

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

Matthew 10:5-15

Key Verse: 10:6, 7

“As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

The latest issue of Newsweek magazine is titled, “Let's Just Fix It.” They reference a survey claiming that 76% of Americans think that our nation is on the wrong track. The same survey finds that the most appealing presidential candidate would be Bill Gates, followed by Warren Buffet, both of whom are very successful businessmen. Newsweek focuses on the economic problems of the United States. To other people, the moral issue is more important. They are up in arms over the New York State decision to legalize gay marriage. To still other people, our most pressing crisis is the breakdown of the family. Passionate people spend their time and effort trying to solve these problems. However, in truth, all of these problems are mere symptoms of a bigger problem. That is that mankind has lost paradise, the kingdom of heaven, due to our sins. The kingdom of heaven? That sounds vague and abstract. It does not seem related to the real problems we are facing. But according to Jesus what we really need is the kingdom of heaven, and he came to give it to us. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of heaven throughout his ministry, and sent his disciples to do the same. Let's accept Jesus' message and learn to share this message as of first importance.

In Matthew's gospel, there are five main discourses which are collections of Jesus' teachings on specific subjects. We find the second of these in chapter 10, where Jesus discourses on discipleship. In order to raise his disciples as spiritual leaders, Jesus gave them specific instructions. As they practiced these instructions, they needed to learn timeless principles that would guide them as shepherds in the future. We can divide this discourse into two parts. In verses 5-15, Jesus sends out his disciples on a specific evangelistic journey. In verses 16-42, Jesus gives more general instructions about discipleship. Today we will focus on the first evangelistic journey, and glean principles that will help us grow as Jesus disciples.

First, go to the lost sheep of Israel (5-6). As we learned in the last passage Jesus had great compassion on the people of his time who were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. In order to reach them, Jesus wanted to raise his disciples as compassionate shepherds like himself. Jesus had a clear prayer topic and vision. Furthermore, he did something practically. Jesus formed a group of twelve men, whom he had already called personally, and invited them to his school. Jesus began to train them as shepherds for his people. They were weak in

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

many ways and quite ordinary. But they were open to Jesus and willing to learn from him.

Look at verses 5-6. **“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.’”** First we must note that Jesus is the sender and his disciples are sent by him. Disciples are envoys of Jesus. Paul calls Christians **“ambassadors of Christ”** (2 Cor 5:20). God wants to use us to make his appeal to the lost. Jesus wants people to encounter him through his disciples. Therefore, they should not speak and act in their own way, but only as Jesus wants them to. Since we represent Jesus, we must pay close attention to his instructions.

What are Jesus’ instructions? **The first is to go to the lost sheep of Israel.** Jesus even makes the point that they should not go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans. As we know from Matthew 28:19, Jesus intended to send his disciples to all nations. But at this time he limited their work to the lost sheep of Israel. Why? It was to follow God’s world salvation plan: **“first for the Jew and then for the Gentile”** (Ro 1:16). God’s servants must follow God’s plan, not their own plan. Moreover, the disciples were not ready for cross-cultural ministry; they needed to learn how to serve lost sheep in Israel first. What does “lost sheep of Israel” mean? It means that they had gone astray from God and his purpose for them (Isa 53:6). Among all the nations, God chose the people of Israel as his treasured possession, and adopted them as his firstborn son. God’s purpose was to raise them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God blessed them abundantly so that they would be a blessing to others. However, in the time of blessing they forgot about God and abandoned their original purpose. They became self-absorbed, thinking the whole world revolved around Israel. In terms of physics, they became like a centripetal force that drew everything inward instead of a centrifugal force that projected blessing outward. Now they were suffering a great deal, mostly because they had wandered far from God. But God had not forgotten them. God sent Jesus to bring them back to himself and restore their glorious mission.

