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Missionary Discourse (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg discusses the responsibilities and rewards associated with missionary work. He emphasizes the importance of freely giving without expecting anything in return, quoting biblical passages that support this idea. Gregg also advises against exploiting invitations for popularity and warns that those who do not receive the message should be left alone. Finally, he reminds listeners that wisdom and the Holy Spirit can guide them in times of persecution or danger.

Transcript

...required that you have this pleasure before you come over there. That's a shame. To me, that is a shame because it seems to me if you have a call from God, then you should go whether you have all things in advance lit up or not.

Because Jesus said the workman is worthy of his hire. The idea there is if you're working for God, God will pay his laborers. Now, the disciples had to learn this, although they didn't have to practice it quite like this all the rest of their lives.

They had to learn this lesson just in case and they no doubt certainly would. They would have occasions when this lesson was going to be necessary for them. Paul describes his own ministry in 1 Corinthians 4 as being naked and homeless and without clothing and so forth.

There were certainly times in the life of the missionaries that they really didn't have any visible means of support. They just had to trust God. Other times, they had things and there was nothing.

Jesus didn't forbid them in their long-range mission to take things with them and to provide for themselves if that was possible. But they had to learn that if that was not possible, they still had to go out and trust God and God would take care of things. Because God is a just employer.

He pays his laborers and the laborers worthy of his hire. Now, there's two things he says to them about finances here in verses 8 and 10 that to my mind are not given enough

attention by modern ministers as far as financial ethics of ministry. He said in verse 8, freely you have received, freely give.

And in verse 10, the worker is worthy of his food. Now, I don't know if you sense the tension between those two statements. On the one hand, you don't take anything because you expect people to give you food.

You're a worker. You're worthy of your food. But on the other hand, you're told to give freely.

What this clearly means is that you are not entitled to charge for your ministry, but you can expect to receive free will. For your ministry. You can expect free will gifts.

In fact, that's how you're going to survive. Let me show you a parallel to this in Paul's writing about himself. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 9, verse 14, for example, is actually, this is a longer passage.

I just want to take a snippet of it. 1 Corinthians 9, verse 14, Paul says, Even so, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. Now, that's like the laborer is worthy of his hire.

As a matter of fact, in another place, we won't turn there right now, but 1 Timothy 5.18. 1 Timothy 5.18, Paul is making the exact same point that he's making here in 1 Corinthians 9. That people who are in full time ministry should be able to be supported by it. But in 1 Timothy 5.18, he quotes Jesus. He says, Because it is written, the laborer is worthy of his hire.

He quotes the very thing Jesus said to the twelve on this occasion as an ongoing principle. That those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. Now, it doesn't mean that the preacher is commanded to live by the gospel.

Paul himself had the option of not doing so, and he chose not to. He chose rather to work with his hands, and that's the whole point he's making in this chapter, 1 Corinthians 14. He's saying, I've never used this right.

I've never taken advantage of this opportunity. The command, those that preach the gospel should live of the gospel, is not a command to the ones preaching. But it's a command to the ones being preached to.

That if you are being preached to, then realize the person preaching has the right to live off of what he's preaching. And therefore, it is right for pastors to be supported by the congregation. It is proper for people who are, as it says in Galatians 6, is it 6.6, I think it is.

It says, let those who are taught in the words share in all good things with those who

teach. Yeah, Galatians 6.6, let him who is taught in the words share in all good things with him who teaches. Okay, well that's it.

The one who preaches or teaches should be able to live off of it. But there's another thing in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 18, in the same context. 1 Corinthians 9.18, Paul says, what is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

Now notice, I have authority, that means I have a right to be paid. I'm a preacher of the gospel, I have the right to live of the gospel. God has ordained that.

I could impose that on you people, he says. I'm your preacher, you should be my benefactors, you should pay me. But, that's my authority, but I have chosen not to exercise that authority, not to abuse that authority by charging for what I do.

I don't want to charge. I want to make the gospel available without charge. Now notice, Jesus said to the twelve, freely you've received, freely give.

You cannot charge for ministry if you're going to freely give it. I mean, just by definition, you're not giving it freely if you're charging for it. So on the one hand, Paul acknowledges what Jesus does, the laborer is worthy of his hire, he that preaches the gospel should live of the gospel.

