KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material
Matthew 10:16-23
Week of 11-17 September

Proclamation, Persecution & Promise

Leader Preparation

Read through the passage so that you are familiar with it.

We have been walking through discussion of Jesus's compassion, which should motivate us to go out into 'the harvest'. Last week, we focused on how offensive that message can be to some, and how we should react to those who do not receive it. This week we read about Jesus's clear description of the persecution we may face as we follow Jesus and do his will.

Read through the exegetical material on **pages 19-21** of the CG leader manual, familiarising yourself in particular with the parts that were not taught in the sermon.

Spend some time praying for the members of your group, and asking God to guide you as you lead your time together. Read through the questions, particularly looking for ways to share openly with your group.

The key focus of the message this week is on persecution for our faith. For some, this may be very real. What some regard as persecution may not seem as significant to others. Focus on asking God for wisdom and perseverance for each person in their walk with him.

Group time

A fun question or two:
- What is your favourite smell and why?
- What is your most used emoji – and why?
- What is the title of a podcast you would never listen to?
- If you didn't need sleep, what would you do with the extra time?

And a little more focused:
What is something you have been praying about consistently (or perhaps on and off) over a long period of time?
[Come back to these at the end of the evening and pray about them together; also make a note of them so you can follow up at a later stage.]

Exploring the Passage

READ Matthew 10:16-23

Sheep, Snakes, Doves

- How might the disciples have felt like "sheep among wolves" as they went out?
- What aspect of being a snake do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to develop?
- What about a dove is something Jesus wanted his disciples to emulate?

As modern day disciples,

- How are we potentially vulnerable as we go out into the world to spread the news of God's kingdom?
- How can you develop the wisdom of a snake and the innocence of a dove? Are these things that come naturally to you? To which of the two do you naturally lean?
- What problems could arise if we focused only on being a  or a ?

> *Sheep: completely defenseless against wolves, dependent on the shepherd and safety in numbers*
> *Snakes: choose wisely when to have a confrontation – they can slither away or stay to fight.*
> *Doves: represent gentleness and innocence. They are regarded as showing integrity without having ulterior motives.*

Facing persecution

- In verses 17 to 20, Jesus speaks of the persecution the disciples might face from both religious and political structures. What specific experiences does he say that they **will** encounter at the hands of these leaders?
- Do you know of Christians who have experienced these things – can you share about an incident that you know of and how God guided them / you?

- In verses 21-23, Jesus speaks of the ways disciples will face persecution within their own families. Most of us feel devastated that following Jesus could result in damage to such important relationships. How do you think you might react to having to choose Jesus over a family member's involvement in your life? Do you have an experience to share where you have had to handle a situation like this?

Surviving persecution

The passage shows us some important understanding of how to deal with the difficulties of times of persecution:

- Verse 20: this is the first time the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the New Testament not in relation to Jesus. Have you ever experienced a supernatural peace and clarity of mind and speech to enable you to address an issue? Perhaps look at the example of Peter in Acts 4:1-13.
- Verse 22: does this verse encourage you? Why or why not?
    - Look at Matthew 13:45-46. Can you relate to this choice?

Prayer

Take time to pray for each group member – particularly supporting them in the prayers they mentioned earlier. Perhaps you could pray in smaller groups of 3 or 4 rather than all together.

Heavenly Father
Through Jesus you have called us to go out into the harvest to reach people with the good news of your kingdom.
We are like helpless sheep:
Protect us by your spirit from those who would harm us.
Strengthen us through time in your word to shield us.
Remind us to stay close to our Christian community to enfold us.
Keep us under your care to guard us from harm.
Teach us to be as shrewd as snakes
– Knowing when to stand firm, and when to flee.
Keep us as innocent as doves
– untainted by the world around us, but not naïve.
Keep your saving grace always at the front of our minds, reminding us that you are a pearl of great value.
Guard us from the temptation to abandon you.
Plant your hope securely in our hearts to strengthen us to follow your way.
In Jesus' name,
Amen