

Preparing the Apostolic Evangelists, Part I

Call to Worship: Psalm 105:1-5

1st Scripture: Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6

2nd Scripture: Matthew 10:1-15

Introduction

Last time, we had entered a transition where our Lord was preparing to send out the twelve men whom he had set apart (earlier) to be his Apostles. For the remainder of Chapter ten then, we will find our Lord providing them with important information to help prepare them for their evangelistic travels. He had already given them authority to perform miraculous (healing) signs and wonders, and now, He would leave them with additional instructions which they were to carry with them on their journey; a journey which would ultimately continue beyond our Lord's earthly ministry (see vs. 17-23). For this morning then, we will begin to consider the first portion of our Lord's instructions to His Apostles from this section. [Note 11:1 - They go]

I. Preparing the Apostolic Evangelists, Part I

“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (vs. 5-6).

And so, the Lord begins by commanding his Apostles to limit their present scope of ministry to the Jews alone. Being up north in Galilee, you were actually at a strategic place for reaching Gentiles, Samaritans and Jews. However, at this point in time, they were to limit their sphere of influence to the Jews only. Following the resurrection of Christ, those limitations would be removed, and then the Lord (in Matthew 18) commands them to go to all the world with the Gospel, from Jerusalem, to all of Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. That said, even then, they were to give priority to the Jews. As Paul had stated in Romans 1:16, the Gospel was to go to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles. And this was consistent with the ministry of the Apostle Paul Himself, who always began by preaching to the Jews wherever he

went, and then, (especially when they rejected his message) he would shake the dust off of his feet and turn to the Gentiles.

Why then was this priority given to the Jews, beginning with our Lord's ministry (and the start of the ministry of His Apostles), which was focused on the Jewish people alone? Why were the Samaritans (who were a mixed people; half Jew and half Gentile) and the Gentiles (who were entirely not Jewish) temporarily left out of the equation, and even later, given a second class status with respect to having the Gospel preached to them? Well, simply put, the promises of God belonged first to the Jews, through Abraham, and then, the whole world was to be blessed through Abraham. Following the separating of the nations (when all of mankind had rebelled against God, building the Tower of Babel); when every nation, yet again, had moved in the direction of utter rebellion against God, God had graciously approached Abraham, and set him apart, and a nation of people through him. And so, God directs His attention to the Jews first, in keeping with His promise, first to Abraham, and then to Israel as a whole, and the blessing comes secondarily to the rest of the nations.

How then does this reflect upon the Jews today? Are we still to give first priority to the Jews? Well, let me answer that as directly as I can, followed by a few additional statements. I personally don't believe that that priority is to be given today. My reason for stating this is because, I believe that when God's judgment came upon Israel in AD70, when the temple was ultimately destroyed and the Romans sacked Jerusalem; when that final transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant had taken place (including the abolition of the Saturday Sabbath, which was replaced with the Sunday Lord's Day)... I believe that God's promise to Israel was completely fulfilled. I know that there are some who would disagree with me about this, and that is okay, but that is how I see it. That said, without jumping off of the other side of the horse, I do believe that we ought to be praying for Israel, and because we have benefitted from the blessings promised to them first, we ought never to adopt any form of anti-Semitic attitude. We, who have been grafted into the original stump, as wild branches, ought never to boast against the natural branches. Rather, we ought to long and pray for God to bring a revival to the people of Israel.

And so, here, we find that the Lord first sends His Apostles to the lost sheep of Israel, who were to be given the priority with respect to hearing the Gospel that would bring lost sheep into the fold of God through Christ.

“And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (vs. 7). And what then was a general summary of the message which the Apostles were to proclaim, beginning solely with the Lost sheep of Israel? That the Kingdom of heaven; that God’s glorious eternal heavenly Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Messiah had arrived. It was upon them at this very moment. Now, what then does our Lord mean by this statement? What is this “Kingdom of God?” Well, the Jews would have known very well that this ultimately involved the coming of a Davidic king who would conquer all nations, and redeem the people of God unto an eternal Kingdom of rest and joy.

