

Kingdom Proclamation & Response

You were a man of sorrows, Lord Jesus. You were acquainted with grief and acquainted with hatred and persecution. And sometimes we can't understand that; sometimes we identify with it and we don't know quite what to do with ourselves, with the difficulties, the opposition, the struggles that we have. I pray, Lord, that as we look at Your life we would first of all come again to know You, Your life, Your ministry and the contours of that blessed life 2000 years ago that continues to this day. I pray that we would know that better, that we would know You better through our time, and Lord, I pray that as always, when we look upon You, that we would know not only who You are, but also who we are and what it means to walk after You. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

We are considering the conflict in the life of Christ, and we are looking at His mission and how it caused some of this conflict. Let's first look at the drama of the Book of Matthew—the drama of the life of Christ. We have seen a unity that stretches all the way from Matthew 4:23 through Matthew 9:35, a unity that shows that Jesus' ministry united word and work. His ministry was one in which He preached and taught in synagogues, preached the kingdom, performed wonderful deeds, and healed the people. All those elements were linked together.

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry, we begin to get some early hints of Jewish opposition. For example, when the paralytic was lowered through the roof, some of the people who were there thought that Jesus blasphemed. That's a hint that things may go wrong, and at the end of the section in Matthew 9:34, Jesus casts out a demon, and they think that maybe He is doing this by the power of Satan. There are a couple of hints that they are even considering taking His life. There is then a turning point in the life of Christ—a slight shift as Jesus turns from the great throngs in their undifferentiated status and begins to train a few people, a few disciples who will carry on His work.

In Matthew 9:35, after Jesus has performed a number of miracles, we read that He was going through the towns and villages teaching, preaching, and healing. Then in verse 36, on this tour of Galilee, when He saw the crowds He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. So although He's been ministering, they're wandering, drifting; they don't know where to go, and they're oppressed. Then we read, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into His harvest field." He sees that there are a great number of people; He does not see them simply as the unwashed, the masses, the ignoramuses of the world, but He has compassion on them and knows that the only way they can be reached is by having more workers go. Those workers are not going to be the scribes and the Pharisees because they despise the masses. What He has in mind when He says this is that He needs to send out His own disciples to take care of them. The Gospel of Matthew does not really provide a clear-cut list of the disciples. In fact, the list of the disciples comes in the very next passage, 10:1, which is still very closely related to this initial mission of Jesus. Matthew 10:1 reads: "He called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles." So this is the first time Jesus reveals the twelve as the chosen ones.

But what He needs to do is motivate them to go out into the crowds and motivate them for ministry, which is not always the easiest thing to do. These twelve are not necessarily mature Christians. This raises the question, "How do you motivate people to go out?"

Once in a Sunday school class, I was talking about Christian ministry, and I said that the one thing you don't want to do in Christian ministry is to try to motivate people through fear. If you motivate people

through fear, and they meet some obstacles, they'll fall away because you manipulated them into it. They're not really dedicated to it. Someone asked, "If you don't motivate by fear, what else is there?" Another person answered, "Guilt."

Jesus didn't motivate through fear or through guilt but by letting people see the need and then saying, "You pray about it. You see these needy people—would you join Me in praying about their needs?" That's how He motivated. Then He called disciples and after He called them, He sent them out. Those who were motivated, went.

This is something very practical for Christian living and church living. There is a continuum of perspectives regarding how people should get ready for Christian ministry. Some people are "maximalists," concerned primarily with their intake of Christian teaching and wanting to be "well-fed," sometimes at the expense of actually passing it along to others. At the other end of the continuum are "minimalists" who say, "The world is dying, going to hell, and the needs are innumerable—let's just get out into the real world and do ministry." They think they have enough knowledge for the work of ministry if they know Christ and have read the Bible a couple of times.

Maximalists say, "I want to go to a church where I'll be fed with God's Word. I like a pastor who gives real spiritual meat." They're people who view church attendance as an act of worship and service to God—not just morning worship, but almost any attendance at any church function is a proof that they're loyal, that they love God and that they're dedicated to His ministry. Sometimes they're so well-fed, so spiritually overweight, that they can barely waddle out of the church and get into the world.

In my experience as a pastor, my church was in a medium-income neighborhood. There were a lot of people who didn't go to church and some needy people. I suggested that we cancel our evening services just for the months of July and August and visit people in the neighborhood a little bit, or if they didn't want to do that, visit people in their own neighborhood. The people who came to evening church in my church in July and August were people who knew plenty, and they were already coming to Bible study, Sunday school and morning worship. I was saying, "Let's get out there and do something." It was the one time when I proposed something I really wanted to do that it was completely denied. They said, "We cannot stop having evening service. That's our service to God." I thought we could have rendered more service to God by doing something with our neighbors. The church members who were opposed to my idea were of the well-fed variety who thought we needed to be constantly trained with no idea of when they would actually do any service.

Jesus' ministry falls in the middle of the continuum. Jesus worked with these people for a while, talking to them about discipleship and about His ministry. Then, probably before they were really comfortable, He sent them out. They knew a fair amount; they weren't the "minimalist" type. They had been with Him for a while, but it was time to get out there and go.

There are two important points about Matthew 10 to consider before moving on to examine the chapter's instructions for one who is to be sent out for ministry.