But at the same time, the preacher shouldn't charge. He's received what he's got from God, his gifts, freely, and he's supposed to give it freely. What this amounts to is the difference between a supported clergy and a salaried clergy.

The clergy, if we dare use that word, it's not a biblical word, but those who are in full-time ministry, they should be supported. But they should not be salaried, in my opinion. Now I'm not going to condemn those who are, but it's still my opinion that when Jesus said, freely you've received, freely give, and he's talking to people who are giving the gospel, who are preaching, it seems to me like that would be applicable across the board.

That's not just to the twelve here on this mission, it's something Paul himself observed in his own ministry and felt right about doing. I want to preach the gospel without charge. But without charge doesn't mean without remuneration.

It doesn't mean that I don't want to receive anything back for my labors. As a matter of fact, a preacher needs to receive something back for his labors, he's got to live. And therefore, the whole issue is voluntariness.

The minister ministers voluntarily, without charge, and those who support him do so voluntarily. So that all is done out of one motivation, which is one motivation of Christianity, is love. That the minister doesn't minister for a love of money, he does it for

a love of people.

And people don't give him money because he charges them, but because they love him. And as long as the voluntary aspect is present, it remains a matter of love. If the voluntary aspect is removed, it's not love.

It's obligation. And so this is something Jesus taught the disciples, this is something Paul himself practiced. And I believe it's something that is a good normative principle for ministry, though it isn't practiced very widely these days.

But these two things Jesus said in Matthew 10.8 and 10.10, freely you receive, freely give, seems to suggest you shouldn't charge for ministry. And a worker is worthy of his food, says that those who receive ministry should help out, should do whatever they can to help out, you know, because it's worth something. Ministry is worth something, and as long as it's going to continue, it's necessary for the minister to be supportive.

Now I don't say any of that here to encourage anyone to give me support. As a matter of fact, this month has been a very good month for us. We've had some very generous friends this month.

We've had low months and high months. It's been a very good month. So I'm not saying this and pressing this home, hoping that you'll get the hint and start, you know, giving me some money.

But already many of you have. In fact, this has been, in some respects, the most generous student body we've ever had in that respect. I think I might have told you, the only thing that any student body ever gave me, any year so far, was about three years ago, they saw that the button on my 501s kept coming undone.

They figured it's time for me to take a new pair of pants, so they surprised me with a new pair of 501 Levi's. However, there are many in this class who have shocked me with all kinds of expressions of generosity, and I appreciate that very much. So I'm not saying these things as if to correct anyone here, or to apply it to my own situation.

I'm just saying this is something that, as you know from having sat under me a while, it's one of those things that's in my craw a little bit, because Christian ministry has become professional. Christian ministry has become commercialized. It has become a matter of, you know, it's contractual.

I will work for you. I'll preach X number of sermons so many times a week, and I will get X salary and benefits. You know, that is contrary to the spirit of ministry, in my opinion.

And I base it upon, of course, scriptures like these. Okay, going on then. Oh, one thing I want to say also, in verse 10, where he says, Of course, he's stating a principle of justice.

It's true in any employment situation. If an employer has someone who does work for them, then that person should be paid. There are homeless people out right now who hold out signs saying, I'll work for food.

I've heard all kinds of stories about people who've responded to that plea. One person here in town said they stopped down near Sherry's. There was a person with a sign that said, I'll work for food, and they said, okay, I've got some work you can do.

And the guy said, well, why don't you just give me five bucks and go on your way like everyone else does? He didn't really want to work. He just wanted to appear to be willing to work. But I've heard of two other cases just this week of persons who did stop and say, listen, I'll give you some work.

And in one case, a homeless person went out and cut wood and stacked firewood all day long for the guy, and the guy gave him a moldy sandwich and a glass of warm water. And another case I heard of, a homeless person was pressed into a full day's work of hard labor, and the guy gave him something like a bowl of soup and nothing more and sent him on his way after a day's hard labor. That to me is an injustice.

You don't have to hire a beggar, but if you do hire him, the labor is worthy of his hire. Now, with reference to ministers, it's clear that Jesus is stating that they don't have to provide for themselves extra things, because whenever they need something, it will be given to them. They don't have to have savings, they don't have to have something laid up for the future, because they are employed by an employer who will never go broke, and who will never default on payday.

