

Introduction

When Jesus looked at people, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Those in need of the ministry of the gospel numbered many. And so he explained to his disciples that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers were few. He urged them to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. That is where we left off back in December. Prayer is a critical matter in the life and ministry of Christ's disciples. And it is critical in a manner that you might not have thought of. We often think of the role of prayer in affecting the outcome of a situation. And here was a situation Jesus had urged his disciples to pray about. With so many people aching under the weight of sin and sickness, and no help from their religious teachers, there was this great need staring them in the face. The obvious thought about Jesus' exhortation to pray is that God would respond to the prayers by sending workers into the harvest. But another side of the purpose for this exhortation emerges in the words that follow. Praying that the Lord of the harvest send out laborers would result in a provision of laborers, it would also heighten in the disciples the urgency of the hour, the great need of the hour, and the desperate condition of those needing ministry, with the result that these who were praying would come to yearn in their own hearts to be part of the answer. Does that make sense? I am saying that if they prayed in this way, they would be moved from asking the Lord to send someone and begin to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me."

One of the directives I give to folks who are struggling with forgiveness or bitterness is to pray for the person who is offending them. Pray for them because it is a ministry to them, but pray for them as well so you can be on the side of seeking their welfare. God often will use that prayer to turn our hearts towards our offenders in mercy and compassion. So Jesus has ordered his disciples to pray and then at a subsequent point, he chooses the Twelve as an answer to their own prayers. He authorizes them and sends them out into the harvest.

[Read Text; Pray]

To Jesus the crowds appeared harassed and helpless. When I look out at the sheep of Jesus in our day, they sometimes appear to me like the bewildered crowds did in Jesus' day. As this world is growing darker by the day and increasingly hostile to Christians, Christ's own followers often seem to lack confidence, a sense of commission, and even compassion. I don't know how each of you feels out there in the world, but I know I need to be challenged and encouraged in order to be more vigilant and more aggressive in regard to going out onto the harvest. So I am so glad to be able to bring to you this morning this text and its message. The message here speaks helpfully to us at some of the very important points of need. So watch with me as we uncover some hope and challenge for Christ's disciples.

Notice first,

I. Jesus Initiates.

A. Jesus had instructed the large group of his disciples to pray and now he convenes his intimate group of twelve. Matthew points out that JESUS "called to him his twelve disciples." Jesus had instructed that prayers be made to the Lord of the harvest in order that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into his harvest. And that is exactly what he is doing here. The Lord of the harvest has selected a group to go out. He has called them to himself and he is about to send them out. I just think that it is important for us to see who is doing the choosing, the authorizing, and the sending. It is Jesus. It is not the disciples themselves but Christ who has selected which laborers he will send out. Jesus takes the initiative. He makes the call.

B. Among those that Jesus savingly brings to himself, he calls different ones to specific tasks. Here in Matthew 10 there was a large group of disciples who were following Jesus. But there was also a distinct group of twelve men who were privileged to be in the inner circle with him. It was this group of twelve that he called to himself on this occasion. The word for "called" here seems to exhibit a formal calling rather than just, "hey guys, come over here!" It was more like an announced summons for the twelve to report to a formal gathering for a special purpose, one with public recognition. And at this gathering Jesus authorized and deputized and dispatched the men to go into the harvest, to go out among the people on a

specific mission. But again my focus at the moment is on the fact that JESUS called these men for this purpose. They were not self-called but God-called. This is such an important aspect of their responsibility in going that Jesus later told his disciples what is recorded in John 15:16, "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." God places people in the body according to his plan and his design. Some are evangelists and some are apostles and some are pastor-teachers and some are those whose souls are being watched over by the elders, but all have a place according to his grace. 1 Corinthians 12:18 says, "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." When in Antioch the church was in worship, the HOLY SPIRIT indicated it was HIS WILL that they set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work which he had called them. And when Paul was speaking to the elders from the church at Ephesus, he recognized that it was the Holy Spirit who had made them overseers.

C. Every Christian needs to remember this truth. It is the work of God to put us in the body according to his placement and choice. We should be eager to embrace his placement and use the gifts that correspond to his placement. And we can be confident and bold, not brash and obnoxious, but gently confident and assured that God is using us to accomplish his purpose through us as we engage ourselves in service to the body and to the world.

