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**Matthew** 10:5–20, ESV, highly abridged.

<sup>5</sup> *These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons. <sup>9</sup> Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey. <sup>11</sup> And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone will not listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.*

<sup>16</sup> *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake. <sup>19</sup> When they deliver you over, do not be anxious what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

**Deuteronomy** 5:1–6:7, ESV, highly abridged.

<sup>5</sup> *And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. <sup>3</sup> Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. God said:*

<sup>6</sup> *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of slavery.*

<sup>7</sup> *“You shall have no other gods before me.*

<sup>8</sup> *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water.*

<sup>11</sup> *“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*

<sup>12</sup> *“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded.*

<sup>16</sup> *“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you.*

<sup>17</sup> *“You shall not murder.*

<sup>18</sup> *“And you shall not commit adultery.*

<sup>19</sup> *“And you shall not steal.*

<sup>20</sup> *“And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

*<sup>21</sup> “ ‘And you shall not covet anything that is your neighbor’s.’*

*<sup>22</sup> “These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.*

*<sup>28</sup> <sup>32</sup> You shall be careful to walk in the way that the LORD has commanded you.*

***6** <sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”*

### **Knowledge, wisdom, and innocence.**

I had a friend in grammar school. We'll call him Morry Sanders. His dad, Mr. Sanders, was my Little League coach. I was an accurate batter, but not very strong, and so he worked with me until I could lay down a solid hit that would get me to first base. I could move quickly and catch accurately, so he put me at shortstop. But there was an edge to this man that I noticed even as a boy. He seemed to be worried or distracted, even a bit angry all the time, at nothing really. We were all a little scared of him. Morry wasn't a good student. He was a disciplinary problem in school. Everything seemed okay, though, until Mr. Sanders bought Morry a motorcycle and a .22 rifle. He was thirteen. I'll get back to this story.

We often associate innocence with ignorance. Children are innocent because they don't have the necessary mental and social context to do wrong to anyone. But adults, at least those with normal cognitive abilities, are certainly not

ignorant of the world. We cannot help but have knowledge of all the terrible things that people do. We are aware of mass shootings, wars where civilians are massacred, and politicians and celebrities who use their power only to advance themselves at the expense of others. We're also constantly exposed to television and movies where greedy, violent, and ungodly behavior is celebrated as signs of strength, success, attractiveness, and power. We are all too aware that society rewards us for putting the needs of others below our own needs. We are encouraged to idolize those who take the most from the world and give the least. It is very easy to take a cynical approach to life and give up on innocence entirely. We are so saturated with knowledge of our brutal world that we cannot help but be corrupted. The idea of maintaining any moral innocence seems totally naïve.

But as Christians, we do want to embrace good and reject evil. We want to train ourselves to screen whatever goes into us, to repel what we know we don't want in our minds, and to cleanse ourselves of whatever rot has gotten into us. We don't do it by forcibly forgetting things: we do it by distancing ourselves from evil, by limiting our exposure as much as possible, and by never letting ourselves be tempted by the worldly benefits of doing wrong. In Romans 16:19, Paul tells believers that he wants them *"to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."* This sounds simple enough, but our response as modern people is

that this is impossible. Still, let's look at what Jesus had to say to the Apostles when he sent them out to spread the Word. He tells them to *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons."* These miracles would prove to the world their right to speak God's Word. He also tells them to be modest and humble, to live for God's world, not the world of humans. Jesus says to them: *"You received without paying; give without pay. <sup>9</sup> Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey."* But he does tell them that they are to stay away from those who are evil, who might corrupt them. He says: *"<sup>11</sup> And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town."* As far as this last statement goes, it might seem rather ineffective to insult someone by shaking the dust off your feet in front of them. But where this comes from is that rabbis of this time, if they had been off on a walking journey, and if they might have passed through any pagan areas, they were to shake the dust off their feet to cleanse themselves before reentering the Holy Land. So, shaking the dust off your feet means to shun and avoid those who are evil, who are not innocent. Jesus was very clear. We are to meet a very high standard. We are

to be out in the world, spreading the faith. We will become knowledgeable about the evils of the world. Still, we are to live simple lives and not become corrupted.

Jesus continues in his instructions to his Apostles, to all those who represent the faith. He says: <sup>16</sup> *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake. <sup>19</sup> When they deliver you over, do not be anxious what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”* We inherit the command given to the Apostles to not hide and to spread the Word. Jesus is telling us that yes, we will be sheep among wolves, and when we reject the ways of the world, we will indeed be persecuted for this. But there is no need to worry about this, because whenever we are caught between good and evil, God will tell us what to do – God will speak through us. If we have the courage to fight for our innocence in the middle of evil, and if we then expose ourselves to the terrible knowledge of the real world, God will get us through. We can be as wise as serpents and as yet innocent as doves. We can indeed do it.

