



Speaker:  
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## A Special Mission

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 18 of 18

9/12/2020 (SAT) | Bible: **Mark 6:7-13**

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Turn with me if you will to the Gospel According to Mark. We're in the sixth chapter, and shall be reading verses 7 to 13.

Last week, we witnessed Jesus and the disciples going back to Jesus's hometown. The people were amazed by the accounts of both the words and works of their fellow citizen. But they concluded that, if he *looked* like a normal man, he must *be* one. Therefore for the most part they rejected him. It was because of this lack of faith that Jesus didn't perform many miracles or healings there.

Jesus now commissions the disciples to go out and be a witness for him. Today, I'd like to look at some of the details of this commission. From the outset though, I need to make this point. We shouldn't think all these details are to be copied by those who today wish to carry the same gospel message to the world. As with all practices recorded in scripture, it's our duty to distinguish between principles which apply to us and those which don't.

By way of example, I'd like to look at the instruction to go out in pairs. There are pretty obvious advantages to this. Solitary evangelists won't have the same encouragement. They won't have a check on the quality of the doctrine they preach. And the preaching won't carry the same authority. It's a principle found throughout scripture that two witnesses to a claim carry more weight than one. You may remember when we looked through the Book of Revelation that it uses the picture of two witnesses to describe the entire authoritative witness of the church throughout the ages.

We might say the two-by-two method has been hijacked by the cults. In particular, the Mormon Church and the Watchtower organisation have more than anyone else taken this principle so strictly that they have, if you like, ruined it for genuine evangelists. If members of the public see pairs of people talking about Jesus in the street or at their front door, they assume they must belong to one of those two groups. It doesn't mean we shouldn't use that method, of course. But as with many other ways, the Lord's people can be wrongly identified with these unchristian religious groups.

Now I used this as an example of a practice that has merit even for evangelists today. But other aspects of this particular commission of Jesus are not to be copied, such as trying to cast out demons or travelling around completely unprepared!

Let's begin then to look at these instructions of Jesus.

## 1. THE DISCIPLES WERE SENT

They **went** because they were **sent**! And all true evangelists since then have likewise been sent by God. You might remember a scripture I quoted last week which asked us how people could hear the gospel without a preacher, and it went on to ask how anyone *can* preach unless they've been sent.

The ways in which men enter the preaching ministries are numerous, but what they all have in common is the work begins with a direct commission from God. Any man in this world can go out and start "preaching". And throughout history they have! But if they haven't been sent by God, they're not true gospel preachers. The one who has been genuinely called to this ministry by God is converted to Christ. He attaches himself to a local church. He's filled with a burden and an ability to preach. He obeys that call. And his preaching is endorsed by the Lord's people.

Luke 10:2 says, "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." Pray, dear brothers and sisters, that the Lord would indeed send people to harvest his elect. And always remember: it's not just those with titles who have this responsibility. God does raise up men who he gives uncommon gifts to. But he expects all his people to be ambassadors for Jesus in this world.

## 2. THE DISCIPLES WERE EQUIPPED

In this unique context, the disciples were given not just a gospel message but power to perform miracles. In the wisdom of God, this transitional period lasting several decades saw unusual expressions of God's power through instant healings and other miracles. These were not meant to last, and they *didn't* last. The actions and words of the modern signs and wonders movement bear no resemblance to New Testament practices.

God doesn't merely *call* people to ministry but *equips* them too. He doesn't raise someone up as a preacher of righteousness only to then deprive them of the knowledge and the spirit needed to fulfil the role. To add weight to the gospel message in these very early days of the church, the Lord kindly shared even some of his own miraculous abilities with his followers.

Servants of God today also have access to his storehouse of power. We may not receive power to perform miracles, but then again we shouldn't want it! We happily go along with whatever methods God chooses. But he equips us. 2 Timothy 4:17 says, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

God's servants today go out with the same authority as their forefathers in the faith. When we determine to go and tell others about Jesus, **he goes with us**. And if you will humble yourself and go to God asking for strength **he will give it**. And it's through this strength of God that his servants have accomplished great things.

- If you're exceptionally shy, he can loose your tongue
- If you're afraid of a hostile reaction, he can give you boldness
- And if you think you're not clever enough, he can show you the gospel saves not through the cleverness of words but by the power of God's Spirit.

A well-known hymn goes like this:

*We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender;  
We go not forth alone against the foe;  
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,  
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.*

### 3. THE DISCIPLES WERE FULLY RELIANT ON GOD

I did say there were aspects to this particular commission that are not to be copied forever. As we read this passage, you may have been struck by a sense of urgency in Jesus's instructions. It's like he was saying, *Just go as you are*.

