

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve - Lesson 1

Matthew 9:35-10:15; Mark 6:6-11; Luke 9:1-5

The disciples had been following Jesus watching and assisting in the mission of preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Now, in their continued training, Jesus will send them out on their first “solo flight.”

I. The Need and Reaction

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages (Greek tense of continual action), teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ³⁶ But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. ³⁷ Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few;” Matthew 9:35-37

The Need – “multitudes” Jesus moved **into all** of the cities and villages of Galilee.

“cities” – large, rich economic trade centers; “villages” – small, poor farming and fishing centers Jesus had no preference to where He ministered! Both had needs! He met those needs, the spiritual and physical, with both preaching and healing diseases. He viewed the people with two beautiful word pictures taken from the world of agriculture!

“as sheep having no shepherd” – Sheep abandoned by a shepherd are open and vulnerable to predators and dangers. Without the watchful eye of a shepherd, they can wander into unknown hazards. There would be no one to take them to pastures or fresh water. And they would be free for the taking by any thief or hungry meat-eating animal! Without a shepherd, they would have no care or protection! This is what Jesus saw when He looked at those around Him – people spiritually tired, uncertain, and without purpose in the world. The Jewish Religious Leaders always claimed to be shepherds, but they were not. We see this word picture recurring in the Old Testament. (Ezekiel 34:1-6) Instead of shepherding Israel, they were adding burdens, leaving the people in a state of concern, discouragement, and spiritually sick! And at the time of Christ, it was the same!

“harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few” – But He also saw the multitudes as an over-ripe harvest. Many years ago, when my parents were home with us on furlough from the mission field, a farmer friend of theirs rented a field to a local canning company that planted tomatoes. For some reason, the company was not able to get to the field at the peak of harvest. My parents were contacted by their friend to come and pick all the tomatoes they wanted. Knowing my parents, I understood we were in trouble! They loaded up their station wagon with every box, bag, and container they could find in my house, and we all headed out to the field. When we arrived, as far as we could see, was a mixture of green and red. I was a young mom, with limited space and time, but there was no deterring my parents from the lure of these large, beautiful, ripe, free tomatoes and by the time we were done, there was no room in that station wagon for another tomato. But as we packed up to leave, we realized we had hardly made a dent in that field. It was sad to know most of those tomatoes would go to waste. Jesus saw the masses as a field ready for harvest and the great tragedy was the lack of harvesters. At the time of Christ Galilee had over 200 villages and cities; the harvest truly was plenteous, but even with Jesus’ extensive ministry, still many hadn’t heard and there were only a handful of laborers.

The Reaction – Jesus – “moved with compassion” – As we study the life of Christ, we read several times of His compassion for the plight of man. As He taught, preached, and healed, His heart was heavy with the needs of the masses. Compassion and mercy have always been the heart of God for man. (Psalm 86:15; 78:38-39; 111:4-6; 145:8-10)

II. The Prayer and Solution

**“ Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.”
Matthew 9:38**

The Prayer – you pray - “Lord of the harvest” – Before we begin every Bible study, we spend some time sharing prayer requests and praying. Have you ever considered, here we read Jesus’ prayer request? This is what Christ desires us to pray. In John 15:1 Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” God the Father is the Husbandman, the Lord of the harvest. He is the one who gives power for the seed to grow, He is the one who planned the harvest, but the laborers must be willing to go! The great need should cause us to pray! John MacArthur said, “...believers’ prayers participate in the fulfillment of God’s plans.” JMCA p. 190

The Solution – God’s work - “send forth laborers” – God sends workers to spread the Gospel message. The need is urgent; the harvest is ripe, ready for harvest! The Greek for the phrase “send forth” is very strong, it has the idea of “thrust out” or even “to hurl.” It is urgent that laborers are sent! And we have a part by not only praying for God to send out the workers but to also go!

III. The Call and Power Jesus made clear to the disciples the great need as He spoke of the shepherdless sheep and the workerless harvest. But then He told them the wonderful solution – prayer, and laborers! But that wasn’t all, then He sent them out!

**“And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, (“and began to send them forth by two and two;” Mark 6:7) he gave them power (“and authority” Luke 9:1) against (“all” Luke 9:1) unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles (only time Matthew refers to the twelve as apostles) are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”
Matthew 10:1-4**

The Call – “twelve disciples”/“twelve apostles” – Twice in this short passage, we have reference to the twelve chosen ones from among the many that followed Jesus. Though Christ called them much earlier than this incident, it is here that Matthew placed the list of their names. We’ve studied all the disciples in depth in Vol. 3 of Ladies Studying Jesus, but I want to remind us that these were common men. Jesus called His twelve from all walks of life: fishermen, political activists, and a tax collector. Throughout His ministry, He called common men and leaders, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. He didn’t draft them, force them or even ask for volunteers! Jesus called them, they didn’t have to go, and as we study Christ, many didn’t heed His call, it was a choice each had to make! This was the plan of Christ, and it still is! God still calls and uses ordinary, willing people to do His extraordinary work!