God’s foretold Kingdom takes us back to the fall of mankind, when our first parents, Adam and Eve, had sinned against God, and brought the curse of death upon the human race. One critical consequence of this was the separation of sinful mankind from our holy God. And yet God had ordained a plan to redeem a people from out of this fallen world, and from out of the dominion of darkness over which satan reigns, so as to bring them into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, who would conquer Satan and his wicked kingdom, while establishing His own reign forever. Right from the beginning, just after the fall, God had promised to send an Anointed One; a chosen Seed of the Woman, who would become Man, crush the head of satan, and deliver a people from out of their bondage to satan and sin, reconciling them to Himself, through the death and resurrection of this Seed. And that Seed is the Lord Jesus Christ, who had finally arrived, ushering in the age of building His glorious Kingdom. And His Apostles were now called to proclaim the arrival of this Kingdom, offering hope to any and all who would embrace Him as their Lord (their King) and Savior.

And you see, it is extremely important to realize that from the standpoint of God, ultimately, there are really only two kingdoms. In other words, every single person in this entire world, whatever race or gender or nationality they might be, is either in God’s Kingdom or in the kingdom of Satan. And the kingdom of Satan is a dying and doomed kingdom. But, consider that for a moment, friends. Right now, everyone in this room, you and me; all of us, are part of

only one of these two kingdoms. You are either in Christ, or you are under the sway and deception of Satan, whom we are told, deceives the whole world. There is no middle or neutral ground. It's one or the other. Which kingdom are you in, this morning? That ought to be the most vital question that we all ask ourselves, with the utmost of sincerity.

And so, the Apostles were to proclaim the Kingdom of God, as that Kingdom, alone, which will endure forever and ever. And attesting to this reality; as they would seek to lay the groundwork for this Kingdom, by laying the foundation of Christ's church, signs and wonders would accompany their preaching. Our Lord commands them in verse 8, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."

Everything about the ministry of the Apostles was to center upon glorifying God by proclaiming the reality of His Kingdom, to those who were lost. Unlike so many today, their ministry was not a tool for serving their own worldly desires. They were not using their God-given oratory skills, or even their ability to perform signs and wonders, as a means of manipulating the people to service their own lavish lifestyles. In fact, as we will see throughout the course of the instructions given in this Chapter, they would be hated, brought before governors, persecuted and ultimately put to death, for the cause of Christ. If this was their "best life now," then they were most to be pitied. Yes, their basic needs were to be met, but their calling was to build the kingdom of God and not their own personal empires. After all, they had received the greatest gift of all for free; forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation in Christ. And so, even as they had received freely, they were to freely give of themselves, calling all to repent and to embrace Christ as their Lord and Savior. Unlike the religious leaders who turned the temple worship into a lucrative business, they were to present the Kingdom of God, and to deliver individuals from their afflictions, freely, just as they had received everything from their Blessed Savior, freely. The Kingdom of God comes at God's expense, and it must be presented in that way.

Moving on, He commands them, "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food" (vs. 9-10). While they were to present the Kingdom of God freely, it would be more than appropriate for their basic needs of survival to be met by those to whom they

ministered along the way. They were laying aside their secular occupations, committing their time (and their entire lives) to traveling about to offer precious souls the greatest gift of eternal life in Christ. To this end, they still had physical bodies that required sustenance. They needed food and drink and shelter. Meeting these essential *physical* needs would be expected of those whose essential *spiritual* needs would be met by them. They were traveling around, carrying the best of news to all people, for the sake of their never-dying souls. One of the very basic ways, in which, individuals could affirm their reception of the Apostles and their teaching, was by providing them with basic hospitality, at the very least, minimizing the burden of their ongoing travels. Indeed, this would be as much of a blessing to those who received the Apostles, as it would be to the Apostles themselves. It would be a very tangible expression of their faith in the message, and in the Christ of the message, as they showed their faith in, and love for Christ, by loving and serving His Apostles.

And furthermore, traveling about with the bare minimum would further strengthen the faith of the Apostles themselves, who would be trusting God to provide for them, wherever they went. In a sense, it would be like depending upon God each day for manna, as the Israelites were forced to do in the wilderness, when they had come out of Egypt. It was never the fact that God, by merely speaking, could not have had them followed by self-propelling carts of self-replenishing food, if He so chose. But rather, they were to learn to walk by faith, not living by bread alone, but by every word spoken from the mouth of God. This providential care of God was greatly witnessed by the Apostles themselves, when Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish, to feed five thousand people, showing that He was more than able and willing to provide for their daily needs, as they faithfully walked with, and trusted in Him.

“Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out” (vs. 11). Wherever they went, they were seek out one who was worthy; that is, they were to seek out one who would exhibit hospitality toward them; one who would greet, welcome, receive and exhibit goodwill toward strangers (which was an Old Covenant law principle). Such would indicate a spirit of grace in that individual, proving him to be a God-fearing man. And then, they were to stay with that individual until they were finished preaching to that village. Keeping in mind that they went out by twos, this would not be too much of a burden. That said,

they were not to jump around from house to house, risking giving the impression that they were looking to take advantage of everyone in the community.

“And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (vs. 12-14).

Here, we find that there was certainly a possibility that the Apostles would be rejected in various regions. Their message would be resisted and they would no longer be welcomed because of their message. The Lord Himself was rejected in certain areas, such as Capernaum and Bethsaida, which He pronounced a curse upon, because of the light that they had been given. If the Master Himself experienced rejection, even in the face of great signs and wonders, how much more would His servants experience rejection.

And because they were representatives of Christ, who was a representative of God, to reject the Apostles would be to reject God, removing His peace from that city. As the foundation layers of the church, they held the keys to the Kingdom, which would be passed on to the local churches which they planted (on the foundation of God’s Old and New Covenant Word). And so, whatever they bound or loosed on earth would be bound or loosed in heaven. So serious was such a rejection, that the Apostles would shake the dust off of their feet when leaving that city, indicating that the entire city was under the judgment of God for rejecting His ambassadors. The severity of this judgment is detailed in the verse that follows:

“Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” (Vs. 15). Everyone knew what had happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, and how wicked those cities were. So utterly corrupt and defiled were those cities that only Lot and his two daughters were spared, when angelic beings rained down fire and brimstone upon the city, leaving nothing but an ash heap behind as a testimony of God’s fierce judgment upon those who rebel against Him. And yet, here our Lord states that those cities which would reject the preaching of His Apostles would receive a greater condemnation than Sodom and Gomorrah, at the final judgment? Why? Why would this be the case, considering how wicked and utterly depraved Sodom and Gomorrah had been? Simply put, Sodom and

Gomorrah had far less light. Had the Lord and His Apostles did in Sodom and Gomorrah, what they had done in the present; had the Messiah stepped into Sodom and Gomorrah and preached to them with the accompaniment of so many signs and wonders, even they would have repented. It is here then, friends, that we unlock a very important principle which we will address in more detail in our applications. Condemnation and judgment increase dramatically for those who spurn the light of Christ, which has been graciously presented to them. Greater light incurs greater responsibility/accountability upon those who are given that light.

And so, this brings us to the conclusion of the first portion of our Lord's instructions to His Apostles, whom He was preparing to send out. Next time, Lord willing, we will continue on with this theme, by considering additional instructions given in the verses that follow.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Brethren, obviously, when considering such instructions as these, which are specifically directed toward the Apostles, we need to exercise care when seeking to apply them to us. To be sure, not everything expected of the Apostles, who were laying the foundation of the church with the accompaniment of signs and wonders (before the Canon of Scripture was complete), is to be expected of us. That said, there are general principles that we can definitely take from these passages, which, in keeping with the Scriptures as a whole, can be safely applied to us. Let us then consider some of those broader principles at this time.

1) While no one here is called to be an Apostle (which was a unique office designated to those who were to lay the foundation of the church, especially in the time of transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant, where God was now expanding His Kingdom beyond the Jews and to the whole world); and while no one here is expected to perform miraculous signs and wonders (which, again, were meant to attest to the teaching and arrival of the Christ, who ushered in the New Covenant and the Last Days)... again, we are all called to present the Gospel, which was solidified by the Apostles and attested to by signs and wonders. [70 later sent out]

We have everything that we need in the completed Canon of Scripture, and in the ongoing empowering of the proclamation of that Scripture by the Holy Spirit, to turn this world upside down, today. What is so special about the Words of this Book? What makes this Bible

any different than any other book in existence? We can answer these questions with one key word, taken from 2 Timothy 3:16. This Book is “Theopneustos.” It is God-breathed. And to this end, God has ordained to empower this Word unto the building of His Kingdom. He has ordained to empower the message of this Book, unto the regeneration and salvation of lost souls. One of the primary ministries of the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the Third Person of the Trinity, is to empower what is proclaimed from this Book, unto the saving and changing of naturally condemned sinners. It is God’s means to a glorious end. It is God’s means unto building His church, and we merely proclaim it, seeking to explain what it says. And the same God who created this entire creation by simply speaking (that’s the kind of power He has), has determined to recreate new life through the Words taken from this Book. The One who has, at the beginning, caused light to shine out of darkness, causes light to shine out of the darkness of the fallen (and naturally dead) human heart, unto life eternal.

