



NO ORDINARY SHEEP

a church in the World

ABSTRACT

I sometimes think we, well, at least I know I forget that Jesus is coming to Jerusalem to die. Why is He ...

April 13, 2025

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Introduction

¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. -- Matthew 10:16

I have never fully understood the serpent part.

Why did Jesus use serpents as an example of how His disciples should be? Serpents aren't really depicted as the greatest creatures throughout the Bible. Even Satan is represented as a serpent. So, a snake does not seem like the greatest role model for a disciple of the Messiah.

But, when I dug a little deeper this week and read a little more, there was more beneath the surface than I thought. That's what we will be studying today, because the disciples of Jesus are Not Your Ordinary Sheep.

Body

Matthew 10:16

¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Sheep

So let's talk about the imagery Jesus is drawing for us here. “Sending us out as sheep.” So let us talk about sheep a little bit. Sheep are known to be timid and gentle. Non-aggressive and kind and not necessarily the smartest animal species on the planet. From a spiritual aspect sheep are used in the Bible as what? As a sacrifice. And we know what John the Baptist said about his cousin Jesus:

John 1:29

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Wolves

Now let's talk about wolves. They are highly

Now let's talk about the characteristics of wolves:

- **Highly Intelligent:** Wolves can solve problems, adapt to changing environments, and

learn from experience.

- **Stealth and Strategy:** Wolves often stalk prey quietly before launching a coordinated attack.
- They use coordinated tactics during hunts and adapt their behavior based on terrain, prey, and pack dynamics
- Wolves are carnivores, primarily hunting large ungulates like deer, elk, and moose

And I wanted to check one more thing, officially, even though I thought I knew the answer, do wolves hunt sheep?

- **Easy Prey:** Domestic sheep are generally slower, less alert, and lack natural defenses compared to wild prey.
- **Opportunistic Behavior:** Wolves are opportunistic hunters and will take advantage of vulnerable livestock if available.

So Jesus is telling His disciples that he is sending them out into the world like kind and gentle people who will be prey for highly intelligent and stealthy people who are looking to destroy them. That doesn't sound too good for His disciples.

However, Jesus said they would be like sheep, but they are not to act like sheep. They are to exhibit characteristics of two other animals. One makes total sense to me and the other, to this day I am still somewhat surprised.

Doves

“Be innocent as doves”:

Characteristics

- Gentle Nature: Doves are known for their calm and non-aggressive behavior.
- Monogamous: Most dove species form strong pair bonds and mate for life.
- Parental Care: Both parents take turns incubating eggs and feeding chicks

Biblical References

- Purity and humility (Leviticus 5:7)
- Holy Spirit descended like a dove (Matthew 3:16)

These are the characteristics we see in Jesus:

Matthew 11:28–29

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

2 Corinthians 10:1

“By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to

face with you, but 'bold' toward you when away!"

This totally made sense to me. You see this throughout the New Testament and even in the prophecy of Isaiah about the messiah, you see this:

Isaiah 42:2–3

"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

Snakes

... but the first characteristic which is to be wise, which is a wonderful characteristic, but the animal used, is a surprise.

Serpents ... Snakes

Really?!?

Characteristics of snakes:

- Carnivorous: Eat rodents, birds, eggs, insects, or even larger animals. Swallow prey whole.
- Predatory tactics: Some constrict (e.g., boas, pythons), others use venom (e.g., cobras, vipers).
- Solitary: Usually live alone except during mating season.
- Cold-blooded: Rely on external heat to regulate body temperature (ectothermic).
- Shedding: Regularly shed their skin to grow or remove parasites.

Biblical References

- Symbolizes cunning, lies, and sin. (Genesis 3)
- Evil (Psalm 58:4)
- Satan (Revelation 12:9)
- Hypocrisy & Corruption (Matthew 23:33)

There Can Be Good in the Bad

With these sorts of descriptions about a snake, why would Jesus say we should be wise as snakes. Well that got me thinking. Are there some people that for the most part you do not like, however you have to acknowledge there is something or a few things that they are good at. And actually you would like to be as good as them in those areas.

In Genesis 3:1 the Hebrew word "arum" is used and it can mean the following:

- subtle, shrewd, crafty, sly, sensible

There are Scriptures in the Bible where this word is used positively:

Proverbs 12:23

*A **prudent** man conceals knowledge,
but the heart of fools proclaims folly.*

Proverbs 27:12

*The prudent sees danger and hides himself,
but the simple go on and suffer for it.*

This verse really made it plain to me, because what are serpents good at. When they see danger they go and hide.

Take Aways

As Jesus is telling His disciples then and He is telling us now, it would seem that we are going out into a world who hates us as lambs to slaughter. That we will be torn apart by wolves. But we are not the normal type of sheep.

We are the sheep of God's pasture who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and we are to use His wisdom when interacting with the world. We are to be cunning in the best sense of the word. Meaning that we are to be cunning and shrewd while at the same time being innocent of any wrongdoing and gentle and kind in our approach.

I will close with one of the best examples of this from the Bible and that is Stephen's speech in the book of Acts:

Acts 6:8-15 ESV

[8] And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. [9] Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. [10] But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. [11] Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." [12] And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, [13] and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, [14] for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." [15] And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Remember to always make it about Jesus