

To the Lost Sheep

Matthew 10:1-15

The reason you are hearing the gospel today is because Jesus sent out the apostles. He preached the kingdom of God and went through Israel teaching and healing, which equipped His disciples to imitate Him. Chapter ten is a sermon on mission which is full of wisdom to receive and apply in the church and our individual lives.

The Twelve

Jesus summons His twelve disciples, the first time they are referred to this way (v. 1). The people of God are like sheep without a shepherd, weary scattered, so these new leaders of the twelve tribes receive power to go out, gather, teach, heal, and bless. We don't know too much about most of the disciples because they spent time working and not building personality cults, but four of them are fishermen (Peter and Andrew, James and John), two are tax collectors (James of Alphaeus and Matthew), one is a zealot (a radical opponent of Rome), and there's Judas Iscariot among them. The main and perhaps the only thing they all have in common is love for Christ and commitment to His mission. First, we see that like the twelve disciples, the church today is made up of strikingly different people with complementary strengths, all beautifully united in Christ. Second, these men humanly considered are very ordinary. God chooses humble vessels of clay so that we will know the power of the gospel comes from Him (1 Cor. 1:27; 2 Cor. 4:7). And third, though Jesus is a flawless and uncompromised leader, He faces division. It's not clear at this point if Jesus knows Judas will betray Him, but it seems unlikely. Dealing with treachery in the body of Christ is part of walking with God. Abel had Cain, David had Absalom, Paul had Alexander the coppersmith, and George Washington had Benedict Arnold. These diverse, humble disciples are the foundation of the new Israel upon which we are built (Eph. 2:19-22).

The Resources

The twelve apostles are empowered as they are sent out: "He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (v. 1). Jesus commands them not to go to the land of the Gentiles or to into a city of Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (vv. 5-6). It's not that He doesn't love Gentiles. We've already seen Him heal the centurion's servant, and soon He will heal a Syrophenician woman's daughter. But Israel is a priestly nation, called to be God's faithful people to minister to the nations and bring them to Yahweh. The Lord says to Abraham, "My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4). The psalmist sings, "God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, Selah. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Selah" (Ps. 67:1-4). It's through the new Israel that the Gentiles will hear. This why the gospel is for the Jew first, then the Gentile (Rom. 1:16). In other words, Jesus is strategic. He empowers the disciples to preach the kingdom, heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons, and they did (Acts 9:36-43, 20:9-10, 5:12-16, 8:6-14). Freely they have received, and therefore should freely give (v. 8). The church is God's ministry of mercy, and therefore they set out to distribute it. On this trip they were not to bring gold, silver, or copper, bags, extra coats or sandals or staffs because a worker is worthy of his wages (vv. 9-10). Jesus does not send the apostles out as beggars to rely on charity. They would show up to *work*, and that

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work is worthy of provisions. Jesus already told them not to worry about what they would eat or drink or wear (5:31-34), and now they will rely completely on the power of the message to provide for them. Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary to China founder of the China Inland Mission, said “Depend on it. God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply. He is too wise a God to frustrate His purposes for lack of funds, and He can just as easily supply them ahead of time as afterwards, and He much prefers doing so.” We would not absolutize Jesus’ instructions to the apostles on this mission—no extra money or shoes for any missionary—but neither should we disregard the principle of relying on the power of the gospel to transform people so they gladly support the work. Missions and church plants can be overfunded as well as underfunded. We can see the effect of the gospel on the people who respond. When the Lord shakes loose the grip of mammon on hearts, it’s no longer a question of how much you have to give but rather a question of how much you can (2 Cor. 9:6-7). Our church was planted counting on the work of the gospel to flourish, and it has. We must be sure to be faithful it continues.

The Urgency

The apostles would go into cities and towns, see who wants to hear the good news—who is worthy of it—and stay there until it was time to go (v. 11). They would greet a household and if the response was friendly, their peace would be upon it. But if not, they were to take their peace and move on (vv. 12-13). When leaving houses or cities that rejected the gospel, they would shake the dust off their feet, knowing that the day of judgment will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than that city (vv. 14-15). Shaking off the dust means the uncleanness of that place doesn’t go with you. Jesus sets the expectation that some people will not receive the good news—they don’t want the message or the healing, cleansing, rising, and peace that follow it (v. 8). This was the case when Jesus Christ Himself went, so it was for the apostles and for us. The reason why it will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement is because *to whom much is given, much is required*. Israel had the Scriptures, the covenant, the promises, all the blessings of being the people of God, and yet they rejected Him. Apart from true, living, evangelical faith, the only kind that God gives, it is not a blessing to be called a believer. The apostles would not burn bridges after leaving unreceptive people, but they knew where to locate the problem and not be derailed from the mission. The presence of weeds doesn’t change the fact that the harvest is abundant, so they would continue to until finding a worthy house. There is the urgency of the gospel. It’s good *news* that people need to hear. We’re not to be frantic, but certainly strategic with an eye to long-term impact (cf. Titus 1:5). We sow and plant, and God gives the increase.