

Mission Warnings
Matthew 10:16-20

Friends, I want to describe a scene from a movie to you – maybe you’ll recognize it? It begins with a classroom full of youth, young men who observe a military parade walking down the street going off to war with crowds of people cheering them on.

Their teacher then gives the boys an impassioned speech about the virtues of serving their country, about how boys in other schools are enlisting for the war effort en masse, and how parents who do not send their sons off to war are weak and unpatriotic.

He continues on and says...

“Now our country calls. The Fatherland needs leaders. Personal ambition must be thrown aside in the one great sacrifice for our country. Here is a glorious beginning to your lives. The field of honor calls you.”

And after this impassioned speech this group of young German school boys stands up and enthusiastically cheers, and one by one they promise to go and volunteer and enlist for service in World War I.

But there is a problem...

While these young men have been motivated to go out and serve their country, while they have been authorized by enlisting in the military, while they have been instructed on how to march, and fire their weapons, and crawl through the mud their training fails to adequately warn them of what the war is really like.

They have not become soldiers; they are still idealistic young German school boys dressed up in a uniform playing a game, a game that thinks war is just a glorious adventure.

But this game, this glorious adventure is about to turn deadly, when they are shipped off to the front lines to fight in the trenches of WW I reality sets in, and in the end the war takes them all.

This war movie is the 1930's classic "All Quiet on the Western Front"

And friends I use it as an illustration to show that as we are motivated to go off and serve Christ by ministering to the children and youth of our community, we can face a peril similar to that faced by those young German schoolboys.

We can be inspired by the cause, by the need for mission, we are stirred to action by a good sermon, and as a congregation we stand up and organize ourselves to go and begin ministering to the children and youth in our community – but its still an ideal, a glorious adventure and we've not been prepared yet to face realities of what it means to be a missionary – a soldier for Christ.

Although we've been authorized to go work in the harvest field, although we've been given Spiritual Gifts to use, although we've looked at Jesus' mission instructions – our training isn't complete yet

The final phase remains where Jesus gives us Mission warnings – warnings to identify and eradicate the mission idealism in us, warnings that will replace idealism with a healthy realism, warnings that begin to change us from inspired church attendees into bona fide missionaries.

And so we continue to listen to Jesus speak to his disciples, and to us, in Mathew chapter 10 about the reality which embarking on mission is going to bring about.

And what we hear Jesus say is sobering, and may not be the kind of inspirational message that we wanted to come and hear this morning - but friends, it's necessary, because we need to become bona fide missionaries!

You see friends an idealized understanding of mission only sees the opportunity, e.g. there are sheep needing shepherds, there is a field in need of harvest, and is moved and inspired to take action to do something about it – and it feels great.

The idealist sees this as a great adventure, we're going to do something great for God, it will be exciting, awesome,

amazing, we'll get to see God do miracles, the people we are ministering to will welcome us with wide open arms.

And that's great place to start – as we did three weeks ago, but idealism will come up short when the reality of the mission sets in.

Now Jesus made some hints about this last week when he instructed us on how to deal with people who were not receptive to the gospel. But today we hear him develop the reality we will face on the mission more fully.

And Jesus is telling us that it's more than some people politely but firmly saying to us: I'm sorry we're not interested in Christianity! Please don't force your views on me.

It's more than not being able to break through the spiritual apathy of some people, in spite of our best efforts to be friendly and engaging and inviting.

It's the reality that we will face active opposition; it's the reality of persecution and antagonism. The reality that the

people you've come to help... will turn on you and turn against you.

Now, this Mission Warning is so important that Jesus spends the bulk of chapter 10 talking about it. All the way from vs. 16 to vs. 39- a whole 23 verses. He devotes more time to warnings than he does to authorizing, equipping and instructing.

So if Jesus spends this much time on going over the warnings – then it's probably a good idea that we pay attention to them and spend some time on them so we don't short change our training, and so that it will accomplish its intended purpose to change us from church attendees into missionaries.

So look at vs. 16 where Jesus warns ¹⁶ "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Friends, to pick up on the army example again – many military units have a crest that symbolizes what they do or some characteristic which they hold dear.

Eg. The US Marine's crest looks like this, and their slogan is "The Few, the Proud"

Now Christ's missionaries have a crest as well – it looks like this. It has a Sheep, a wolf, a snake and a dove.

It means that when you go out as a missionary, the situation on the front lines is like being a sheep among wolves.