The person who is in the service of God doesn't have to worry whether he has right now the things necessary for tomorrow or the next day, because it's very clear that God has them, and God will still have them forever. He'll never lack them, and therefore if you are diligently working for God, you have never any reason to doubt that you'll have all the things you need, because God is your employer and he pays his workers. Now, I do know some people who claim to be in full-time ministry, who if they worked for an employer the way they work for God, they'd be fired, because a lot of people say they're in full-time ministry, but really they're just lazy and don't want to get a job.

And it is possible to dupe the body of Christ enough to get enough support by doing very little work in ministry, and some people have learned how to play that system, and how to play that game, and how to get generous people in the body of Christ to underwrite their lazy lifestyles. But the fact of the matter is, Jesus is saying, as long as you're working for God, and how do I know that the worker here is working for God? Well, because back in verse 37 of chapter 9, he says, the harvest plan, the laborers are few, pray, in verse 38, to the Lord of the harvest, to send out laborers into the harvest. And this was an example.

The Lord of the harvest was sending out laborers. They were therefore his laborers. If you go into full-time ministry, whether as a pastor, missionary, evangelist, whatever, itinerant, you are working for God, if he has called you, by the way, if he has sent you out.

If you are one of the ones that he has put in full-time ministry, then you are his employee, and you never, ever have to worry about whether you'll have enough for anything. I do not have health insurance, nor life insurance, nor would I buy it or accept it. If somebody offered to pay for it for me, I wouldn't have it.

Why should I? I've got better insurance than that. You see, people who have insurance like that do so because they're really not sure about the future. That's the only reason for getting insurance.

They're not sure that if God took everything away, that they'd get it all back. So they get insurance to make sure they can. But the fact is, I never worry a moment about a future health crisis.

Because every time I've had a need, and I've never had a major health crisis, but every time I've had a need that was particularly expensive, the money has come from somewhere. Usually without my advertising that there was a need. In fact, almost always, it's been without my making any reference to it as a need anywhere.

And that is something I've seen. I know that if expenses increase, if crises increase, well, I know who my employer is, and it's a job with full benefits. The benefits are not exactly plush, but they are, well, retirement is out of this world.

But the fact of the matter is, there is security. There is security in serving God like there is in serving no other employer. And the laborer who has labored for God can be secure.

Now, one reason, as I've pointed out to you before, some people in ministry are very insecure about finances. They're not sure that they're going to be able to pay their radio bills or their TV bills. You hear them ripen on television and radio all the time about how they're going to have to go off the air and so forth, and how they're in big trouble financially and stuff.

Or even pastors get insecure sometimes. You know, I've told you this before. They come to a church, they've got a contract for a certain salary.

They get a house, they get a car, they've got a mortgage, they're making payments. Their kids are going to Christian school, they've got this expensive lifestyle. And then they find out that there's trouble in the church.

Someone's complaining about their sermons. Someone doesn't like what they're preaching, or there's going to be a division. And suddenly their job security gets

challenged.

And then they're just like anyone in any other kind of employment. Just as insecure as anyone else. You know why? Because they're not God's employees, they're the corporation's employees.

The laborer is worthy of his hire, but of course, it matters who you're laboring for. A man in ministry should be laboring for God. In which case, he can be sure that he will always be secure because his employer is God.

And the only thing he has to worry about is keeping his employer happy. All he has to worry about is keeping his conscience clear before God, and doing what he knows to be right before God. If his employer is a church or an organization, then he's got plenty to be insecure about because keeping people happy isn't all that easy.

And especially if you're going to try to keep God happy too. Paul said, if I yet pleased men, I couldn't be the servant of Christ. In Galatians 1.10. So, you know, I don't blame ministers for feeling insecure when they're trying to keep God happy and people happy too.

When they're working for God, at least they claim to be in the service of God, but they're really working for an organization that's made up of men who can fire them or change their salary or whatever. See, you can't be fired by God unless you simply become out of control. I mean, the fact is, God will chasten you if you do wrong.

And if you're uncorrectable, then of course you've got plenty to be insecure about. But the point is, if you just keep your heart pure before God and do the thing that you believe he's telling you to do, and that happens to be in some cases to be in full-time ministry as opposed to any other kind of supported work, you're worthy of your hire. God will pay you.

