

# Sheep Among Wolves



Matthew 10:16-39

Year A Proper 7

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part   ▲ = medium sized part   ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲	▲	■	▲
▲	<b>Thomas</b> - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	▲	●	▲	▲
▲	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲	▲	■	●
▲	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲	●	▲	▲
●	<b>Susanna</b> - the more conventionally-minded friend of Joanna, who, like her friend, left her home to become a disciple	▲		▲	
●	<b>Joanna</b> - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲		●	
▲	<b>Jesus</b>		▲		▲

## Scene 1

James , Joanna , John , Judas , Susanna , Thomas

*{Jesus has been instructing his disciples on the eve of sending them out to all of Israel announce his coming.}*

**James**     *[victoriously]* Now we're talking! Now we're talking!

**Thomas**    Why are you so happy? He's sending us away.

**James**     Yes, but he's sending *us*!

**Judas**     Rather than recruit another seventy and send them instead?

**James**     Exactly. And not only that, but it's just going to be the original twelve. The core.

**John** I'm glad about that, too. I'm relieved the rabbi will still have a good group around him.

**Susanna** We'll do our best to hold the fort.

**Joanna** I still wish I could go. It's unjust to think I couldn't do as good a job as anyone representing the rabbi!

**Judas** Not a good idea.

**James** Definitely! In the first place -

**Susanna** *[interrupting]* In the first place, what? She's just a silly woman?

**James** That's not what I was going to say!

**Judas** Actually, Joanna might make an even better missionary than any of us because of her social standing. She could get in doors we never could, and she would have extra credibility.

**Joanna** "But"?

**Judas** But it would be too dangerous. I'm sure that's all James was going to say. It would be too dangerous to send any of the women out, especially someone as valuable as you.

**James** Yes!

**Joanna** I can understand that for the other women (or even for some of the men who are being sent!) but my social standing is precisely what would protect me.

**John** You're probably right, but it seems the criteria was not who was most qualified or able. And who's to say which role carries the greatest honor and trust, anyway, to stay or to go?

**Thomas** I know which role *I'd* rather have.

**James** I have to admit, it does seem a little nuts to send out a nonbeliever to proselytize the masses.

**Thomas** Actually, I think I could do that part. I could certainly report what the rabbi says about himself, and add what I think of him as a person, and declare that I'd follow him to the end of the world if he called me to.

**Susanna** I think that's what the people really want to hear. You're going to do great out there.

**Thomas** I just don't want to leave his side. I don't want to leave the group.  
*[to Susanna]* I envy you.

**Susanna** Well, I don't envy you! I could never even *want* to go like Joanna.

**Joanna** *[in a conspiratorial hush]* So, what's he been telling you in these prep sessions?

**John** Nothing special -

**James** *[interrupting by loudly clearing his throat]* Harrruummpphhh!

**John** What?

**James** *[in a low voice]* Should we be revealing this material to someone who won't be going?

**Thomas** Did the rabbi ask us to keep it a secret?

**Judas** Not that I recall. And he hasn't said anything out of the ordinary, anyway.

**John** *[to Joanna]* I was going to say that you knew it all, already. It's pretty much what he had us teach the seventy: don't go door to door, find a worthy house, heal the sick, take no money, and so forth.

**Susanna** Goodness! Heal the sick?

**James** The seventy came back reporting all kinds of miracles. Not just healing the sick, but casting out demons. And: the rabbi said we'd raise the dead.

**Joanna** *[to Thomas]* If you do that, you'll pretty much *have* to believe!

**Thomas** I kind of hope I don't!

## Scene 2

James , Jesus , John , Judas , Thomas

*{Jesus continues his instruction to the Twelve, who continually interrupt him with their reactions, but each time, he simply continues his lecture calmly from where he left off rather than reply directly.}*

**Jesus** I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes -

**James** *[interrupting]* And as dangerous!

**John** Dangerous?

**James** Sure, because we're going to kick ass out there! This is the beginning of the coming of the Kingdom.

**Thomas** But we're just messengers, right? Not soldiers. At least not yet.

**Judas** That doesn't mean the message we bear won't be as disruptive and cutting as if we were wielding swords instead.

**Jesus** Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes, but 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 -

**Thomas** *[interrupting fearfully]* When they arrest us?

**James** *When* they arrest us?

**John** *[weakly]* When they *flog* us?

**Judas** *[with confidence and relish]* When we appear before governors and kings!

**Jesus** But when they arrest you, don't worry about what to say or how to say it. It will be given to you what you should say in the moment, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

**Thomas** How will we be able to tell? What if it's just us speaking? How can we be sure?

**James** Yeah, how can the spirit of the Father speak through Thomas when he doesn't even believe in the Father?

**John** Maybe it doesn't matter. And maybe it'll always feel like it's us talking. Maybe the important thing is not to worry about it.

**Judas** All the same, I think might be useful to work up a basic message that people can rehearse.

**Jesus** Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

**Judas** What?

**Thomas** Is...that the message we're supposed to deliver?

**Jesus** You'll be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

**John** No, I think he's still talking about what's going to happen to us.

**James** Well, there's no way *this* set of brothers is going to betray each other. We'll *both* be standing firm at the end!

**Jesus** When you're persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

### Scene 3

James , Joanna , John , Judas , Susanna , Thomas

*{They take another break, and the members of the Twelve discuss what they've heard so far with some of the others.}*

**Joanna** So how was the latest session?

**John** Confusing.

**Thomas** Depressing!

**James** Only if you think you're going to fail the tests.

**Susanna** What tests?

**Judas** I wouldn't call them tests. But there are apparently going to be some pretty stiff challenges.

**Thomas** "Challenges"? I'd call them catastrophes!

**Joanna** What could be so bad?

**John** We're going to be arrested, and beaten. Hated and betrayed by friends and family.

**Susanna** That's dreadful! But you speak as if it was going to happen for certain. Surely, these were just dangers the rabbi was warning you against.

