

“In The Name of Jesus”

Matthew 10:1-15

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When Jesus first called his twelve disciples, it was to prepare for service by joining his inner circle. Now, he’s calling them to his mission, and the only credential they needed was that they had been with Jesus.

Jesus calls twelve as a sign of the restoration of Israel and the blessing of the world.

The nation Israel descended from 12 Patriarchs; in the same way, choosing of the 12 reminds Israel of its hope of being restored. Jesus uses a symbol to say, the church is the new Israel, a people composed of both Jew and Gentile, a new humanity. What God wanted to do through Israel to save the world, he’s going to do now starting with these 12 Jews. Like he told Abraham and Sarah,

"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

"I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3)

God is fulfilling that ancient promise through Jesus. His kingdom is the great nation, and he is the great king. He is blessed by God, and he has the name that is above every name. And being blessed or cursed comes down to how we respond to him.

That’s how important the mission is that he sends his disciples on. Let me set do a little work with the passage, and then draw some conclusions for us.

The 12 were first of all called to Jesus (verse 1).

The version of this story from the Gospel of Mark simply says, “He appointed twelve.” But Matthew says, “He called *his* twelve disciples to *him*.” I think that ties into a couple of important emphases of Matthew’s book: Jesus is the absolute center. We’re not just called in the abstract, we’re called to belong to *him*. It also has to do with what they’re called specifically to be—his *disciples*, or learners. They’re called to be apprentices of Jesus: to learn his way, to take up his life.

The next thing ties right into that: Jesus gave authority to the twelve. Remember the mega-themes of the Gospel of Matthew? That’s right, it’s *authority* and *surprise*. Matthew registers many times the surprise of the people at seeing the authority of Jesus. And here, the surprise is he gives authority to his disciples. That authority isn’t just a

tool from his tool kit, and it isn't simply a thing he gives them. It's a relationship, and the authority flows out of the person of Jesus Christ. You want authority for ministry, the power to make a difference, you stay connected to Jesus. You get to know him as master, and you follow him as his apprentice.

Notice that the disciples (verse 1) are called "apostles" (verse 2), which means "ones who are sent," which is what Jesus does in verse 5:

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions."

The Twelve are called to him, and they're sent to do his work. When he called them, they weren't anything special, just a regular bunch of people. The prophet Isaiah foresaw Jesus' own ministry would seem like that. He wrote,

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:2b)

Jesus was a normal human being. The important thing wasn't that he overwhelmed people with his physical attributes. He didn't come to be a Hercules or an Adonis, but to speak and act with authority. For those he called to be sent, there was nothing special or impressive either, but their commission was from God. It didn't depend on eloquence or rank with people, but when Jesus sent them it was with his power.

Jesus first had a mission to Israel (verses 5-6).

The disciples had a specific mission. What was it? It was limited to "the lost sheep of Israel" (verse 6). He even told the apostles, "Do not go among the Gentiles," that is, to non-Jews. Why?

Jesus cared about non-Jews. Matthew tells about a lot of times when Jesus surprises others. But in chapter 8, he told us about the only time Jesus himself was "astonished" (8:10). It's when a Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant and he said he didn't deserve to have Jesus come under his roof. The Roman told Jesus, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority" (8:8b-9). In other words, the Roman officer understood authority, and he knew Jesus had it.

Jesus was amazed by the man's faith; he responded,

"I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." (8:9)

With those words, he commanded the servant to be healed.

Again, in Matthew 8:28, Jesus showed he cares about non-Jews. He healed two demoniacs from the Gentile area called the Gadarenes.

Then, in chapter 15, a non-Jewish Canaanite woman came to Jesus and asked for healing for her little girl. Jesus tested her, and he told her he was sent to the "lost sheep of Israel." But when she trusted in him, he answered,

"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." (Matthew 15:28)

In other words, Matthew makes it very clear in his gospel that Jesus cares about the world. He even ends the Gospel with the Great Commission, sending the Twelve into the whole world with the Good News about him. But he had a plan to unveil, a process to go through. He moved according to God's timing, and he began his work of reaching the world by fulfilling first the purpose of Israel. That's what the Apostle Paul made clear when he wrote,

"For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy." (Romans 15:8-9)

God had a special covenant, a promise to the family of Abraham, and so Jesus began with the chosen people until the time God had chosen. His resurrection showed that time had come, because the temple curtain that separated us from the most holy place was torn open (Matthew 27:51), and Paul wrote:

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

And again,

"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...remember that at one time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. "(Ephesians 2:1-13)

Thanks be to God, we're included too in the family of God! The message of salvation is now for everyone who trusts Jesus. But we have to remember that the first mission was to Israel.