D. Further, we should in fact recognize that our coming to Christ for forgiveness of sin and justification with God was itself initiated by God. God's sovereign placement of us in the body corresponds to his sovereignty in our salvation. Our placement in the body never began in the heart of a man. Likewise, human beings do not initiate the saving work and the saving call of God by crying out to God, "Please save us! Please rescue us! Please forgive us and transform us!" The saving work of God from the start is initiated by God. The idea to save was God's from eternity past and his call to salvation is an effectual calling which derives out of an eternal purpose to save specific persons. Our cry for salvation and for forgiveness results from the initiating work of God.

Just as Matthew mentions specific names here of specific men for this special task, there are specific names written in the Lamb's Book of Life from eternity (Revelation 13:8). These are the called according to God's purpose. These are specific ones God loved and chose before the foundation of the world. In the course of time, as Romans 8:29-30 says, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

And why do we need to remember this truth? Well for one thing, we need to always bear in mind that God's salvation is 100% of God's grace. It begins and ends with him. To him be all the glory!! But in Romans 8 Paul is highlighting the assurance that comes from this knowledge. If God is for us in this way, who can be against us? And who can bring a charge against us (one that sticks anyway)? And we can be sure that we will not be separated from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. We can be bold in the face of tribulations and distress and persecution because none of those things can separate us from so great a love as began before the earth was founded.

The fact that Jesus initiated this formal and public gathering of the Twelve to be authorized and dispatched communicates to them that he chose them. They are going on HIS mission not theirs. And He who chose them will see them through. They can be confident and bold and assured in him. Their courage and confidence will find solid ground in the assurance that Christ is the one who chose and called them.

E. This is an important reality for every Christian to grasp. We may not be one of the Twelve, we may not be apostles, but if we belong to Christ it is because Christ Jesus took the initiative. He undertook to lay down his life for ones the Father gave to him. The Father chose His people from the foundation of the world and entrusted these to His Son Jesus, and Jesus undertook to die in their place to give eternal life to them. And he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not with him generously give us all things? And how will he not keep us unto himself? In Christ we are more than conquerors. Nothing shall be able to separate

us from God's love in Christ. We can go out into this world and live in obedience to Christ and to his call with confidence. We can live boldly. We can be strong. We can be assured. We can be unashamed. And the reason is that this is his mission. He has the power, the authority, the wisdom, the strategy, and the certainty of victory. And we are the soldiers he has chosen to send out in battle. So pursue holiness with hope and assurance. And share the gospel without shame or hesitation. Face affliction and hardship without flinching. But rejoice in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Second, I want you to see . . .

II. Jesus Authorizes.

A. When Jesus summoned the disciples to himself, Matthew tells us he gave them authority. To possess authority is to possess the right to exercise power. Clearly the authority these men were given was powerful. By the authority granted, they would be enabled to do astonishing works.

Jesus authorized the disciples with his own authority. If you look back just a couple verses to chapter 9:35, you see that Jesus had been going throughout all the cities and villages "healing every disease and every affliction." Now this is precisely what he is enabling them to do. The words are the same—to "heal every disease and every affliction."

B. The disciples would be going out with power far greater than anything they possessed on their own. It was not their strength but a delegated power. These men were not widely recognized for skill or speaking ability. They were from Galilee, a region where many Gentiles had come to live. In the eyes of the rest of Israel they were low class. These were not scholarly or educated. Several were fishermen and one was a tax-collector. The way of the Lord is not to choose people because they have much to commend them but to use people who have little to no reason for confidence in themselves but whose confidence then is in him. There is little or no reason for the world to be impressed with them. After all God has not called disciples to himself to show how great they are but how great Christ is and how great is the power of Christ at work in them.

C. So these men had no reason to be proud or self-confident. The eyes of the Lord roam through the earth not to find people of great ability, but seeking for people whose hearts are blameless toward him. He uses not people who are naturally confident but people who will understand that only in Christ can they do anything of worth. These are men and women God will shape into fruitful servants of his. They will only be useful as they abide in Christ. They will be confident and bold NOT because of their skill or human wisdom but because they know the Lord, obey him, and trust in him.

