

Loyalty Tested
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Matthew 10:16-20; 26-34

Opening: I am not a sports fan, but I marvel at the loyalty fans have for their favorite team. Even when the win/loss record is more losses than wins, they don't abandon their team because they LOVE their team – they are LOYAL FANS. One might ask, *“After all the money and time you invested and ‘trash talk’ you endured, was it worth it?”*

- The loyalty of a sports fan isn't measured when the team is winning championships. It's who's still wearing the jersey during a losing season.
- The loyalty of family and friends isn't measured when everything is coming up roses. It is measured by who stays when it would be easier to walk away, who still shows up when things fall apart.
- Matthew 10 is about the testing of our most important loyalty: loyalty to Christ.

What Jesus shared with His disciples as He was sending them out on their first mission were not quotes you'd find on a calendar or a plaque:

- *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” (v.16)*
- *“You will be hated by all for my name's sake.” (v.22)*
- *“Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (v.33)*
- *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (v.34)*
- Not exactly “Hallmark” material!

Let's put it in human terms, as a parent, if you send your kids into the world letting them believe everything will always be terrific how will that work out? What SHOULD a wise and loving parent tell them as they are “sent out” into the real world?

The point: Jesus warned His disciples then (and His followers today) about the cost of discipleship. He didn't “sugar coat” the realities, He prepared us for how we must deal with those realities and gave us hope as He promised His love and protection as the Good Shepherd.

16 “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. **17** Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, **18** and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. [It gets worse] **21** Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, **22** and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [rescued...not salvation]

- Jesus words were not the stuff of military recruitment posters: “You’ll look great in that uniform!” “Join the Marines and see the world!” His words were more like, “You should watch ‘Saving Private Ryan’ so you understand reality.”
- Jesus words were for the twelve disciples about to go to the “lost sheep of Israel” announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven was near.”
- They are also a “reality check” for His followers today.
- Verse 16 is familiar. “I’m sending you out as sheep among wolves.”
- “Lord, that doesn’t sound like a great idea!” Jesus said, “I’m sending you out as special sheep.” Sheep that are as “wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”
- “You want us to be like a serpent? That’s odd given the Garden of Eden story.”
- Jesus said be “wise” like a serpent. The Greek word means “practically wise, sensible” We might call it “street smarts.” The word also means “shrewd.”ⁱ
- Most of us don’t like snakes but how are they “shrewd” when facing an enemy?
- Chuck Swindoll writes, “Though in the Bible the serpent is often associated with evil, its abilities to slip past predators, hide from sight, and slither away undetected are cast in this context as positive aspects of its nature.”ⁱⁱ
- Jesus is calling us to be “shrewd sheep!” (Say that three times fast!)
- We will explain what it looks like to be a “shrewd sheep,” shortly.
- “Lord, I’m still hung up on sheep vs wolves. That doesn’t seem like a fair fight!”
- Jesus replies, “When did I tell you to fight? I want you to not only be as shrewd as a serpent but as innocent as a dove.” That word means “unmixed, [genuine and having integrity] and “innocent:—harmless.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- Where in scripture did Jesus tell his followers to fight? He taught the opposite:
 - Matthew 5:9, 38–39 – “Blessed are the peacemakers...” and “Do not resist the one who is evil...” “Turn the other cheek.”
 - Matthew 5:44 “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
 - John 18:36 “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting...”
 - What about Luke 22:36? Jesus told his disciples to buy a sword.
 - You should do a study on that! His choice of words was symbolism and tied to fulfillment of prophecy. How do we know that?
 - Jesus told Peter: “Put your sword back into its place. For ^hall who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me ^jmore than twelve ^klegions of angels?^{iv} [Put away your sword Peter, I don’t need a bodyguard!]
- Illustration: “Preacher, you do the preaching and I’ll do the fighting!”
- In verse 34 of today’s text Jesus said, **34** “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.
- You see that? Jesus is bringing the sword NOT US.
- Repeatedly in scripture Christ followers are told to “stand firm.” Verse 22 says we are to “endure” persecution and we will be rescued.
- “Jesus did not call us to go looking for a fight; He called us to stand in the Truth while He fights for us.”
- If we will do the STANDING and ENDURING, He will do the fighting!
- Note also in verse 22 Jesus said “...you will be hated...for my name’s sake.”