Missionaries are exposed, they are vulnerable and in danger.

Yes, Jesus saw the crowds and they were like sheep without a shepherd- but when we go out to work among them...these sheep become wolves.

People won't necessarily welcome you with wide open arms, they won't think what you have to offer is the greatest thing since sliced bread; in fact the people we go out to serve may take advantage of us, they may attack us and hurt us.

Now the serpent represents how Jesus instructs us to deal with antagonism.

When we face apathy Jesus says "move on, shake off the dust" but when we deal with persecution we are to be like serpents.

Jesus praises the snake for its shrewdness, its prudence in its approach to dealing with people. It's like Jesus is saying – watch a snake and learn from it, because snakes are wary and cautious, they don't expect the benefit of the doubt, they don't expect the goodwill of people towards them.

But lest we give in to the temptation to learn too much from the snake, lest we are tempted to imitate its cunning ways and poisonous attacks against those who would threaten us, Jesus balances it out by warning us to be "innocent as doves!"

In other words be peaceful, harmless, non-violent – but wise and shrewd in the face of persecution and harm.

And Friends, here we see how wise Christ really is. Not only does the missionary crest teach us about the reality we will face as missionaries, but it teaches us about the reality we will face in other areas of our life too...

If you're in business – your customers *can* turn on you,

If you're an employer – your workers *can* turn on you,
If you're an employee – your boss *can* turn on you,
If you're a teacher – your students *can* turn on you,
If you're a parent – your children *can* turn on you,
If you're married – your *spouse* can turn on you
If you are in government – once you're elected, your constituents *will* turn on you!

Friends, whether we are out on our mission as a church, or whether we are living for the Kingdom in our day to day lives we need be aware we are Sheep among wolves, but to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Because friends, what Jesus is getting at here – the truth behind what He is saying is that human nature is ultimately self-contradicted, it needs help - but it fights that which seeks to help it - so don't be naïve and trust in any sort of “goodness of humanity”

Jesus warns us – “be on your guard against people” vs. 17

You see In spite of the fact that they are sheep in need of a shepherd; that they are harassed and helpless, the sheep can...and some will...turn on the shepherds who try to help them.

It's in our human nature because our human nature has been warped and twisted by Sin – right from our birth.

Now, when the idealistic missionary experiences this reality, this kind of treatment at the hands of those they came to help they say - I didn't sign up for this! I give up! I didn't know it would be this hard! I want to quit! When this happens, the ministry dies.

Friends, Jesus does not want that happening to us! He doesn't want it happening to His mission. This is why He gives us these mission warnings, not to discourage us but to train us, to warn us so that we're not caught off guard by it, so that we won't be tempted to give up and quit.

But friends, please don't misunderstand -- Christ is not sending us on a suicide mission. The dove on the Missionaries crest also reminds us that we do have a strength and power available to us.

Jesus reassures us that the Spirit of the Father, the Holy Spirit will speak through us when we find ourselves in situations where we need to defend ourselves.

In the face of persecution and opposition Missionaries use timely words from the Holy Spirit to defend themselves, Why?

Because as the apostle Paul, one of the greatest missionaries ever, explains “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

You see friends; this mission does in fact take place in the midst of a war, a war in which the people and families in our community are the unsuspecting pawns and victims of the evil one – Satan, who is bent on destroying them.

And if He can deceive them into thinking those who come to help, are instead coming to harm them. If He can manipulate through them fear, anger or hatred into having them lash out against missionaries...

Maybe there's a chance that we will fight back against them, maybe we'll prove his lie correct, maybe we will become discouraged and give up.

But friends, we have been prepared, we have been warned – so we are aware of the reality we will face on our mission.

And when we face persecution or antagonistic attacks we will not be caught off guard –we anticipated it and we're prepared for it, we can endure it and the Holy Spirit will give us the right words to say in the midst of it.

And friends, we can be assured that when hardship and suffering come, even though we might think the mission is all SNAFU'd – its not. In fact it is through these things that Christ's mission makes its greatest advances.

And we endure it because we cannot leave the children and youth and their families of our community in the clutches of the enemy who will destroy them and see them spend an eternity without Christ.

The stakes are too high; too many lives are at stake; too
to allow persecution and opposition to demoralize and defeat
us.

So friends, you've been authorized, equipped, instructed – and
now we're well on our way to becoming full blown
missionaries ready to face the reality of the mission.

We've been warned!

Amen