He doesn't guarantee a high hourly wage. But that's another thing about Christianity. You have to be content with little.

Paul said, having food and clothing, let us be there with content. If you obey the Scripture all around, you've got no problems because you'll be content with little and you'll always have at least that much, or at least the little that you need. Now, further instructions for this particular journey.

Verse 11. Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it.

And if the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in that day of judgment than for that city. Now, this has to do with how they're to conduct themselves, where they're supposed to live while they're itinerating. They would go into a city and presumably they wouldn't just spend one day there.

They'd spend some extended period of time there. They'd need a roof over their head. They'd need a host.

They'd need someone who's going to serve meals and stuff to them. Now, when they go to the city, they inquire who is worthy. And no doubt that would mean, are there any pious, godly souls in this town? What they're doing is trying to identify the faithful remnant in that town who would be the natural candidates for conversion to Christianity.

They'd be the ones like Anna in the Temple or like old Simeon who are looking for the redemption of Israel, who are looking for the Messiah. Find out if there's any of those people in this village. And when you find them, go and stay with them.

Presumably, one of the things that would show you that they are of that class is that they'd welcome you into their homes. Some have entertained angels in their wares. And any godly person would show hospitality to a traveling minister if they recognized that minister as being from God.

Now, that's just it. The faithful remnant would have to have a witness in their hearts that these guys really were from God, but they would. Old Anna knew it, old Simeon knew it, and no one had to tell him.

So the godly would recognize the apostles as coming with the message of truth and would invite them in. Now, he said, let your peace come on this household. That means give it the traditional blessing, peace on this house.

When you come into a house to stay there, you can't give them much materially for the hospitality they're giving you because you're not carrying a bag or a script or anything like that. But you can give them peace. You can bring a blessing on their house.

Now, I must confess there's something mysterious to my mind about the whole category of blessing. You know, does something really transpire when you bless someone? We know that from ancient times in Genesis, patriarchs would bless their sons. Typically, though, that had to do with bestowing inheritance rights and, in the case of the godly patriarchs, prophesying about the future of their sons.

But did the prophesied blessing, was that simply foreseeing what was going to happen in particular or was it saying this shall happen and because the blessing was given to that person, it did happen to them? I don't know the answer to that. That's an interesting question, I think. Maybe you don't think so.

I think it is. I do remember a time when my own lapse into the use of clichés was brought home to me in a convicting way. It's very typical, as you probably have noticed, for me to say when leaving, you know, God bless you or something like that.

I mean, instead of goodbye. I don't know where I got that. Maybe from old Boaz or something.

Anyway, it's just been a habit for about 24 years of mine that when I'm departing from them, I say God bless you to them. And once, I was hitchhiking in Santa Cruz. And I was hitchhiking and this girl came along, who I happen to know, she was a Christian.

Also, she was trying to get to the same side of town I was, so she decided to hitchhike with me. So the two of us were hitchhiking. And this car picked us up and it turned out they were only going a few blocks.

They took us maybe half a mile at the most and let us out. And so we didn't get a chance even to witness to them or anything. And as we were getting out of the car, I said, well, God bless you and so forth.

And they were gone. And I said to the girl, that's too bad, that was such a short ride. I didn't even get a chance to talk to them.

And she said, well, maybe they just needed the blessing. And that kind of brought me up short. What are you talking about, needed the blessing? And then I realized that I had said, as I always say, as a matter of cliché, God bless you to these people, but it never occurred to me that anything was going to happen as a result of my saying so.

It never occurred to me that I was imparting anything. It was just a cliché. You know, it's just like saying goodbye.

It's like saying see you later. And this girl was a fairly young Christian. She was naive enough to think, well, when you say God bless you, you're imparting a blessing to someone.

And, you know, I was really convincing her, she's probably right. I just never really given it any serious thought. What does it mean to impart a blessing to someone? Jesus told us that when you go into the house, let your peace come on this house.

And no doubt he's talking about, in fact, elsewhere in parallel passages, he says, say, peace be on this house. So that's a blessing. You bless the house with peace.

Now, he goes on to say, if the household is, in fact, worthy, your peace will come upon it. If it's not a worthy house, then let your peace return to you. You won't have lost anything by your being friendly and courteous.

