

by  
Didymus

**Evensong readings:-**

Exodus Ch.5 v1 – Ch.6v1

Phil Ch.3, v.4b-14

Matt Ch.10, v.16-22

The three readings focus on the threat perceived, and God's deliverance from that threat. In Exodus we read of the situation in Egypt, where the Pharaoh, increasingly worried about the growing Israelite population, decides to make life unpleasant for them. This has been balanced against the considerable value to Egypt of the Israelites, acting as servants and de facto slaves. The well-known story develops into the seven plagues and the flight from Pharaoh into the wilderness. We can see how the threat became real and the Israelites were delivered from that threat.



Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, was writing about the persistent Jewish Christians, whom he calls "dogs", (*a moment of Pauline irritation?*). They were concerned that the Christian church should uphold the Abrahamic covenant, which required male circumcision (Gen Ch.17, vv10-27). Peter had set this aside (Acts Ch.11), saying that what God had declared clean could not be called impure. In his letter to the Colossians (Ch.2, v11) Paul had spoken of "the circumcision of the heart" that a Christian believer had experienced had made physical circumcision no longer necessary, and here he reiterates his teaching.



The gospel according to Matthew was originally thought to have been written by the Apostle as the first of the four, but subsequently both assumptions are thought wrong. "Matthew" is more of an attribution, it seems. It includes the Gospel according to Mark, which points to Mark as the first to be written. It seems very unlikely that one who sat alongside Our Lord should need the help of a Gospel written by one who did not. The Gospel is focussed on linking the Judaism of the OT with the Christianity of the NT, and is the most fiercely critical of the Pharisees of the four Gospels.

It was written between 75 and 90AD, by which time Matthew, if not dead, would have been very old. Current thinking is that the Gospel was assembled from Mark and records of Jesus' acts and words, (which may well have come from Matthew), by a Christian rabbi at Antioch, where Matthew taught. There was thought to have been a council called at Jamnia to ratify the canon of the OT, to which Christian converts were barred. This has been questioned, but certainly Jesus is quoted in Ch.23 with a mighty denunciation of those who teach but do not observe. Increasingly, the Gospel moves away from Jewish to Gentile Christianity.

The reading is part of the Mission Discourse, where Jesus prepares his Disciples for the mission of preaching and healing. It is largely based on Mark's Ch.13 and is also in Luke's Ch.10. It is of course, as true today as it ever was.



Matthew Ch.10, vv16-22 (NIV):-

*"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved".*

## Prayers

Think of South Africa's apartheid, East Germany's stasi, Russia? Iran? North Korea? China? And so on. Remember the words of Isaiah.

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.*

Let us pray for them. Amen.