We can see a parallel between Israel’s history and America’s history. When Americans worshiped and feared God and sent many missionaries to the world in response to God’s calling, God blessed America abundantly. But in the time of blessing, nationally speaking we drifted away from God and lost our mission to be a blessing to all nations. Then many problems arose. From a human point of view, we are in a very challenging, difficult period of American history. But God has not

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

forgotten us. God wants to send his workers to find the lost sheep of America. God wants to ignite a spiritual revival. It is time to remember God's grace and come back to God. It is time to commit ourselves to God and restore our mission. Then God will surely bless us to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We thank God that in this new fall semester, many are going to the lost sheep on our campuses. As I saw at the UIC student leaders' meeting on Friday, young students, just like Jesus' disciples, are going onto the campus to find lost sheep and bring them back to God. Diana Guzman, Peter Cowen, Moses Timlin, and others are bring lost sheep to Jesus. Others among us are going to the lost sheep in their work places and neighborhoods. Let's remember Jesus' words, "Go to the lost sheep...." Let's share Jesus' heart and bring lost ones back to God!

Second, "proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'" (7).

So far we have thought about to whom the disciples should go. In this part, Jesus tells what their message should be. Look at verse 7. **"As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'"** This message is the core of Jesus' teaching. Jesus' first message was, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"** (4:17). "The kingdom of heaven" is one of the main themes in Matthew's gospel, in which it appears 32 times (3:2; 4:17; 5:3,10,19[2],20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11,12; 13:11,24,31,33,44,45, 47; 15:2; 16:19; 18:1,3,4,23; 19:12,14,23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1). The kingdom is not a geographical location; it is wherever God reigns. When people accept God as their King, the kingdom of heaven comes to them. The message, **"The kingdom of heaven has come near,"** means that Jesus the King sent by God has come! It is time to accept Jesus as our King.

To Jesus this was the most important message. People's root problem is that they abandoned God and his mission. They have lost direction, and been overwhelmed by sinful desires, the power of death, and evil spirits. They have no peace. Rather, driven by greed, envy, and selfish ambition, they suffer from contention and strife. Losing the kingdom of heaven is not a small matter. It is the root cause of all the miseries and troubles of mankind. The kingdom cannot be restored by man. Only Jesus, the King can restore the kingdom of heaven to us. Our King Jesus is full of wisdom and power. Isaiah described him as follows: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord--and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth" (Isa 11:2-4a). Jesus has authority to forgive

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

sins, drive out evil spirits and raise the dead. When we accept Jesus as our King, the kingdom of heaven comes into our hearts. Our sins are forgiven. We can enjoy God's peace. We can have God's blessing upon every area of our lives. We can receive from Jesus his wisdom and power in any situation and live a victorious life. Jesus came to reign with peace and love. This is the message Jesus wants proclaimed.

Due to a strong sense of individualism, many American Christians emphasize Jesus' reign on a personal level. However, Jesus' reign also extends to our community and nation. In fact, the word "kingdom" implies community and nation. To accept Jesus as king is not just a personal matter, but a matter of community. However, we cannot but admit that there are conflicts in our community. It is easy to think of these conflicts as personal matters and try to resolve them accordingly. In our sinful nature, we insist on our own righteousness, blame others, and fight with them. When we do this, the devil celebrates and our Lord Jesus grieves. In such a community, Jesus is not glorified. To let Jesus reign is to crucify our own passion and pride and to humbly submit to Jesus' reign. Apostle Paul confessed in Galatians 2:20, **"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** In a word, we have to die to ourselves to let Christ reign in us. When Christ truly reigns over our hearts, he becomes the center of our community and is exalted through us. When Christ reigns over us, we can love one another. Then we can experience the kingdom of heaven in our community and give a credible Christian witness in the world. This pleases God and he will pour out his blessing upon us to bear much fruit.

As the Moravian community first assembled, there were many disagreements and quarrels among the members due to doctrinal issues, cultural differences and personality conflicts. They could not love one another, and they were not useful to God. One evening, on August 13, 1727, they had a communion service together. As they confessed Jesus as Lord and King, the Holy Spirit came upon them all and began to work mightily in their hearts. They repented with tears and accepted one another as dear brothers and sisters. When they loved one another sincerely, God worked mightily through them and sent over 3,000 lay missionaries to some of the most remote places in the world. Here we find the solution to all conflicts among us. It is to accept Jesus as our King personally and over our community. To do so, we must have a humble and repentant heart. We must be willing to accept others as they are and value each person as a very

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

precious coworker. When we make a love community in this way, God can use us to advance his kingdom in our nation and the world.