That said, God has ordained it to be the case that His Word would be upheld, supported, carried and transported by means of His church. He uses broken, vessels of clay to transport His life-giving Word to the world, so that, through that proclaimed Word, through those broken vessels, He might bring life to those who hear. The job of the church, and of the individuals who make up that church, is to proclaim this Word, unadulterated, undiluted, without mixing in our own ideas and concepts, which would only serve to defile it. And when we cease doing that; when we cease proclaiming the full counsel of God, given in this Word, we ultimately forfeit the power of the Holy Spirit, and cease to be a church. To this end, let us hold God’s Word, which has always been challenged throughout all of history, up to the highest position of honor in our hearts, constantly reminding ourselves that the power of life is contained within it. Everything we need, to act as a church, and to live in a way which is pleasing to God, and to bring life to the world, is right here, contained in this Book. Let us be good stewards of it! Let us humbly, and yet, boldly release this light! And might there even be among us, some who are called to carry this message into a full-time ministry context? [Note: Abuse of some charismatic churches, but also neglect of some reformed churches...]

2) Without wavering in your faith; without stumbling in your commitment to proclaim the Gospel; without lacking confidence in the power of God and diligently serving Him to your

dying day, recognize that rejection is also part and parcel for the course of faithfully proclaiming the Gospel. Recognize that there will be mockers and deniers of the truth, not with a pessimistic attitude, but simply to prepare for whatever God brings our way, so that, we will not lose heart in our Gospel labors. Our job is to sow seeds, and some of those seeds will be a testimony of judgment against those who remain hardened in their rebellion, even after hearing the Gospel proclaimed to them. The Lord and His Apostle's faced severe rejection. There were times when they even had to shake the dust off of their feet, but they kept going. They sowed Gospel seeds and prayed over them, and left the results to God. And we too, must live with the constant reminder that we can't change the human heart, which is dead in sin. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. We simply proclaim the truth, and we leave the work of regeneration to the Holy Spirit, who will effectively call, whosoever He chooses to effectively call. That said, we can rest assured that all of Christ's true sheep will hear His voice, in His perfect time. We don't know who His sheep are. We simply give the general call and leave God to do the rest. And so, we have to anticipate (again not pessimistically), that we will also experience rejection, even as our Lord and His Apostles had experienced. Rejection and discomfort are things we never covet in life, but you will never be able to effectively serve Christ, if you are unwilling to experience both.

3) Finally, friend, do not leave here this morning without understanding something absolutely critical, which we have seen in this text. Remember the greater responsibility you have in responding to the greater light you have been given, concerning the things of God. You are living in a very unique time, when the entirety of God's will is clearly given in the completed Canon of Scripture, and proclaimed regularly. As wicked and evil as Sodom and Gomorrah were, to reject the light that you have been given, is far worse. Now, hear me here for a moment. It is so easy to look at the wicked things that go on around us; it is so easy to look at the terrible sins of homosexual marriage, transgenderism, adultery, fornication, murder, drunkenness, drug addiction, theft...etc; it is so easy to look at these sins and to assume that they are the worst of the worst, seeing them as a means of self-justification if we have avoided them. But, understand this. The worst sin; the absolute worst sin of all, is to refuse to come to Christ, after He has been presented to you, as your only hope of salvation. Are those other evil acts taking people to hell? Absolutely! But, it is much worse to spurn the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whom God has presented

to you as crucified, and as God's costly means of reconciling sinners to Himself. The worst sin of all is to reject God's peace offering in Christ. To be sure, there are different degrees of suffering in hell, and any degree of suffering forever is a miserable reality. But, the Scriptures teach that to reject Christ is a very serious crime, which will carry with it some of the severest of consequences. Remember these words of our Lord: "It will be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah, than it will be for those cities who refuse the Gospel of Jesus Christ!" You have been given much, much light. Even today, there are many who have never so much as heard the Gospel! You have been given a great privilege. But, with that privilege comes great, great responsibility to properly respond to it. Don't let this opportunity escape you. Don't put it off. If you die in such a state, you will regret it (deeply regret it), forever! [The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25