D. Here again is an important lesson for every Christian. Jesus Christ authorizes every believer not as an apostle and not to heal but to be a witness unto Christ out in his harvest, to be salt and light in the world. This is a calling which demands power we do not have in and of ourselves. And to the extent that we try to produce results on our own through human means is a departure from the way of God. Listen to the Apostle Paul. To the Philippians he declared that whatever gain he had personally according to the flesh was actually a handicap to serving Christ well. Things like which tribe he came from, how zealous he was, how blameless he was in trying to keep the law—these stood between him and resting in Christ. So he declared “whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

To the Corinthians Paul declared that he was sent to preach the gospel. It seems like folly to those who reject it. But those who are being saved see it for what it is—the power of God. So he did not use human skill or rhetoric to try make it appealing. He said, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that their faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

That is the way it is supposed to be. For the disciples Jesus was sending out as apostles, their focus was not to be on their own weaknesses and failures or their own strengths for that matter. Rather, they were strengthened for the task by the power and authority of Christ. Same for us! We do not need to try do something that we can't. What we are supposed to do is exhibit God's power by simply proclaiming Christ. To some it will be folly. To others it will be a stumbling block. We must not

use human effort or schemes to try to change that. We must rest in the power and authority of God by simply preaching the truth. And to those who are being saved, it will be seen as it is—as the power of God.

Now , third, I want you to see

III. Jesus Dispatches.

A. Having called together the twelve, and having authorized them with his own authority, verse 5 indicates that Jesus sent the twelve out into the harvest. Here we notice a progression. After Jesus was baptized by John and introduced by the Father as his beloved Son, Jesus went up to be tempted. And then after John was arrested Jesus went off to Galilee to conduct his ministry. He preached the kingdom of God. He healed people of every disease and affliction. And he began to call disciples to follow him. They heard him preach and teach and witnessed his massive healing ministry. They heard him explain the cost of following him. They experienced Jesus' miraculous stilling of the storm. They saw him cast out demons, raise a dead girl to life, and give sight to the blind. And they had heard Jesus exhort the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into his harvest. What they had learned and experienced to this point was preparatory. Now it was time to put into use the things they had learned and the authority they had received. Jesus was dispatching them to minister and proclaim the kingdom. It was time for them to step out and build on their training to join Jesus in the work.

B. As most of you know, my daughter Ariail is a nurse. She has been at Children's Hospital now for about 3 years. But she didn't just jump in. She didn't say one day, I think I'd like to be a nurse and then the next day get a job. The track of training and preparation was long and challenging. It really started back in High School, and then she went to UW Waukesha taking all kinds of basic courses before she could transfer over to UW-Milwaukee and begin nursing education in earnest. Finally after hours and hours of classes she got to practice nursing on dummies. They are properly referred to as nursing simulation mannequins. And only after that she entered clinical training where she provided nursing care to real people. And then she was closely supervised. Even after graduation and being hired, she had to be oriented and spend time under the supervision of a preceptor before being sent out on her own.

You see that kind of process going on as Jesus appoints these disciples, calling them apostles in verse 2. The significance is that a disciple is a receiver of instruction. An apostle is sent out to put instruction into practice. An apostle is sent out under the authority of the sender. Jesus is sending out the disciples but he is still nearby to supervise, instruct, and assure. But you see Jesus is taking them further and further one step at a time to be the fishers of men he had told them he would make them to be.

The time would come when he would no longer be around in person. The time would come when Jesus would confer upon his disciples the authority to go to the whole world. Matthew tells us in chapter 28 Jesus would send them out to make disciples of all nations. And even though he would not be present in body, he gave them this assurance, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Dispatched but not deserted. Sent but not forsaken.

C. If Jesus has called you to himself, he has called you to discipleship. He has called everyone who would come after him to deny self and take up one's cross and follow. At some point that means being sent out, dispatched. It means we go through training in order to go out. Disciples make disciples. And that is what the church is about. We are disciples of Jesus. We learn and train and teach to reproduce, to go out into the harvest, to leave our safe zones in order to reach the masses who are helpless and harassed and in need of the Savior. But as we step out, we have the assurance from Jesus, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Conclusion

I do not know anyone who does not experience at least a twinge of fear at the thought of going out into the harvest, you know, sharing a word of witness unto Christ. But this is what the followers of Jesus are supposed to be about. Reflecting the joy of the kingdom, we are to share the good news of Christ's kingdom. Jesus knows it is a task for which we are not adequate in ourselves. But here is good news. He chooses disciples he will use. He equips disciples with his power and authority, and he will never leave us but be with us always. So let's be bold. Let's exhibit confidence. Let us radiate joy. And let us go.