

Prayer

The glory and majesty of Your work, Almighty God is ever present in the beauty of a raindrop and the majesty of the Universe. Give us eyes to appreciate both the intricate detail of Your creation and its stupendous magnitude; and give us hearts and minds to value both. May we never cease to find you at work throughout your world, and give You the praise which is Your due. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Make a list of things that concern you at the moment. Pray about them in order during the course of the day.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who are growing old** *Pray for those who are losing their memory and do not know either recognise this or know what to do*
- *Thank God for the beauty of joy and happiness, and seek it out*
- *Pray about bullying in the workplace, which is topical in the UK*

Meditation

You called Abraham to follow you into the unknown ... and he did.

You called Sarah to trust you and bear a son ... and she did.

You called Israel to accept Moses' leadership ... and they did.

You called Caleb and Joshua to stand firm for You ... and they did.

You called Deborah to lead God's people ... and she did.

You called Gideon to test you and then act ... and he did.

You called Ruth to break down cultural barriers ... and she did.

You called David to become a servant before he was a King ... and he did.

You called the Queen of Sheba to honour Your greatness ... and she did.

You called Elijah to confront sin and wickedness ... and he did.

You called Wisdom to show God's truth to the world ... and she did.

You called Isaiah to speak about God's salvation ... and he did.

Lord God, You call us to follow in their footsteps ...

Bible passage – Matthew 10:5-15

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following commission: 'Do not disperse yourselves among the Gentiles, or enter a town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but concentrate on the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

⁷ As you go, preach the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give, therefore, without charge. ⁹ Do not take gold, silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰ no food-bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the labourer is worth his keep.

¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, search for one who is worthy, and stay with them until you leave. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ If the house is worthy, let your peace come on it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from off your feet when you leave that house or town.

¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town.

Bible Study

Review

The first phase of Jesus' ministry in Galilee drew to a close after a hectic round of teaching, healing and performing miracles (Matthew 8-9). The labourers were few (9:38) but it was now time for Jesus to work with the small band of disciples He had called (10:1-4) and hand His mission over to them. Our reading today tells us that Jesus called the disciples to go and do the things that they had seen Him do. The instructions Jesus gave are clearly important, because they are found in other Gospels (Mark 6:8-11, Luke 9:2-5 and 10:3-12), and each Gospel gives them different emphases. Here, Matthew emphasises preaching the Kingdom of God (10:7) and the ministry of miracles and healing (10:8), and the disciples clearly needed to know more.

Firstly, it is worth noting that Jesus sent His disciples to work in places where His authority was already respected. It was not yet time for the disciples to go out into the whole world (28:19f.), so their ministry was limited to Jewish regions of Galilee. Also, by requiring the disciples to do what He had already done (10:7,8), they would never be able to claim credit for their work; they could only act in faith, and give glory to Jesus. Then, by following Him, they would lay the foundations for the mission of the early church. As he wrote, Matthew clearly had this in mind.

Jesus gave the disciples a clear 'commission' (10:5), and followed this by further instructions about what to do, what to take, and where to stay; it was all very basic, yet also essential. All the instructions Jesus gave reflect a sense of urgency, and this is one reason why we tend to find them difficult today. Where we think of taking out time to establish the right starting points for ministry, Jesus told the disciples to go with the minimum of fuss and the minimum of preparation. No opportunity was to be lost by delay.

To begin with, Jesus summarised the mission with these words; *'preach the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.'* (10:7,8). After this, he told the disciples to carry the bare minimum of personal necessities, *'Do not take gold, silver, or copper in your belts, no food-bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the labourer is worth his keep'* (10:9,10). We will look at the reason why Jesus may have said this later in the study, but here, we should bear in mind the way Jesus qualified both these commands. In between these two, Jesus said something important that linked them together: *'You received without paying; give, therefore, without charge'*. The Kingdom of God comes free and with no charge. This oft forgotten command of Jesus challenges all His followers, for although he does not forbid the proper organisation and financial management of the church, like the NHS in the UK, what is offered must be free at the point of delivery!

The last part of our reading is about hospitality. If the disciples were called to work for free, then they would have to be welcomed and supported by others who opened their homes to them. Jesus does not say who these others might be, but He must have meant other sympathetic Jews in the region to which they were sent. The principle is straightforward; the missionary should only stay where there is a true welcome and therefore a hope of being accepted and heard. In ancient times, the nature of the offer of hospitality indicated whether the hosts were open to anything a stranger might bring or say. So here, Jesus effectively warns his disciples not to try and preach the Gospel and demonstrate it where people are unwilling to receive it.

It takes a little care to translate these instructions into a relevant code of practice for Christians and missionaries today, but the effort can and should be made. Jesus would one day say more to the disciples about what he wanted of them, but they had to start by doing His will, and copying Him.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The commission – where to go
- The commission – what to do
- The commission – what to take
- The commission – where to stay

Going Deeper

The Commission – where to go

Jesus gave the disciples clear instructions, using a word ('commission' – see verse 5) that was used for giving instruction to pupils, for a military command during warfare, or for a King issuing a decree. All three

illustrate what Jesus wanted done to extend the work of the 'harvest', and the first thing Jesus decreed was 'where to go'. This is a little surprising, because no other Gospel writers include this. Jesus limits this first mission to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10:6 – see also 9:36), with guidance that the disciples should not disperse themselves amongst the Gentiles or Samaritans. In some Bible version, it says 'do not go' (10:5), but I have translated 'not not disperse yourselves' because this is true of the Greek, and it conveys Matthew's concern that this first mission could be too diverse. Limited aims were best to start with, even though the salvation of the whole world was at stake.