The first message was the preaching of the kingdom (verse 7).

He said, "As you go, preach this message: 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" That's what John the Baptist said was happening with the coming of Jesus (Matthew 3:2). It's what Jesus announced when he began his public ministry (Matthew 4:17). Now we see it's the basic message he gave the disciples, too. It means, God was fulfilling his plan for Israel, and his blessing would be forever.

Healing, raising the dead, and casting out demons are signs that go along with the preaching. Just like Jesus did miracles to demonstrate his authority came from God, he gave the Twelve the power to do miracles as their credentials with people. Jesus' word and his work go hand in hand. He comes to free us from sin, death, and the devil. The long and short of it is,

Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 8:8)

That's what that call to Abraham, back in the Genesis, was all about when God said, "I will bless you" (Genesis 12:2), and "all the nations of the earth will be blessed because of you" (12:3).

Let me draw a few conclusions of the text. It's a very important passage because it tells about the first ordination into the service of Jesus Christ. Even today, when we ordain pastors, elders, and deacons, he commission with a charge, and in the first ever ordination into kingdom work, Jesus himself gives the charge.

First, Judas was among the ones sent.

That suggests not all ministers are saved. Jesus chose Judas Iscariot as one of his apostles. Later, Judas would betray Jesus, and be the instrument through which Jesus was killed. That suggests to me that ordination doesn't save people. The free grace of Jesus Christ working through our faith is what converts us. We have to test our leaders by the Word of God, and like the Apostle Paul said, follow our leaders as they follow Christ. We should pray for our leaders in order that they might prove to be faithful. I desperately need your prayer to fulfill the calling of God on my life. You need that from me, too, because "many are called," Jesus said, "but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

Second, the work of the ministry is to seek lost sheep.

The first calling of the first apostles was to the lost sheep of Israel, but later to the world. We are called to reach lost sheep with good news, too—good news for people who suffer. We're commissioned to do like Jesus did, and to take his mission for our own. He told the people what his mission was in the Gospel of Luke:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

That shows us that we're not called to rule or to lord it over others. We're called to serve. We get to find lost people, and to bring them to Jesus.

Third, it's dangerous to turn away from the gospel.

To refuse the gospel is to reject Jesus Christ. Jesus says a striking thing about that: to accept or reject his representative is to accept or reject him. So much rides on people's reaction. He says,

"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town." (Matthew 10:14)

It's interesting that Jesus says in Matthew 25, the final judgment comes down to people receiving or rejecting him, and that happens through our reaction to believers, or those Jesus calls "brothers of mine" (25:40).

So let me ask you: what are you doing with the gospel—the good news about Jesus? Let's say we Presbyterians are pretty decent people, respectable people, hardworking and sincere. That's good. But is that all they can say about us in the end? Do we love the truth? Does Jesus Christ live in our hearts by faith? If not, we're in danger: Jesus says about those who don't welcome the gospel,

"I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town" (Matthew 10:15)

People in the Old Testament cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were notoriously sinful. We're not famously bad, are we? But they never had the chance to hear the gospel, and we have. What if we wake up from all our comfort and respectability to discover we've never responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ? He wants *you* to be fishers of people. He wants *you* to be salt and light of the world. He wants *you* to carry his message to the world. From God's perspective, that's the very best investment we can make with our lives. Like Isaiah the prophet said,

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

And the last thing is, when we bring good news to the world, it doesn't only bless the world; it blesses us, too. Luke's version of the story tells about the disciples coming back to report to Jesus how their mission trip went. Luke writes,

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17)

And Jesus told them the significance of what they had just experienced:

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." (Luke 10:23-24)

When we share the good news with the lost; when we go in the name of Jesus, God calls us beautiful, and we get to see God's fulfillment of his purpose for the world.