“apostles” – So what is the difference between a disciple and an apostle? The word apostle means “those sent on a mission; sent ones,” while a disciple is “one follows a teacher with the desire to learn.” We see Jesus is moving the twelve from disciple to apostle. Though often we only think of the twelve followers of Jesus when using the word apostle, Paul will use it more broadly to refer to a church planter or missionary.

“send them forth by two and two” – Most scholars believe that Matthew’s list is giving us the divisions as Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. But Mark is the only one who tells us they were sent two by two. The Greek text hints that Jesus individually commissioned each pair as His representative, not the twelve

as a whole. He looked each man in the eye and spoke to them. The phrase in Mark 6:7, “to send” means apostle, sent out ones. We are at about the mid-point of Jesus’ ministry. His disciples have been following, learning, assisting, and observing, for most of a year. Christ knew the day would come when they would be building the church on His foundation. This is the first time they will be sent out by themselves. Why two by two? Well, it’s always nice to have someone else with you. Especially when you are insecure with your task! Working in groups of two gave these disciples spiritual and emotional support, it was safer, and two were necessary for a legal authentic witness. This is the first time they will put what they had learned into practice. But first Jesus had to empower them and must give some specific instructions.

The Power – Jesus gave them the same power and authority that He had! My study Bible said this, “Their miracle-working ministry was to attest the legitimate claim of Jesus to be the Messiah.” p. 1432 These abilities were their credentials! Paul will speak of these same gifts in the early church as confirming gifts to the truth of Jesus as Savior in Hebrews 2:1-4.

“against unclean spirits” – The disciples had authority over demons just as Jesus did! They too would fight against the Devil’s kingdom!

“heal all manner of sickness” – Both physical and spiritual needs were to be met. They were both part of their mission. **Matthew 10:8** tells of the extent of their healing powers – disease, leprosy, casting out demons, and even the ability to raise the dead! No Old Testament prophet ever had the extent of these abilities! We don’t have any record of the twelve raising the dead at this time, and I don’t personally believe they did, but realize Jesus is saying they had the power. I’m afraid they just didn’t have the faith to raise the dead. (Matthew 17:14-21) A very important part of their healing ministry was the generosity their abilities were to be used! They were given this power freely, so freely and liberally they were to give it out! It wasn’t for pay, it wasn’t for favors, it wasn’t to be used selectively – the power to heal was to be given generously! What a wonderful principle to live by! We have received all things freely and generously from the hand of God, and in turn, we should be quick to give to others!

These powers would make them welcome and prove their message was an extension of Jesus’ ministry. Now came the instructions.

IV. The Recipients and Message

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded (Lit. instructed) them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷And as ye go, preach (Lit. – herald), saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. ⁸Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:5-8

“lost sheep of the house of Israel” – Jesus had referenced the shepherdless sheep just minutes before and now He sends His disciples to find them for the kingdom! There were several Greek cities in Galilee, but the disciples were not to even go on the roads toward them or into Samaria with the message of the kingdom. They were only to preach and minister to their fellow Jews. Jesus was being very specific, no exceptions. This was not done with a heart of prejudice, and it wasn’t a permanent restriction. They could preach to Gentiles if they were in their crowds as Jesus did, but the disciples were not to go to Gentile areas. The message of the Messiah

going to the Jews was completely sensible to the ears of the disciples! The first mission field was the Jews – Rom 1:16.

“the kingdom of heaven is at hand” – Their mission was to preach the same message as Christ, the same message as John the Baptist, literally, “the heavenly kingdom is in their midst!” The Messiah had come! When we look at Jesus’ messages and discourses, this is what He preached! The Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Parables were both about the Kingdom! And this was their message too!