They won't receive your peace that you wish on them if they're not worthy to receive it.

That's an interesting thought. It suggests that peace, actual peace, will come on the house if the house is worthy to receive the blessing you're giving them.

If they're not worthy, then it won't come on them. But that suggests that Jesus was giving his disciples authority to pronounce and to bring blessing on the homes that blessed them, on the homes that took them in. And it certainly is a blessing to have a godly person in the home.

Whether he says, peace on this house or not, it does bring blessing. But I think that perhaps we could be instructed from this that we do have the power as Christians to invoke blessing verbally on people. And if they are worthy of it, it will stick.

And if they're not, apparently it won't. Then he says in verse 14, whoever will not receive you nor hear your words... Well, you know, I didn't comment on the end of verse 11. I probably should have.

I only talked about inquire who is worthy and stay there till you go out. Till you go out of the town is what it means there. The idea was they don't go from house to house.

They don't stay one night in this house and one night in that house. It's possible that the faithful people in the town would not be the richest people in town. So you might be invited into a home that's not particularly luxurious.

But if you stay in town long enough and preach and get a big following, there might be some richer people who would invite you to stay in their home. But don't accept it. Just stay in the same house.

Don't succumb to the temptation to exploit other invitations that may come along after you've been there a while and got a little popularity. Stay in the house of those who are most worthy. Not necessarily better offers you may get in terms of comfort or whatever.

Also, probably the reason they were to stay in one house as long as they were in town. He doesn't specify whether they should stay two days or two weeks or two months in a given town. But apparently as long as there were people hearing them and receiving them, they should stay for a while anyway.

And perhaps the reason they were to stay in one house and not go from house to house is so that the people in town would know where to find them. If they were moving around from house to house, people who were inquirers, like Nicodemus had been, coming to Jesus, wouldn't know where to find them. But if they stay in one house in the town, it would be predictable where people could look them up if they wanted to talk to them about the things of God.

They'd have a headquarters, a base of operation. Now verse 14. Whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust

from your feet.

Now shaking the dust off the feet was actually a rabbinic custom. The Pharisees did this after they'd had to walk through Gentile territory or Samaritan territory. Sometimes, as we know, in traveling between Galilee and Judea, Jews either had to go through Samaria or had to go outside the country and walk in Transjordan, in technically Gentile regions.

And the Pharisees, just as a graphic way of demonstrating their disdain for Gentiles, didn't even want the dust from Gentile territories sticking to the soles of their feet. So when they'd come back into Israel, they'd shake the dust off their feet to get off all the remnants of Gentile territory off their feet. And Jesus said, any Jewish city that rejects the message of the kingdom should be treated like a Gentile city.

You shake the dust off your feet of these people. It'd be a way of saying, though you are a Jewish city, you're no better than pagans if you reject the gospel of the kingdom. Which is another way of the many ways the Bible tells us that a Jew who is not a believer in Christ is no better off than anybody else, just another Gentile, just another pagan.

And Jesus says in verse 15, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in that day of judgment than for that city. Now, we've encountered that expression back in Matthew 11. Verses 22 and 24, Jesus said things like that.

And of course, Sodom and Gomorrah were Gentile cities. And so shaking the dust off the feet not only suggested that that Jewish city that rejected the gospel was equal to Gentile cities, in some ways it was worse. It'd be more tolerable for Gentile cities like Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for a Jewish city that had heard and rejected the message of the kingdom.

Why? Because Sodom and Gomorrah never heard the message. Sodom and Gomorrah never saw the signs and wonders that the apostles were doing. They never had the advantages these Jewish communities had of seeing and hearing these things.

And therefore, while Sodom and Gomorrah were in fact lost and suffering in eternity, yet their suffering will be of a lesser degree, apparently, than that of Jewish cities that have rejected the gospel, or Jewish people that have rejected the gospel. Now, at that point, after verse 15, that is actually technically the end of the discourse that Jesus gave on this occasion. The disciples then went out, according to Mark and Luke.

At this point, they tell of them going out and doing what Jesus said. The rest, as I pointed out to you before, is found a lot of other places. In fact, I don't feel like I need to comment in detail on most of the rest.

We'll look it over. But we will encounter all of this material elsewhere, and I'll have another occasion to comment on it in the other contexts that it comes up. But verses 16 through 22 are from the Olivet Discourse, as I mentioned before.

