upon it**. The implication is that truly receptive listeners were to be ministered to in the fullest way. Their open hearts to the Lord's work earned them God's richest blessing. As Jesus said, "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward" (Matt. 10:41).*

Meditate and Pray: How thankful we should be that the preaching of the Gospel of God's grace is designed to bring peace *into our homes, as well as into our lives*. Why? Because that Gospel brings with it the Holy Spirit, the Author of our peace. As Jesus says in John 14:26-27:

*The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

**Friday: read Matthew 10:16-25.** There is something beautifully domestic in our Lord's description of the persecution which would fall upon His followers in verses 21-25. Jesus warns us of our betrayal by family members because of our faith, and declares that all sorts of people will hate us as they did Him – yes, including family and neighbors, just as the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus (Mark 6:1-6), though they watched Him grow up among them! Jesus nevertheless reassures us that the deepest reason behind such persecution will be that *we have been adopted into God's family!* As verse 25 says in conclusion: *"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign **those of his household**."*

Do you see the good news here? Our persecution proves we have been adopted into God's household! It proves that we have been authoritatively transferred from the side of God's enemies into the fireside fellowship of belonging to God's family. In short, *it is our status as adopted 'bairns'*, and the special love of God the Father which has set us apart – this is what the world hates! But surely such an adoption into God's family *is worth* the hatred of mankind isn't it? That is what the Apostle Paul declares in Phil 3:8-9: *Indeed, I count everything as loss be-cause of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him*

Meditate and Pray: Forgive us, Lord Jesus, our dear Elder Brother, that we so often act as if we are still orphans, relying on our own efforts to survive in this hateful world! Teach us the joy of having brotherly fellowship with you in our sufferings. Give us the joy and gratitude in our trials to be like John and Peter, "who rejoiced at being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ" in Acts 5:41. After all, that name had been given them (and us) as a new, adopted family name! Should we not be willing to suffer for that name, since by that name all the family treasures of God's grace are now open to us? May the Lord grant us the grace to live in this spirit, expressed so well in hymn # 584:

*Go, labor on: spend, and be spent,  
Thy joy to do the Father's will:  
It is the way the Master went;  
Should not the servant tread it still?*

*Go, labor on! 'tis not for naught  
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain;  
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
The Master praises: what are men?*

*Go, labor on! enough, while here,  
If He shall praise thee, if He deign  
The willing heart to mark and cheer:  
No toil for Him shall be in vain.*

*Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice!  
For toil comes rest, for exile home;  
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,  
The midnight peal, "Behold, I come!"*

**Sat/Sun: read Matthew 10:26-31.** Behold how Christ seeks to reassure the 'sheep' of His church, whom He sends out among the wolves of this world! He emphasizes God the Father's tender care for them as pictured by His care for the birds of the air - emphasizing that His disciples are "worth more than many sparrows" (Mt. 6:26 & 10:31). *If the Father cares for these lowly birds*, how much more for His adopted children, whose very hair He counts in Mt. 10:30.

But it is not just the Father who protects His disciples. For example, all through the Gospels, Christ makes sure to provide them with every necessary instruction and promise; every means of protection; every word of prayerful intercession on their behalf, and every necessary time of rest and retreat:

- Time and again He pulls His disciples back from the exhausting crowds which press around them, demanding a sign. (Matthew 8:18 & Mark 6:30-31)
- Time and again He steps in to rescue them from conflict with the Pharisees who seek to undermine their faith. (Matthew 12:1-8)
- Time and again we find Jesus up early in the morning to pray for His sheep, and lingering in supplication for their needs late into the night! (Luke 6:12-13)
- Most of all, time and again we find Jesus taking His disciples apart to impress upon them the importance of His teaching.

In short, *it was Christ clothed with all necessary spiritual weapons to protect His church*, who repeatedly steps forward to protect His sheep. As Richard Trench puts it:

*"As when some great captain, suddenly arriving upon a battlefield, where His subordinate lieutenants have well nigh lost the day and brought all into an hopeless confusion, with His eye measures at once the necessities of the hour, and with no more than His presence causes the tide of victory to turn, and everything to right itself again, so is it now. The Lord arrests the advancing foe: He addresses Himself to His disciples' enemies: "What question ye with them?", thereby taking the baffled and hard-pressed disciples under His own protection, and declaring that whatever question there was more, it must be with Himself. These foes, so forward to dispute with the servants, do not so readily accept the challenge of the master".* (Richard Trench)