Matthew knew that it was the risen Christ who gave instructions to 'go into all the world' (28:19), and after the creation of the early church, this became the characteristic message of the apostle Paul. He preached the message of God's love for all to the Gentiles, as found in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. The time for this was yet to come, but in Jesus' working life, before the crucifixion, He focussed primary, but not exclusively on His own people, the Jews.

Jesus banned the disciples from going to the Samaritans as well. This may have been because at that time, Jesus trusted Himself alone for such a mission (which we find in John chapter 4, for example). The Samaritans were people who lived in the central parts of what is now Israel and Palestine. They were descended from those who settled in that region after the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 721BC and after the Babylonian invasion of 587BC. Many Jews of the traditional tribes of Israel intermarried with the peoples of this region to create the 'Samaritan' people, and they developed their own beliefs and worship of God over the centuries. Pure Jews separated themselves from the Samaritans, so that by the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritan were quite distinct. They would one day be included in the full Gospel, but not yet.

The Commission – what to do

Interestingly, the disciples were not to go somewhere, settle themselves in, and then embark upon their mission. They simply had to follow what they had seen Jesus do, and His instructions laid out the bare bones of their call in memorable terms. They would undoubtedly come across those who were ill (literally 'weak' 10:8), and who needed to be healed. They would also come across lepers, and whilst they would have avoided them in the past, now they had to heal them as well.

The other two features of the call were more difficult, unless, that is, the disciples had complete faith and trust in Jesus. The first of these was to 'raise the dead'. Some describe this as an allegory of 'spiritual awakening', but this does not do justice to Matthew's Gospel. Jesus had already raised a little girl from the dead (9:24,25), and this was the example they had to follow. The disciples were not told to go and open up graves, but to deal with family distress at the untimely death of loved ones, particularly children, who in those days, died in far larger numbers than today. Such a ministry would have been deeply spiritual, and seen in its day as a sign of the Kingdom. The disciples may not have appreciated the full meaning of this, because they had not yet been told by Jesus that He would die and rise again, but nevertheless, it was important for Jesus' ministry.

Lastly, Jesus called his disciples to cast out of demons. Clearly, the disciples had Jesus' example of dealing with demons 'with a word' of authority, both troublesome demons such as the Gadarene demoniacs (8:28f.) and those that caused disease such as the mute man (9:32f.). It made sense to cast out demons, because they had no place in the coming Kingdom of God as preached by the disciples. Evil of any form was not the stuff of the Kingdom of God. The demon's power, however, had been expressed in holding individuals bondage so that they could not express themselves normally, or in binding a person to chronic illness through no fault of their own (the mute man, 9:32f.). Demons prevented people from responding to the call of God, and this was why demons had to be cast out.

The Commission – what to take

The next part of the Commission begins in the second half of verse 8. Much of Jesus' instructions about what the disciples should take with them was typical of the practice of travelling rabbis of the day, though many of these rules were not enforced. There are a number of places in the Jewish 'rule books', the Talmud and Midrash, which give remarkably similar rules for rabbis and teachers. What Jesus did was to re-assert a strict interpretation of this guidance. He did this because the disciples did not have time for possessions due to the urgency of their work. In later generations, rules like this were not always kept, and many itinerant preachers of the Early Church demanded to be paid for their work, draining the young church of its ability to do essential charitable work. Matthew would have been keen to point out the difference in Jesus' teaching between wages (payment for work) and provision for need. The Church was to be responsible for adequate provision of need, but not wages.

A sense of urgency is created by the Spartan image of taking nothing other than the barest of essentials, but this forced the disciples to learn to live by the principles of the Sermon on the Mount '*do not worry ... about what you will eat or drink ...*' (6:25ff). In the details of these rules there is some discrepancy between Matthew and Mark here. Mark says that the disciples could take a staff Mark (6:8), whereas Matthew

appears to say that a staff should not be taken (10:10). However, this may be to take the passage more literally than necessary, because if you read from verse 8b, the principle stated by Matthew is more like 'take what you have, don't try and obtain extra', and this should be the guiding rule. It is possible that the 'two' of 'two tunics' could also refer to sandals and staff as well; in other words, don't take two (of) tunics, sandals or staff, meaning, effectively, don't take extra. Understood in this way, there is no confusion with Mark, and I do not think it likely that Matthew intended the disciples to walk barefoot and without any means of support on rocky roads.

Jesus asked that His missionaries should not be encumbered either by having to acquire things (or money) before they went, and they should not be burdened by having more than was necessary. This, too, is a lesson for our materialistic world.