He says, Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Interesting that he used this simile as sheep, because this whole thing was introduced by his recognizing that the people of Israel were like sheep. In verse 36 of chapter 9, he saw them like sheep having no shepherd.

So he sent out laborers into the harvest, but those laborers were like sheep too. Like sheep in the midst of wolves. Doesn't sound like a real inviting situation.

Sheep in the midst of wolves are in bad shape. In fact, the expression of being sheep in the midst of wolves is also found in Luke 10.3. And there, that's when he's sending out the 70. He says the same thing, but he says lambs there, like lambs in the midst of wolves.

Makes them seem even more vulnerable. He says in verse 16 here, Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. So, sheep, by the way, are not a good example of being wise.

Sheep are stupid animals. And they're vulnerable animals. But since you are, in one sense, very vulnerable, you're meek, you can't defend yourselves like sheep can't, you're in the midst of a hostile world, like wolves, yet you do have something on your side, and you can be wise.

You can be wise. Wise as serpents. Your enemies are serpents.

You've got to be as wise as your enemies are. As a matter of fact, you can be wiser. According to Psalm 119, in Psalm 119 and verse 98, the psalmist said, You, through your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

The next verse says, I have more understanding than my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep your precepts. You can be wiser than your enemies, because you meditate on the testimonies of God.

You keep God's precepts. He makes you wise through his commandments. Because of your knowledge of his word, it's not only possible to be as wise as the serpents that you're up against, but wiser than they.

So that the church is not, it's like sheep with reference to being able to defend itself physically against the persecution and the ravages of the violent nations that hate us. We're not allowed to defend ourselves physically, but we are allowed to use wisdom. And by the way, he goes on and explains how that wisdom is expressed.

You have to be as harmless as doves. Now, a dove is about as harmless as you can get. Next to a sheep.

Sheep and doves are both very harmless kinds of animals. Lambs, in the midst of wolves,

defenseless. But what they do have going for them is wisdom.

Now, he explains what wisdom will do in verses 17 and following. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues, and you'll be brought before governors and kings for my sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. This is, of course, much later than the mission that we were reading about a moment ago.

This happened in the book of Acts. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you shall speak, for it will be given you in that hour what you shall speak, for it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your father who speaks in you. Now, brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his children.

The children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures the end will be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another.

Now, let me stop there for a moment. I want you to see the connection between three of the things he says here. In verse 17 he says, they will deliver you up.

It is predicted. A sheep among wolves is going to get torn. It's going to get attacked.

They will deliver you up. But in verse 19 he says, but when they deliver you up, and in verse 23 he says, and when they persecute you, see, when they deliver you up, when they persecute you, he tells them what the reaction is. And there are two reactions.

The first reaction, well, let's take the second one first. The second one is, in verse 17, when they persecute you, flee. Run away.

That's at least one physical response you can make to attack. You can physically remove yourself from there. And there is more than one way to do that.

It's not just talking about running away on foot. I believe there is legitimate cause for hiding out, for the church at certain times being underground, as it has been in Russia and China and many other places in our century, to run away, to hide. Now, not to be totally invisible, because we still have a mission to the world, but where there is immediate danger, to take precautions.

That's part of being as wise as serpents. We're as harmless as doves, and we're like sheep among wolves, but we have something going for us. We have wisdom.

And wisdom tells you when to run away. In the Proverbs, I wish I knew the reference. I should have gotten it in advance.

I didn't. I don't know what the reference is. But twice in Proverbs it says, it says, the wise man foresees the evil and hides himself, but the foolish pass on and suffer or are

punished.

Someone's going to look that up and find that for you in Proverbs here, and when you find it, give me the reference. It's, foresees the evil and hides himself, is how it would read in the King James, if you have a concordance that uses the King James. So that's wisdom.

The wise man foresees the evil. So to be as wise as serpents in the face of hostile persecution means at least, the very least, that you hide or run away when you're persecuted, if, you know, if the chance is there. Did you find it, Jenny? I noticed you're looking there.

Let me know if you find the references. It's twice in Proverbs it says that. The wise man foresees the evil and hides himself.

