

Home Group study: week beginning 22nd June 2020

Jesus Christ: Dangerous Revolutionary

7: Cunning

What animal would you like to resemble? Do you like the idea of being like a snake?

Read:

Matthew 10: 16, John 4: 1-17

Matthew 10: 16 sets us a principle, and in John 4 we see one of the occasions where Jesus demonstrates that principle in practice.

Discovery

Snakes don't get a great press in the Bible. Satan's first appearance, in Genesis 3, is as 'the serpent', and he is quickly condemned by God to 'crawl on your belly'. Jesus calls the teachers of the law and Pharisees 'hypocrites', before going on to say to them: 'You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?' So what do we think of Jesus telling us to be 'as shrewd as snakes' in Matthew 10:16? Is there a contradiction here? Or is Jesus perhaps encouraging us to play Satan at his own game?

In the same sentence Jesus tells us we need to be 'as innocent as doves'. What associations do doves have for us? John Eldredge in his book 'Beautiful Outlaw', on which this sermon series is based, interprets Jesus' instruction to be 'shrewd' as 'cunning', hence the title of this week's sermon. Is there perhaps a different way we could interpret 'shrewd', maybe one that is more in line with gifts of the Spirit?

We started to look at John 4 last week. Let's now look at how Jesus applies shrewdness and a dove-like approach to the woman at the well. Firstly, how do we see Jesus applying these principles in verses 1-3?

Why do you think Jesus asked the woman for a drink? There's a very practical answer in v10, but is that the only reason? We discovered last week that Jesus, culturally speaking, should not have been engaging this woman in conversation. What does the way she replies to Jesus reveal about her? (*Hint: You might expect a lone woman in that culture to be acutely embarrassed in this situation: she doesn't appear to show much embarrassment.*)

The woman has quite a lot of questions for Jesus in verses 9-13 and asks them boldly. Does Jesus directly answer any of them? Why might that be, do you think? Does the way he avoids answering suggest he's being as shrewd as a snake or as innocent as a dove?

In verses 16-18 Jesus demonstrates perfectly how to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Discuss how he does that.

Understanding

Jesus has played this situation very shrewdly; he has skilfully led the conversation round by shrewdness bordering on cunning. By chatting to this woman easily and openly in a situation where he ought to have had nothing to do with her, he has also shown innocence almost to the point of naivety as part of his strategy.

The conversation has clearly been life-changing to her. We might think Jesus should have been more robust in dealing with her immoral lifestyle. Would this conversation have been so life-changing for her if Jesus had, as Tim put it on Sunday, 'thrown the book at her'?

Verse 4 tells us Jesus 'had to go through Samaria'. Last week we discussed the way most Jews making the same journey would have avoided Samaria altogether, as there was so much animosity between Jews and Samaritans. In Verse 34 of this chapter, Jesus says to his disciples:

'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work'

and in verse 35 he goes on to say:

'I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.'

Does this suggest that he has to go through Samaria to achieve a deeper purpose?

Read: John 4: 21-24, 39-42. The Samaritans were not by this time considered to be part of mainstream Judaism, so it is remarkable that Jesus would be sharing such profound truths with a Samaritan woman of dubious morals. What do you think Jesus' deeper purpose may be?

This encounter is not just a nice story: Jesus is actually revealing fundamental truth about his purposes. The fact that his message is for everyone, not just mainstream Jews, is mind-blowing: he has revealed to this woman truth that 2,000 years later would lead to our own salvation! So, was Jesus being 'shrewd' in not diverting around Samaria? And in what way would you say he was also showing innocence?

Application

For most of us, being as 'shrewd as snakes' is easier said than done. Add to that the need to be as 'innocent as doves', and that leaves a lot of room for error! How do we as Christians rise to a seemingly impossible challenge?

How might we tackle a given situation using these seemingly incompatible characteristics effectively? What attributes (gifts and/or fruit) of the Holy Spirit do we need to help us?

Pray for members of the group to be blessed with those gifts.