- They were not to take food with them
- They were not to take money in order to *buy* food along the way
- They were not to take a bag with necessary bits in
- And he even restricted the amount of clothing they wore, so they couldn't even sleep outdoors if they had to!

Let's be clear: there was never any risk the disciples would starve or die of exposure. There'd be people on their travels who'd take them in, feed them and give them a bed for the night. This would be a good lesson for them about reliance on God. But Jesus would later overturn these instructions and send the disciples out properly prepared. And in doing this, he laid down for future generations the meaning of reliance on God. He now expects us to use normal means for carrying out his work, **but it is always carried out with a complete reliance on God in prayer**.

Some today, with a poor understanding of these scriptures, tell us they're "living by faith". It's likely it's these very verses they misuse in order to justify their irresponsible attitude. They might claim they don't need to have a job because God will pay their bills. They might travel about evangelizing, insisting God will feed them. But I'd say this approach in no way displays a great faith. I know it impresses some, but it's just reckless. And the greatest irony of these "men of faith" is they so rely on God to supply their need without any effort on

their part that they go round telling everyone they're living by faith! I'm sure there are many people who have responded sympathetically to these remarks by contributing to the living of those people. This bizarre scenario shows just how little faith these men really have.

God expects us to use the means he's provided. So:

- If you want to eat, he expects you to earn money
- If you want to get from A to B, he expects you to travel
- If you want to keep your family safe, you must be prepared to defend them from those who wish them harm

But again, **every step you take, every word that comes out of your mouth, must be covered with prayer**. Philippians 4:6 exhorts us, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

#### 4. THE DISCIPLES PREACHED REPENTANCE

At the heart of all the preaching was **repentance**. They told people to *stop sinning*. They told them to *seek God* instead. They told them to *confess their sinfulness*. **They told them to trust in the merits of the promised messiah, Jesus Christ.**

Their message, then, was partly negative. People would need to become aware they were in terrible danger before the rescue was presented to them. After all, what use is there in telling a drowning man of a way out of the swollen river if they don't believe they're drowning? What point is there in offering food to a man who isn't hungry? Likewise, those who think themselves righteous won't see their need for a saviour.

The mention of sin must have its place in Gospel preaching, and the natural man doesn't like it. If a man preaches faithfully, he WILL be met with opposition. And fearful Christians will often try to avoid opposition. They convince themselves and their fellow churchgoers that our message should be one the world likes. And so we end up with sin-friendly preaching.

Consider the common phrases used in modern evangelicalism:

- "The Lord has a great plan for your life!"
- "God really, really loves you!"
- "Jesus wants to be your friend!"
- "God is pleading with you to accept him!"
- "Jesus just wants you to let him into your heart!"

All these phrases, and all like them, have this one thing in common: they have no foundation in scripture. You can survey the entire book of Acts, with all those examples of apostolic preaching, and you will search in vain for any of the phrases or approaches used by the modern evangelical church.

The picture of the apostles' preaching we get from the examples given to us in Acts was very different. They weren't frightened of telling people they'd sinned against God. They even accused people of specific sins, such as the murder of Jesus by the Jews. Their preaching was bold. They didn't shrink back from disputes with people. And their preaching was of course thoroughly Christ-centred.

The only way someone can enjoy the knowledge of sins *forgiven* is to have first experienced the sadness of sins *unforgiven*. People must be left in no doubt they're in trouble with God.

When we had our children, it soon dawned on me they were born into this world "children of wrath" like everyone else. Regardless of whether they were God's elect or not, in their initial state they deserved God's condemnation. Unless God was to change this state, they'd remain his enemies.

This goes for your children too. God is coming for them. If they don't repent, God will come after them with his sword drawn and inflict vengeance. And he won't show them a scrap of mercy. They won't receive a lighter sentence because they had Christian parents. It's worse than that. The fact they *had* Christian parents and *had* such a privilege to hear the gospel over and over again means they'll be held more accountable! This is why I beg God day after day to have mercy on my children. I don't lay it on thick to them about eternal hell so they make some false profession. **BUT I DO WANT THEM, AND MY RELATIVES, AND MY FRIENDS, AND THE REST OF THE WORLD TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEY **MUST** FEAR GOD.** The Hebrew Christians were reminded that it's "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".

Listen to James 4:8-10, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

When I share the gospel with unbelieving friends and relatives, I want more than anything for them to feel *bad*. To feel *sorrow over sin*. To *cry* when they realise they've spent their lives mocking the God of Heaven. And may God help me to never descend into the preaching of a false gospel geared towards making sinners feel like God is their best friend.