Anyway, it's part of wisdom to recognize danger, in other words, and to take precautions. Not to be afraid, because we trust God, but to take precautions, to use wisdom. Did you find it? Proverbs 22.3 and Proverbs 27.12. Thank you very much.

That's 22.3 and 27.12. So wisdom, on the one hand, advises you to flee, to hide, to escape. Now, on the other hand, even though, you know, if you have opportunity to escape, you should, if you don't have opportunity to, you will be caught. And that's where verse 19 comes in.

When they deliver you up. When you actually are arrested. When you're actually brought to trial.

See, here's the other contingency. You either run away or you get caught. Or you may run away and still get caught.

You run away if you can, that's wisdom. But what if you get caught? You still need wisdom. And it says, do not worry, in verse 19, how or what you shall speak, for it will be given you in that hour what you shall speak.

And in verse 20 it says, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. You know that verse 20, has, in the parallel, Luke 21.15, it reads very differently than that. In Luke 21.15, instead of what we have here in verse 20, Luke's version says, for, it's after Jesus says, don't premeditate what you shall speak.

He says, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. That's Luke 21.15, and it's parallel to verse 20 here. I'll read it to you again.

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. So, if you have the wisdom to run away, do it. If you get caught

anyway, God will still give you wisdom.

His wisdom. He'll give you words to speak. He'll give you wisdom that is higher than that of your adversaries.

Now, of course, Luke is the one who renders it that way. He also wrote the book of Acts, and there can be little doubt that he was thinking of this very statement of Jesus in Acts chapter 6, when he's talking about Stephen. And it says in Acts chapter 6, in verse 9 it says, Then there arose some in what was called the synagogue of the freedmen, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those of Cilicia in Asia, disputing with Stephen.

But verse 10 says, Acts 6.10 says, And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. It sounds almost like a quote, certainly a strong allusion to Luke 21.15. I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which your adversaries will not be able to resist. He says, they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.

Now, notice, in Luke's version of the passage we're dealing with, he says, I'll give you wisdom. In Matthew's version, in Mark's, it says, The spirit will be speaking through you. It will not be you who speaks, but the spirit.

Just an observation, verse 20 here in Matthew 10, uses the expression, the spirit of your father, in the parallel in Mark 13.11, this is not of major importance, but it may be of value someday to note this. In Mark 13.11, in the same statement, it says, The Holy Spirit. Now, I say that, because in one passage, it's rendered the spirit of your father.

In the other passage, it's the Holy Spirit. Just a bit of data to stick in your data bank when you start wrestling with the issue of the Trinity. Okay? If you're going to ever do that.

The Holy Spirit is referred to as also the spirit of the father. And also as the spirit of Christ. Elsewhere in scripture, in 1 Peter, and in a few other places, Romans 8. The spirit of Christ, also is what the Holy Spirit is called.

Alright, now. So, he's saying, you guys are going to be in a hostile world. You seem defenseless, in fact.

You seem like sheep among wolves. You seem like doves that can do no harm to anyone. But, you have wisdom that exceeds that of your serpent-like oppressors.

And wisdom, first of all, would tell you to run away if you can't. But, in some cases, you're just going to get caught. And when they catch you, then wisdom will serve you well then too.

Don't even trust in your own wisdom. Don't even premeditate a defense for yourself. Just depend on the Holy Spirit in you.

Just depend on the spirit of God to give you a wisdom that your adversaries will not be

able to gain. Now, Stephen is an example. They couldn't resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

Of course, he died. So, there's no guarantees that wisdom is going to bail you out of a death sentence. But, see, that's the issue.

For the Christian, avoiding death is not the big deal. Survival is not the priority for the Christian. It is for the world, because self-preservation is the strongest human instinct.

Or, probably the strongest animal instinct too, as far as that goes. But, for Christians, we have a new mind, a new nature, and it's not our strongest instinct. The thing that compels us is that God will be glorified in our lives.

And, if we are brought to trial for our faith, then our greatest prayer is not that we can escape death, but that we can be the best testimony for God that we can be. To speak wisely, to speak in a way that will convince and convict our enemies, even if they still kill us. That's what happened to Stephen.

So, I'll just bring that point to your attention. You can be wise as serpents. Sometimes you'll have to take the retreat though.

Now, although I'm not going to comment on all the verses here today, because we're going to find most of them in another context elsewhere, I do want to say something, I do need to say something about the remainder of verse 23. Because it is unique to this chapter. It's not found in any other context.