V. The Urgency and Provisions

“(“And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only;” Mark 6:8) Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, (“no bread,” Mark 6:8)¹⁰Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, (“But be shod with sandals;” Mark 6:9) nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. ¹¹And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.” Matthew 10:9-11

“take nothing for their journey” – When my kids were in upper elementary I started a practice that continued through their high school years. When we were getting ready for a trip, I would make a detailed packing list! It would have all their needs as far as clothes, toiletries, shoes, and equipment listed. I would even catch my husband using the packing list when putting his stuff together! Here we read Jesus was very specific to the disciples' packing list, and on it was basically nothing! No extra provisions were to be taken on this mission - no money, clothing, or food! Though there are slight differences between the three Gospel narratives, the principle is clear, they were to go simply, unencumbered, realizing their trip was urgent. There is no time for preparations and no need for it because,....

“the workman is worthy of his meat” – They were to rely on the gifts and hospitality of those to whom they preached! There were no Holiday Inn or Comfort Suites at the time of Christ. Public lodging was shady at best, and not a place where godly men or women would stay. A spirit of hospitality was the norm among the Jews of Jesus’ day. The disciples were to seek out a “worthy” home. That would consist of those receptive to their message. And there they would stay until they left the area. No moving from house to house, stepping up to a better home or situation if they could! If the home was “worthy,” they were to stay thankfully. They were to trust God to meet their needs through the people they ministered to. Later in Jesus’ ministry, it is interesting that Christ will remind the disciples of this very incident and how God provided for them – Luke 22:35.

VI. The Blessing or Warning

“And when ye come into an house, salute it. ¹³And if the house be worthy, let your peace (Lit. - Shalom – greeting, blessing) come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. ¹⁵ Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.” Matthew 10:12-15

“let your peace come upon it” – As people received their message of the kingdom and took care of their daily needs, the disciples were to bless them. This was a warm salutation of appreciation and brotherhood.

“shake off the dust of your feet” – But if a household or city was not receptive, the disciples were not to bless it or extend a brotherly warmth to it. Jesus even added a very surprising action at this point. He told them to “shake off the dust” of their feet when they left! This was something Jews would very dramatically do when leaving a Gentile area or city. It was a symbolic act of the filth they felt when associated with Gentiles. Needless to say, it produced much tension between the Jews and Gentiles in Galilee. But Jesus is saying the disciples were to “shake off the dust” of their feet with other Jews, and the difference was their belief in the Gospel of the kingdom and ultimately in Jesus as the Christ! Rejecting Jesus was a serious sin! The disciples were to give the message but the decision for acceptance was to be made by each person. Jesus compared Sodom and Gomorrah to those who rejected Him, and He said, “It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”

This first tour was an exercise of radical faith for each of the twelve. They had been following Jesus watching and assisting in the mission of preaching the gospel of the kingdom. He had provided for their needs and led them. Now, in their continued training, Jesus will send them out to experience God’s power flowing through them to accomplish the mission of the gospel and provide for their every need! But while they went, they would experience hospitality and hostility, and their message acceptance and rejection. Things haven’t changed much!

Believers Application:

One of the greatest missionary passages is found in Matthew 9:37-38. Many believers have obeyed the call to both pray and go into God’s harvest field. How about you? It was sad that most of that big tomato field went to waste. But the lack of dedicated Christian workers is truly a great tragedy! A Sunday school class without a teacher, a Nursing Home without a gospel witness, a ladies' group without a Bible study, a church not being able to have Vacation Bible School because of lack of help, a ministry without musicians are all very sad! For these bring ripe souls to Jesus! In John 4, Jesus said the harvest was white ready for harvest! In Luke 10:2, at a different time in His ministry, Jesus will repeat these words again, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.” It was true then, and it is still true! The need is so great! Are you a willing worker? Are you willing to serve, teach, minister, disciple...be available to God to be thrust and thrown into His work?

I’m afraid many believers don’t go with the gospel because they are missing a major component of the heart of God! Does your heart carry the characteristic of God – compassion?! Or is your heart hard against the plight of sinners? Do you see those trapped in addictions and the lifestyles of the world as undesirables, untouchables, or do you see them as souls needing Christ? Are you armed and ready with love, grace, and truth for needy hearts? As my children have moved into their adulthood, they have had to send out resumes or fill out employment applications. Many aspects of their life, abilities, education, and experiences have had to be given and documented. But please realize, for giving the gospel, God has no age limit on His laborer's application, no place to list one's educational background, and no experience necessary for His work – just availability! Remember, He gives the power! Be like Isaiah as in Isaiah 6:8 when he heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” answer, “Here am I; send me.” The Great Commission of Matthew 28 tells us our mission field has been extended far beyond the one of the disciples at this time of Jesus’ ministry. Later Jesus will send them, and us, to the world! Let’s all see people with a heart of compassion and love and be willing to go! Remember, God’s great power and work in the lives of all people.

I Corinthians 6:9-11