## 5. THE DISCIPLES WASHED THEIR HANDS OF ALL WHO REJECTED THE GOSPEL

Jesus's instruction to the disciples may sound odd to us. *If any refuse to hear you, he said, shake the dust off your feet.* The disciples were still Jews, culturally speaking, even if they were no longer Jews spiritually. And they'd have been familiar with this curious practice. Many Jews, on returning from Gentile countries, would remove the dust from their feet before entering their homeland. The gentile nations were considered unclean, and they'd have no trace of this pollution in their own land. It was symbolic. It's rather like Pilate symbolically washing his hands before handing Jesus over for crucifixion. It was a bit of

theatre to make his statement clearer: that he was not responsible for the killing of this innocent man.

Things have changed. Jesus introduced the concept of a kingdom without borders. God's Kingdom today is made up of neither unclean nor holy places. There is no heathen land and no holy land. God's Kingdom is made up of individuals from every corner of this globe. God no longer dwells in *places* but in *people*, his holy Church.

I said the disciples would've enjoyed hospitality throughout their journey. But Jesus is here warning them they must also be prepared to be shunned. Some people will find the beautiful gospel message to be nothing but hate speech. The second century Roman historian Tacitus said Christians were haters of the human race. And that same irrational attitude persists even today.

Jesus mentions Sodom and Gomorrah here. Curiously, he insists the inhabitants of those sinful cities won't suffer at the judgement as much as the people who rejected the disciples' message. I say it's curious because Sodom was notorious for its depravity. There was within it a devilish mixture of pride, hatred and lust. Those cities were destroyed by God as an example for future generations. Through this, God would show his hatred for sin.

The curiosity then is how some otherwise respectable people who just happen to not be interested in the gospel could be in worse trouble at the judgement than the perverts of Sodom. The person who doesn't know the scriptures would dismiss this as illogical. In the minds of men exist hierarchies of sin. You can ask anyone you meet to provide you with a list of sins. And they'd rank these sins according to seriousness. But you won't meet a single individual who even has a decent list let alone place them in the right order.

Now any sin will bring judgement your way. If you were to somehow live your entire life sinlessly yet in an unguarded moment commit just one sin, you'd face eternal judgement. So when people tell you "sin is sin", you can partly agree with them. You will perhaps agree that, in one sense, all sin is the same, but remind them that in another sense some sins are more serious than others. And contrary to what the world thinks, **unbelief is the worst**. Because to commit some violent act against another human being is truly reprehensible. But this is a crime against a mere human, likely a fellow sinner. The rejection of the gospel is an attack on God!

- It's a rejection of a message from God himself
- It's an insult to his children who share the message
- And worst of all it's a slight on God's only son who gave his life for sinners.

The man or woman who rejects the gospel acts despite the evidence for God in his creation and despite their conscience telling them they're sinners. So they're guilty. And their crime is one God will surely take personally. As contrary to human reason as it is, **rejection of God is more serious than any of those sins the natural man considers the most heinous**.

This wasn't the only occasion when Jesus said rejection of the gospel was the worst crime. Matthew 11:20-24 says, "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: 'Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

So here's the paradox. People who hear the gospel have been granted a great privilege. BUT IF THEY REJECT IT THEIR FATE WILL BE WORSE THAN IF THEY NEVER HEARD IT AT ALL.

Once you hear the gospel, you immediately become part of a special class of people. From among this class will emerge **two radically different peoples**. One group will obey the gospel. They have their sins forgiven and get to live forever in a state of happiness. The other group won't obey the gospel. They won't have their sins forgiven and they get to exist forever in a state of misery.

What this means for us is **those countries today which have been most privileged with the outpouring of the Word of God are at risk of facing a harsher judgement than all the most barbarous heathen nations**. Unbelievable, isn't it?

I was saying to you only the other week that we should be thankful for what we, as Christians, have in this country of ours. I mentioned all the preaching, and evangelism, and Bibles, and books and so on and so on. **But rejection of this greater light means greater guilt**. Jesus elsewhere says, in John 15:22-24, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."

An unthinking Christian might reason that, if most are to reject the gospel, it'd be better for them to not hear the gospel from us in the first place. They'd be right in one sense. If the world didn't hear the gospel, their guilt would be less at the judgement. But the world will run according to God's good and wise purpose and not our childlike logic. And we who have been saved from our sin are thoroughly glad we heard the gospel. We rejoice that not all held back from declaring the news of God's rescue plan.

We'll be forever thankful to God that he raised up men to bring the gospel of righteousness to us. That he equipped them, sent them and moved them by his Spirit to preach repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.