The commission – where to stay

The last five verses of our passage talk about where the disciples were to stay. If they were not to worry about earthly provisions, this had to come from somewhere, and it was to come from 'hospitality'. In Jesus' day, this was a sacred duty to people of the Middle East, as it is today. However, Jesus suggested a test for the nature of the hospitality, and this was a test of 'worthiness'. Notice that the word 'worthy' occurs in one or other form, three times in these verses. Worthiness is a combination of trust, openness and honesty, and although it is vitally important in human relationships, there is no way of recognising it on the spur of the moment, so Jesus suggested a test based upon 'peace'. He did not use here the Greek equivalent of the famous word 'shalom', a greeting of 'peace' frequently used in Israel, but a word that simply meant lack of discord or strife. Basically, if the missionary and what he was doing was accepted without discord, then that was a good sign of its worthiness.

There would only be one chance to hear the good news and accept the Kingdom, such was the urgency of the task. If a place of hospitality rejected God's message, then the disciples were to '*shake the dust from their feet*' (10:14), a telling illustration of how, in the end, evil can have nothing to do with good. At the harvest (9:9:37), the separation would be final, and the labourers had work to do. This expression is powerful and should be used with great caution; I find it sad when people use it to express personal differences or relationship break-up. It is about evil and good, not personal opinion, however well founded, and must be rooted in the gospel.

The final picture of rejection of the gospel is that of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities had broken God's laws of hospitality (Genesis 19:24ff) by abusing Lot and his family, and reaped the reward of a terrible judgement; this Biblical image of judgement served to illustrate the magnitude of the mission task, and its importance in the eyes of God.

Application

A significant number of issues within this passage have major implications for mission today, but it can be hard to make good connections between what Jesus said and our situation today. We should at least be careful to note the difference between what Jesus required of His disciples here before He died and rose again, and what He asked of them after He died (28:19f.).

Surely, though, we cannot be the church of God today and ignore this call to preach, teach and demonstrate the Gospel. We will do some things differently today because we live in different times, but the essentials remain. I find it amazing to find churches that have questionnaires about what people think the church should be doing. It is a pointless exercise! Jesus has given the church its marching orders and much of it is clear. We have to interpret these instructions and work out how we can call people to repentance, teach people about God, care for people's needs and confront the demons within our world and cast them out. Although people will come up with many other things they think make up the essence of being the church, you will find that the Gospel adds few that do not fit within the short list of this passage. I have come to the simple conclusion therefore that this is what the church should be doing.

One particular issue is important. There is a lively debate in the church about whether people should 'go out' in twos, or singly, and whether they should operate in any form of ministry by themselves. Here in Matthew, the matter of going in twos is not mentioned. It is mentioned however, in the Gospel of Mark (6:7) and in Luke's commission of the 'seventy' (Luke 9:1-6). The fact of the matter is that Scripture is not unified in its advice about this practice. The best way to resolve the issue is to regard going in twos as good practice, where appropriate, but allow that it is unwise to follow this rule too slavishly. History has plenty of examples of missionaries who have gone out singly and done great works for the Lord (for example, William Carey in India, 1761-1834).

In every age good Christian folk have sought to model their work for the Lord on this and the other similar passages in the New Testament. As we find ways of drawing closer to its ideals, we draw closer to our Lord,

and some of the most significant ministries that have ever happened in the life of the church have exhibited many of the features of this passage interpreted within their own culture and times. The challenge is no less today.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How do we preach the Gospel today, and how do we reflect these rules in what we do?
2. There are many sick people around us all the time. Does Jesus want us to heal them all? How do we decide our priorities for ministry given that we cannot do everything?
3. Discuss the value of 'going in twos', when sent by the church to preach the Gospel and witness to Jesus.

Topics covered by this text

- *The agenda of mission*
- *Christ's commission to preach, teach, heal and deliver*
- *Christ's instructions about receiving hospitality*
- *Christ's instructions about possessions for one on 'mission'*

Personal comments by author

This is a very challenging passage of Scripture, and I have struggled with it myself over the years. What troubles me is this. Some people are very dogmatic about what is said here, yet feel no obligation to obey Jesus' other commandments to 'love' others, for example! We cannot pick and choose what we obey about Christ's commands! We must try to read these passages carefully in order to be clear with ourselves, let alone other people, about what the Lord requires of us. The worst examples are set by those who demand that others live by such spartan rules, and yet live themselves in relative luxury. I see too much of this in the church, and it is a very bad witness, and one that brings condemnation and judgement on the church.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Imagine you are required to preach, to teach, heal the sick and cast out demons and yet live like a pauper, relying on other people's generosity! Can you imagine circumstances like this, and what you would feel like? I ask you to do this because the Lord calls more of His people to live like this in our day than we know. How many respond?*
- *Pray for those people who have given their lives to minister in Jesus' name and spend their entire lives in the service of Almighty God.*

Final Prayer

Dear Jesus, may we speak to You honestly and listen to You carefully, so that we may learn to distinguish Your voice from the clamour of everything around us. We long to learn more of Your will and be obedient throughout our lives, and demonstrate in this way the abiding faith we have in You; AMEN
