

**October 26, 2008
Reformation Sunday**

"The Lord Provides Faithful Confessors"

MATTHEW 10:16-23

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²² All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³ When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

A dog is chewing on a nice juicy rib bone. The bone tastes so good. His mouth is even drooling. What happens if you try to take the bone away from the dog and the dog is not your friend? The dog will growl and even snap at you to protect its tasty bone. Even a little kitten will growl, scratch, and bite to keep other little kittens from taking its morsel of food. Take a toy away from a baby and it may cry, or say "mine" or even hit the person taking away the toy.

I was born into this world holding on to something that I didn't want anyone taking away from me. (Show paper stick man) It was trust in myself and my goodness to be loved by God. But then God's word opened my eyes to see how worthless it is to trust in myself. (Tear up stick man) It led me to trust in Jesus. At first we hate God's Word because of what it teaches, and even hate the messengers who bring God's Word into the world because of what it takes away from us, but then we love God's Word because of what it brings to us in Jesus. (Show cross and trust in that cross)

When the Bible came into Martin Luther's life he saw that his righteousness could never be good enough to make himself acceptable to God. Then he saw that God had given to him the righteousness of Jesus as a free gift. He could not keep this message to himself. He wanted to help people take this false hope of trusting in self and replace it with a trust in Jesus. That was like taking a juicy rib bone away from a hungry dog. The false teachers hated Martin Luther and wanted to put him to death.

The Lord our God will always raise up faithful confessors who are willing to risk their lives to tell people the bad news that they cannot save themselves, and the good news that Jesus has done everything for them. Some of the best moments in your life have come when you were able to confess your faith in Jesus to those who do not believe.

He sends his sheep among the wolves

Is it really that dangerous? Would some people hate me for telling them about Jesus? Listen to the words of our Lord. "I am sending you as sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as wise as doves." What chance does one sheep have in a pack of hungry wolves? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? One in a million? How about no chance at all! Moose and elk have sharp horns and powerful hooves to fight off the wolves, but the sheep has no defense. In his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Philip Keller writes, "Two dogs have been known to kill as many as 292 sheep in a single night of unbridled slaughter." Jesus wants us to bear witness to what he has done to rescue us, even it means we are ripped apart by savage wolves who hate and despise the truth of God's Word and who hate Jesus as the only hope of being saved.

Some of the songs or hymns we sing in our church services are very dangerous such as "Jesus your blood and righteousness, My beauty are my glorious dress. Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed. With joy shall I lift up my head." That song teaches clearly that we are saved not by our righteousness, but only the righteousness that is found in Jesus. What if you were to confess this truth in a college classroom? You would be laughed out of the classroom, and not taken serious for the rest of the semester by your classmates or professors. If you confessed this truth in a Muslim country they would tear you apart as wolves tear apart the helpless sheep.

Martin Luther got into big trouble by the words he wrote down about Jesus as the only way to have peace with God. Here are the words he put down in a hymn about his inability to save himself. "My own good works availed me naught, No merit they attaining; My will against God's judgment fought, No hope for me remaining. My fears increased till sheer despair Left naught but death to be my share And hell to be my sentence." Here is what he wrote about being God's love that saved him. "But God beheld my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And, mindful of his mercies great, He planned my soul's salvation. A Father's heart he turned to me, Sought my redemption fervently; He gave his dearest treasure."

Let me illustrate what really gets us in trouble with this jar of broken pieces of glass. When safety glass shatters, it breaks into thousands of little pieces. One blow and the glass shatters. Sin shatters God's law, because God's law is perfect. We cannot take pieces of glass and glue them together again. We cannot make up for breaking God's law by the good we do just as you cannot glue the pieces of glass together. We need a new piece of glass. We need a new righteousness found outside of ourselves in Jesus as Paul tells us in Romans 3, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Christ Jesus to all who believe." People who foolishly think they can save themselves want to hold on to it tightly and not give it up. They especially despise and hate anyone would say that we have to put all our hope in what Christ has done.

Jesus told his disciples, "They will hand you over to local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to the Gentiles." I am holding in my hand a piece of robe that could be used to tie up people and hand them over to be persecuted and put to death. They used rope to tie up Jesus and hand him over to Pontius Pilate. They used rope to tie up the apostles and hand them over to be beaten because they boldly confessed the name of Jesus. The Lord Jesus said this of the Apostle Paul, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name among

the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Paul had scars on his back for all the times he was bound with ropes and beaten for the name of Jesus. When Martin Luther went to defend his teachings about Jesus, the leaders of the Roman church were given the charge to arrest him and bring him back to Rome. That meant being burnt to death as a heretic. Is the time coming, when they will bind you with ropes, or hand cuffs, and beat you for what you believe about Jesus?

As hard as it is to confess your faith before governors and kings and religious leaders or even a college classroom, the greater challenge is to witness to members of your own family who may still hold on to a false hope of how they are saved. Jesus spoke of how hard this would be: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm until they end will be saved.”

There are times in the history of the Christian church that the hatred for Jesus becomes so strong that fathers and mothers hate their children for believing in Jesus, and children hate their parents. It has been said that there is only one love stronger than natural love, and that love is either born from heaven or comes from hell. My love and desire to have my children believe in Jesus as their hope of salvation will move me to want to risk losing their love just to reach them with the gospel. If a child develops a love for the devil’s kingdom and a hatred for Jesus, that hatred may become even stronger than the love they have for their parents. In dealing with our own family members we need to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves, always speaking the truth in love, but always faithful to God’s Word.

He provides his Spirit to speak the truth

Think again of the poor sheep among the wolves. What chance do Christians have in these last days? Jesus reminds us that we are not alone. He tells us, “At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” When we speak the truth of God’s Word to our family members and friends, we have to take Jesus words to heart and believe that he will give us the right moment to speak the truth and the right words to say. When we see our children wandering away from the Lord, we have the Holy Spirit to help us plead with them to not give up that robe of righteousness that covers them. We want to remind them of their baptism of which Galatians 3 says, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

In Acts 1 Jesus told his disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” He did not just call us to be his faithful confessors; he also promised us the power that we need from the Holy Spirit to faithfully confess. The One who calls us to stand firm to the end, will also be our Shepherd who will not let anyone pluck us from his loving arms. “My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and I give them eternal life and no one shall pluck them from my hand.”

The night before he was to stand before rulers and religious leaders to defend the true teaching of the Bible against the false teaching about salvation through good works, Martin Luther faced the very real danger of being burnt to death as a heretic. He was

heard praying this prayer:

"O Almighty and Everlasting God, how terrible this world! Behold, it opens its mouth to swallow me up, and I have so little trust in You.....I wish that my days would flow along peaceful and happy, but the cause is Yours... and it is a righteous and eternal cause. O Lord help me.....O God my God, don't You hear me?... My God are you dead?...No, you cannot die. You are only hiding Yourself. You have chosen me for this work. I know it well... Act then, O God...stand at my side, for the sake of Your well-beloved Jesus Christ, who is my Defense, my Shield, and my Strong Tower."

After a moment of silence Luther continues on "And then though the world should be filled with devils- though my body which is still the work of your hands, should be slain, be stretched upon the pavement, be cut to pieces, reduced to ashes...my soul is Yours... Your Word is my assurance. My soul belongs to You and shall abide with you forever. *Then he closed with the words,* "Amen. O God, help me Amen." The Lord will always give us faithful confessors. Amen.