The difference between wise and knowledgeable is important. The reason we should protect children when they are on the Internet is because they are not yet wise. They are not ready to be knowledgeable. They aren't capable of screening what they witness. To maintain innocence while being knowledgeable, we must be wise. We become wise through faith, through living lives that are consistently modeled after the life of Christ. We care about the sick, the poor, the lonely, and the outcasts. That's why Jesus tells us to be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves – because by living Christ-like lives, we find the only way of maintaining our innocence despite our extensive, grim knowledge of the world.

Paul tells us in Romans Chapter 12 how to live wisely, with knowledge, and with innocence. He tells us: *Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.* <sup>10</sup> *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.* <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.* <sup>14</sup> *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.* <sup>17</sup> *Repay no one evil for evil.* <sup>19</sup> *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* <sup>21</sup> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The story of Exodus continues into the Book of Deuteronomy. The Israelites have spent forty years in the desert. An entirely new generation has

been born and raised. They have no first-hand knowledge of life in Egypt, and they have very limited knowledge of the early years in the desert. Moses stops them before the Jordan River. Moses will not enter the Promised Land, but he will review for them all that the Chosen People have been through, about their Covenant with God, about the promises that God has made to them. He will prepare them to live like God's People in the Promised Land. This is Moses' farewell sermon, his last chance at taking an ignorant generation, filling them with godly knowledge, teaching them to be wise, and then telling them how to live with spiritual innocence. They are like children who are going to grow up very, very fast, right at the entrance to the Promised Land. Moses lays out the commandments given to him to then give to the People of God:

*7 " You shall have no other gods before me.*

*8 " You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water.*

*11 " You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*

*12 " Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded.*

*16 " Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you.*

*17 " You shall not murder.*

*18 " And you shall not commit adultery.*

*19 " And you shall not steal.*

*20 " And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

*21 " And you shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's."*

Moses tells them how to be wise, so that they maintain innocence in the presence of what they are going to confront in life - and then gives them a warning:

*28 <sup>32</sup> You shall be careful to walk in the way that the LORD has commanded you. These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”*

They are about to enter the land of Canaan, Israel, and they will establish God’s nation. They need to know how to live. It’s very simple. Follow the laws of God – and keep them in your heart and your mind every day, wherever you go, whatever you do. Think about how you must live in the morning and at night.

Back to my friend, Morry Sanders. It turns out that, although I did not know it, Morry had far too much knowledge of the brutal side of our world. His father was a violent man who repeatedly harmed both his wife and Morry. Morry was not innocent. He was highly knowledgeable, but not wise. One day, he got on his motorcycle, with his .22 rifle and he shot seven people. But, because it was not a hunting or military grade rifle, nobody died, and everyone recovered. Morry ended up in a psychiatric hospital and I never saw him again.

A lot of the harm that happens in the world would go away if all people filled themselves with the kind of knowledge that Moses gave his people, if we all worked at being wise, and if we put in the hard work that it takes to remain innocent. We are drifting away from God as a nation. We are soaking up all the wrong knowledge. Young people are on the Internet exposing themselves to



violence, depravity, and extreme narcissism. Long before they are wise, they are taking in the wrong knowledge. Their innocence is being destroyed.

We are the generation born in the desert, filled with the right kind of knowledge, made wise so that we can protect our innocence. We are indeed the roots of an ancient society, one founded on a covenant between God and Moses, and then later, with a covenant between Jesus and each of us. We must go out into the world each day, filled with the joy of knowing that we are working hard, through prayer and Scripture, to be wise and knowledgeable, and to remain innocent. We talk to God. We read the Bible and we study the amazing, ancient faith lessons that tell us exactly how to respond when we are confronted with evil. As Christians, we do not live by the book of Leviticus. We don't have those ancient rituals to remind us of God throughout the day and during every season of our lives. We must invent our own rituals. We lift up our hearts every day, and we ask God to give us the strength to help others learn the extreme wisdom, the ancient knowledge, and the beautiful innocence of faith. Please pray with me.

*God, send us out into the world. Help us spread the knowledge that you brought to this world. Help us lift others up to a state of godly knowledge. Let us find joy in knowing that no matter what happens in this world, no matter what we witness or experience, our faith will always keep us innocent. Amen.*