- If people reject you because you are a “jerk for Jesus” that’s not persecution, that’s self-inflicted.
- Quoting Swindoll again, “*Believers are to remain gentle in their tone, gracious in their responses, and disarming in their charm—even in the midst of...wolves.*”^v
- About this time, we are thinking: “*These are heavy verses! I need some HOPE!*”

19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. **20** For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

- Maybe James said be “slow to anger and slow to speak” so we have time to listen to the Holy Spirit before responding to persecution because of Christ.

26 “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. [When they accuse you, Jesus will bring the truth to light!]

27 What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. [Publicly confessing Christ and sharing the gospel with gentleness and respect 1 Peter 3:15-16] **28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. [Fear of disappointing our Savior should be much greater than fear of what people think.]

- Let’s be real. Even if you share your faith intelligently and gently, it could still cost you relationships, your job, or other hardships. But Jesus did give them and us some promises that are a little more “Hallmark-worthy.”

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. **30** But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

- If we suffer for standing firm for Jesus, He is always with us and will fight for us.
- Here is a sober warning we dare NOT skip over.

32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, **33** but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

- The Greek word for acknowledge means, “to profess, to confess allegiance to declare, make an emphatic assertion”^{vi} [publicly.]
- Swindoll again, “*Loyal disciples openly acknowledge Christ before the world. The faithful soldier isn’t ashamed to identify with Christ or hesitant to confess Him as Savior and Lord.*”^{vii}
- Does denying Him in a moment of weakness mean a loss of salvation? No. [See Eph. 2:8-9; John 10:28; Romans 8:38–39.]
- Peter denied Christ three times and was forgiven and restored.
- The key: If we are truly Christ’s follower (we’ve trusted Him as Savior and Lord), He will forgive the sin of not acknowledging Him faithfully.

- Of course, our goal is to avoid that sin by heeding His warning in those verses.

So What's the Takeaway?

- Just like a wise and loving parent warning their adult kids about the real world, Jesus warned His disciples (and His followers today) about the cost of discipleship.
- He didn't "sugar coat" the realities, He prepared us for how we must deal with those realities and gave us hope as He promised us His love and protection as the Good Shepherd.
- So, how can we be a "Shrewd Sheep" –
 - The "Sheep side of our nature":
 - Humble – We know we're not self-sufficient.
 - Dependent on the Shepherd – We listen for His voice, not our instincts alone.
 - Gentle in posture – We don't lead with force, anger, or dominance.
 - Peaceable – We don't look for fights to prove faithfulness.
 - The Shrewd part:
 - Spiritually alert – We recognize opposition, manipulation, and false motives.
 - Wise with words – We know when to speak, when to stay silent, and how to frame truth.
 - Not naïve – We are kind but not gullible.
 - Strategic, not impulsive – We think before we react.
 - The Balance: A "Shrewd Sheep" is:
 - Kind without being clueless
 - Bold without being abrasive
 - Faithful without being foolish
 - Trusting God without testing Him unnecessarily
- Loyalty to Jesus comes at a cost, but it is oh so WORTH IT!
- One day in eternity we will look back and marvel at how our finite minds just couldn't begin to grasp the true WORTH of following Jesus!
- This week, let's be "shrewd sheep" that STAND FIRM for His truth and ENDURE for His name's sake knowing that our Good Shepherd will never leave us and will ALWAYS fight for us.

ⁱ Thomas, R. L. (1998). In *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Foundation Publications, Inc.

ⁱⁱ Swindoll, C. R. (2020). *Matthew 1–15* (Vol. 1A, p. 194). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

ⁱⁱⁱ Strong, J. (2009). In *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 9). Logos Bible Software.

^h Rev. 13:10; [Gen. 9:6; Ezek. 35:6]

ⁱ [John 10:18]

^j [ch. 4:11; 2 Kgs. 6:17; Dan. 7:10; Luke 22:43; John 18:36]

^k Luke 8:30

^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Mt 26:52–53). (2025). Crossway Bibles.

^v Swindoll, C. R. (2020). *Matthew 1–15* (Vol. 1A, p. 195). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

^{vi} Swanson, J. (1997). In *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

^{vii} Swindoll, C. R. (2020). *Matthew 1–15* (Vol. 1A, p. 202). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.