**James** There's no "if" about it. "*When* you're arrested" is what he said. He said we *will* be flogged and betrayed.

**Joanna** I'm glad I'm not going, after all.

**Thomas** I wish I could stay behind!

**Judas** We all knew what we were signing up for. We all knew there was going to be tremendous physical risk, and that no one would be able to avoid it. After all, beyond this little traveling campaign, there's still a War to be fought, and even if you don't wield a sword on the battlefield, you're still going to die pretty horribly if we lose.

**James** I'm not so sure about that now.

**Susanna** You think the rabbi's not going to claim the kingship?

**James** What? No! What are you thinking? No, I think the war might be won without striking a single blow!

**John** That's what I've always believed! (Or hoped, anyway.) The Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and it'll be achieved not by strength of arms, but by...well, by exactly what we're about to do: going out and preaching to the people.

**Thomas** That's fine for renewing the nation, but don't you think the Romans will object?

**Joanna** Maybe they'll be renewed as well.

**James** [*incredulously*] The Romans? That's crazy! And the rabbi already told us right from the start that we're only supposed to go to the people of Israel.

**Susanna** If that's the case, then why do you think there's isn't going to be a war?

**James** It was something he said right at the end of his talk. [*to the others*] Remember?

**John** Yes, but I wasn't sure what he meant. He said that we wouldn't even finish going through all the cities of Israel before the Son of Man came.

**Joanna** Those were his exact words? "Before the Son of Man came"?

**John** "Comes." Yeah.

**Thomas** "Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

**Susanna** What does it mean?

**James** It's obvious. Before we're done traveling and spreading the word, he'll be on his throne.

**Judas** And what about the Romans? Do you agree with Joanna after all about their potential to be renewed as well?

**James** No! I don't know how they're going to be neutralized, but it won't be *that* way. Maybe the rabbi will call down fire and brimstone to destroy them. Or an army of angels.

**Thomas** [*jokingly*] Maybe it'll be those staying behind who'll do the fighting.

**Susanna** Bite your tongue!

**Judas** I suppose it's a possibility, but if it is, then it's not something he's discussed with me or anyone else as far as I know. I'm more inclined to take it the opposite way completely: He's saying that there *will* be a war, and that it's going to happen sooner than we think.

**John** [*realizing what Judas is getting at*] Before we finish visiting all the towns!

**Judas** Yup. At some point while we're still out there, he's going to declare himself.

**Joanna** That's wonderful!

**Judas** Is it?

**James** We're going to be left out! If he raises an army without us, then it'll be some newcomer who stands by his side when he wins!

**Judas** You think he's going to win?

**James** Of course! Are you beginning to doubt as well?

**Judas** I have no doubt that a successful revolt is possible. I even think this field work is a good start: to build support in villages and towns and cities all over Israel. But it's just a start. If he thinks it'll be enough all by itself to instantly launch a revolt, he's badly miscalculating. Unless he really is counting on angels.

**John** *[reasserting his earlier point]* Or on the power of his teachings to touch the human heart, Israeli or Roman.

**Susanna** *[straining to work it out]* I was happy he was sending people out, and happy it didn't have to be me, but now I'm not sure I'm happy about anything!

**Thomas** *[glumly]* There doesn't seem to be a promising interpretation - except for the angels. I wish I believed in them.

**Joanna** *[softly]* I believe in them. But it's not helping!

**James** *[firmly]* You've all become doubters! The tests haven't even begun, and you're already flunking out. Well, I for one am standing firm.

#### Scene 4

James , Jesus , John , Judas , Thomas

*{Jesus resumes the instructional sessions.}*

**Thomas** Rabbi, could you answer a few questions before we resume?

*{Jesus makes no answer.}*

**John** *[jumping in]* We weren't sure we understood some of the things you said in the last session. We just want to be clear on everything before we go out on this mission.

*{Still no response.}*

**James** *[bluntly]* Is your Day coming before we even finish visiting all the towns? If so, what kind of army will do the fighting, and where are you getting it from?

*{No reply.}*



**Judas** You understand this is the kind of thing we need to know, don't you? We're your advisors; we've got to work together on these things.

**Jesus** The students are not above the teacher, nor the servants above the master. It's enough for the students and servants to achieve the same level of fame or infamy as their teachers and masters. If the head of the house has been called a devil, how much more the members of his household!

**Judas** Is that a response to my point?

**John** I don't think so.

**Jesus** Therefore, don't be afraid of those who will persecute you, for there is nothing concealed that won't be made known.

**Thomas** I don't understand how that's a reason not to be afraid.

**James** *[to Jesus]* Do you mean that whatever happens to us, at least it won't be covered up? That if they imprison us or kill us, they'll eventually be called to account?

**Thomas** That doesn't comfort me much.

**Jesus** What I tell you in the dark, proclaim in the light. What is whispered in your ear, shout from the rooftops. Don't be afraid of those who can kill your body but can't kill your soul. Rather, fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in Hell.

**Thomas** Okay, I understand that reasoning better - but somehow, I don't find it comforting, either!

**Judas** *[to Jesus]* Are you threatening us with damnation if we don't complete the mission?

**James** Of course not! It's our enemies that should be afraid of the God who can damn them.

**John** I'm sure the whole point of portraying a God powerful enough to send you to Hell is that he'll also use his power to protect us. *[to Jesus]* Isn't that right?

**Jesus** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

**John**        See? I was right. The smallest little bird, every hair on our heads:  
the Father sees them all.

**Thomas**    *[grimly]* What I hear is this: the Father may care for every little  
sparrow, but they still fall.

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*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at  
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