In verse 23 it said, When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Now, the impression is given that they won't have time to dilly-dally.

They won't have time to linger in one place too long, because there's a limited amount of time available to them. And, they are sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and they should do their best to reach all the cities of Israel. And, they're not going to have time even to do that, even if they hurry, before the Son of Man comes.

Now, the Son of Man coming obviously refers to the end of their opportunity to reach any more cities of Israel. You will not have reached all the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Whatever is referred to there, obviously means that's the end of your opportunity to reach any of the cities of Israel.

So, don't waste any time. Especially don't cast your pearls before swine. If they're persecuting you in one city, then go somewhere else that they won't, where they can listen to you, because you just got a limited amount of time, and there's a lot of cities out there, and even as it is, you don't have enough time to reach them all before the opportunity ends.

And, the end of opportunity is spoken of as the coming of the Son of Man. Now, there's a number of ways to look at this expression. Everyone knows what I think about it.

We've covered it before, but let me just give you the various options on it. One is, and I'll give you the one that I think most absurd first. One is that Jesus was mistaken.

There are actually liberals, of course, who think that Jesus made the mistake of thinking that his second coming was going to occur before they got back from this outreach. How anyone could think that Jesus would make such a mistake, I do not know. First of all, being God, and speaking nothing but what the Father showed him, he clearly couldn't make a mistake.

Furthermore, even if he were not God, he's not likely to make that mistake, since he already knew and was predicting he was going to die and resurrect and do some other things too. Certainly, his second coming, he could not have thought, was only a few weeks off. Anyway, that's a stupid suggestion, but it's typical of liberals to make stupid suggestions whenever possible.

A couple of other things have been suggested by people who are not liberals and who do honor the Scripture and honor the Lord. One, the most natural, is to assume that the Son of Man's coming is the second coming of Christ and that Jesus was not wrong. But then they would have to reinterpret or they'd have to do something with either the expression, gone through, or the expression, cities of Israel.

If they emphasize, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, they could say, well, that means you will not have thoroughly evangelized everyone in the city before the second coming of Christ, and that is probably the case. I mean, even to this day, not everyone in every Jewish city has been evangelized. And so that could be taken that way.

Or to emphasize cities of Israel, some have felt that he's talking about all the cities in the world where Israelites live. Not the cities in the land of Israel, but the cities where Israel, that is, the Jews, are living, and that could be in all the countries of the world. You will not have reached all the cities yet before the Son of Man comes, where there are Jews to reach.

However, this would seem to fly in the face of Jesus' statement in Matthew 24, 14, that the gospel we preach to all the world is a witness to all nations before the end comes, and so on the one hand he'd be saying everyone's going to be reached, and on the other hand he'd say they're not all going to be reached by then. Of course, the other two options are, one is that Jesus is just talking about himself coming and rejoining them at the end of this mission. That is, on this short-term outreach they're going on, he says, I'm going to eventually join you, I'm going to come behind you.

You're going to go ahead of me and I'll come join you, and I'll catch up with you before you're done. So don't waste any time, hit as many cities as you can, because you won't get them all done before I join you, before we regather. Now that is a possible meaning, but as you know, my opinion is, he's talking about his coming in judgment in 70 AD, and the reason I do is because the coming of the Son of Man is sort of a technical expression with Jesus.

And he does say, in a passage which is by now familiar to all of you, in Matthew 16, 28, Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And in Matthew 24, he said that they will see the Son of Man coming and this generation will not pass till they see all these things. So it would seem that he was referring to 70 AD and some of these other places.

So he may be here also. It would seem, to my mind, likely. In which case, his saying, you will not have gone through all the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes, means before he comes and judges the nation, and there are no longer any cities of Israel to evangelize, after that, when the Jews are driven out into all the world, there's no more Jews allowed to be in Israel because the Romans banished them, that's the end of your opportunity to reach these cities of Israel.

So do as many as you can before then. The rest of the chapter I'd love to go into, but we will have opportunity to do so on other occasions, as I say, when we come to the parallels. Or else, maybe take another session on it next time I haven't decided.

But that's as far as we can go today. We're out of time. And of course, that does include the entire thing that he said to them on that given occasion of sending them out.