Third, serve those in need (8). As we have studied, the message, “the kingdom of heaven has come near,” should be proclaimed clearly to bring freedom to those bound by darkness. To do so more effectively, it should be accompanied by service for those in need. Look at verse 8a. **“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.”** At that time there were so many people who were suffering from diseases, the power of death, guilty consciences due to legalism, and demons. The same problems exist in our times. Human culture and technology have advanced in many ways, but the fundamental problems of mankind remain the same. People are still suffering from all kinds of diseases: cancer, AIDS, heart disease, and others. They also suffer from the elements of death, guilty consciences, mental illnesses, and so on. That is why psychiatrists and psychologists are popular and wealthy. One psychiatrist, Dr. M. Scott Peck, came to realize that there is a spiritual world through his treatment of many sick people. He concluded that in some cases, the only explanation for their evil was demon possession. Jesus commanded his disciples to serve these kinds of needy people. Jesus raised his disciples not only as powerful messengers, but also as compassionate shepherds. To be honest, there are many churches that proclaim the message of the kingdom, but not many that reflect the love of Christ that should accompany this message. As disciples of Jesus we should serve needy people. We should help them with sincere prayer, the word of God, and acts of compassion that bring healing to their bodies, minds, and spirits.

When we serve needy people, it is easy to think we are doing a favor for them and to expect some recognition or compensation. But Jesus said in verse 8b: **“Freely you have received; freely give.”** We have received God’s grace freely and we should also share God’s grace freely without any expectation. However, our natural mentality is “give and take;” sometimes, “take and give.” The gospel principle is quite contrary to this. Let’s not let the “give and take” principle rob joy from our hearts. Let’s remember, **“Freely you have received; freely give,”** and live a joyful shepherd life.

Fourth, depend on God alone (9-15). In verses 9-15, Jesus instructed his disciples how to carry out their ministry. **First of all, he taught them to depend on God alone, not on material preparations (9-10).** When we depend on material things, we cannot experience God’s power. Rather, we can become slaves of money. Many people think that without money, they cannot serve God. Whenever they want to do something, they first think about how much money they need.

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

Practically speaking, money can be helpful in serving God. But money never converted a sinner to a saint. **In order to do God's work we need God's power. In order to receive God's power we must recognize our need and ask God in prayer; we must depend on God alone.**

When Korean missionaries first came to America, they had nothing in their pockets. They came by faith, depending on God alone for everything. Six women who worked as nurses or nurses' aides rented a one-bedroom apartment near Northwestern. They were a little awkward socially; when inviting one professor for dinner, they used toilet paper as napkins. But they had God's calling and clear faith and they went out to meet students every day and invited them for Bible study. Then God worked. Many attractive, intellectual students followed them, including Pastors Mark Vucekovich and Kevin Albright, Dr. Alan Wolff, and Yvonne Timlin. One man missionary had such a severe English problem that he once said, "I am a headache, I need a pharmacy," consulting his English dictionary in the process. But when he went out inviting students to Bible study at a very prestigious university, many followed him and committed themselves to grow as Jesus' disciples. One missionary came to America with nothing in his hand except five Bibles. But when he went to a campus and taught the Bible some promising leaders were raised through his care. And now he has five mature children and some grandchildren as well. My point is not that we should imitate the actions of these people, but that Jesus wants us to depend on God alone in doing his work. When we depend on God alone, God's power will rest on us.

Secondly, Jesus taught them to search for some worthy person and stay at their house until they leave (11-15). Jesus' disciples need discernment to search for a worthy person who values the gospel message and is willing to serve gospel ministry. Gospel workers are not salesmen who beg others to buy their product. Rather they have the most precious treasure that can bring eternal salvation to those who believe, and they must give this treasure to worthy persons. Worthy persons are those who welcome the disciples and listen to the gospel message. Such persons deserve to receive God's peace (13). When we look at verse 14, we learn that Jesus' disciples must have a clear identity as servants of God. When people reject the message of the kingdom, it is not a person they are rejecting, but God. Those who reject the gospel will receive unbearable judgment from God (15).

In this passage we have learned that Jesus sent his disciples with the message, "**The kingdom of heaven has come near.**" Jesus, the King, has come. He wants to reign over each of us as individuals, over our families, over our community, and over our nation. Let's invite Jesus into our hearts even now and

Jesus Teaches The Twelve

pray that he may reign over our community in love so that God may be honored and his kingdom expanded.