First, Matthew 10 is a summary of a variety of things Jesus said about Christian ministry. He didn't say all these things at this particular time, and He said a lot more than what we have here. For instance, in the first part of Matthew 10, He said, "Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans; go rather to lost sheep of the house of Israel." And then later on, in verse 18, He added, "On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles." So as early as verse 18 Jesus was letting them know that though they were not to go to the Gentiles primarily, eventually there would be

some things He wanted them to tell the Gentiles. So this is why it is likely that there was more to this discussion than what is recorded in Matthew 10 or that this chapter serves as a summary of things He said over several occasions.

Second, Matthew 10 is one of the obvious passages where the value of background studies for Bible interpretation is demonstrated. There are several things in this passage that you can't just read and understand. In this passage we meet Samaritans, demons, and "worthy persons" and we read of "peace going forth," "peace resting," and "shaking dust off people's feet." These are things one may not understand without studying other parts of the Bible and background information about the culture and time in which the passage took place. This passage is a little reminder that things were very different in that world from how they are in our world, and it is important to do background studies to understand a passage such as Matthew 10.

Matthew 10 presents the mission of the disciples. It starts with the statement about the sheep 9:35-38. Jesus looked at the crowds, and they were in difficult straits; they were harassed and helpless. They were like sheep without a shepherd, and He says the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. This is an example of the need to do background studies. We tend to think we know exactly what it means—we just need to get out there and reap that harvest. The truth is that a careful reading of Matthew 10 reveals more references to persecution and being oppressed and resisted than to happy results in ministering to others. The word "harvest" in the Bible does not always refer to the end gathering of the lost. More often than not, the harvest is a way of alluding to God's eschatological harvest for judgment. The harvest is the last day when God gets His sickle out and reaps the world. This imagery of harvesting with the scythe or with a sickle means cutting down the wicked. Examples of this imagery can be found in places like Isaiah 27:12-13, Jeremiah 12:3, Jeremiah 50:16, Joel 3:1-13, and Revelation 14:15. The harvest is often a term for judgment. It is not always for judgment. It can be a bit ambiguous. So here we must ask, "Is Jesus saying 'Just bring them on in; it will be so easy'?" Or is He saying, "Your ministry in some ways is a declaration of judgment on the wicked, a preparation for the final harvest?" We must read further to see the answer to this question.

In Matthew 10:1-4, Jesus calls His workers. He says to them, "Simply pray." We presume that they prayed, and then He called them. Looking at the list of those He called, it seems that the only thing they all had in common was that they were loyal to Jesus, with the exception of Judas. Then He gave His charge regarding where they should go in 10:5-6: "Don't go among the Gentiles or any town of the Samaritans?" What is the problem with Jesus' initial remark? Why do we stumble over it right away?

First, one would think He would be sending them to the whole world. Is He prejudiced? Is He narrow minded—without a vision? Second, there were a lot of Gentiles in some of these towns. Were they supposed to somehow evaluate people by their speech and appearance, to make sure they avoided any enclaves of Gentiles?

In other places Jesus said, "Go to the Gentiles." In fact, the Great Commission, the final words of the book of Matthew say, "Go to all the nations," and of course, "the nations" is just another word here for everybody in the world, and that's primarily Gentiles. So what was Jesus doing? One thing people do when they come upon a verse like this is to say, "The verse 'Don't go to the Gentiles' obviously no longer applies today so let's move on to the next verse." Instead of just discarding a verse like this as irrelevant, one must probe its meaning. First, determine if you have understood what the verse meant. Did Jesus really mean not to go to the Gentiles? Is that what the words really mean? A Bible dictionary or another Bible translation can help in discerning the meaning of the text. In this case, after

probing and digging a bit, one discovers there are no hidden secrets. It seems to mean “don’t go to the Gentiles,” and it does.

The next thing to do is ask, “Is there anything of interest happening at that time in history? Is there anything going on in ‘the redemptive historical situation?’” By that I mean not only the history of the year or the culture, but also in God’s plan—the place in God’s administration of His justice and love and His covenants that was different then than it is now. This could be the crucial issue in understanding a passage.

Next, find the principle that demonstrates some godly wisdom in the situation, regardless of what has changed over time. Find that principle and apply it today. We know that the situation was different then. How much did the disciples know at that time about the mission of Christ—the mission of the kingdom and God’s plan of salvation? One might answer that their knowledge was limited, thinking that God was going to redeem the Jews only, and any Gentiles who converted to Judaism—“If you want to become Jewish, come on over. If you want to come to the temple and follow our rules, rituals, and customs and enter our covenant, you’re welcome.” In other words, “Become a Jew and then you can become redeemed.” They were genuinely open to that, and they looked forward to that. They weren’t ready for the idea that the church doesn’t just let people come, but rather, the work of God is to go. That was a new concept for them. They weren’t familiar with that yet, and so, they started off by going to whom? To the people they already know. They were going out on their first mission. Jesus let them go first to the people they knew and cared about.

How did the average Jew, including the twelve disciples who weren’t that well trained yet, regard a Gentile? What was their image of a Gentile or a Samaritan?

The Jews thought that the Gentiles were dogs, Gentile dogs. The rabbis of the time actually debated whether a Jew should rescue a drowning Gentile, and concluded that he shouldn’t, even if he was a good swimmer. The reasoning was that Gentiles are unbelievers, therefore if they are rescued they simply have more years in which to do evil. So a Jew was under no obligation to help a Gentile. Now if a Jew wanted to do it, he could. It was not immoral to help a dying Gentile, but it was not recommended either. So it’s not surprising that Jesus would say, “Don’t go to the Gentiles.” Go to the people whom you know first. This provides a nice principal in which to do ministry today. If you’re going to start off in some ministry, you probably want to start with people whom you know, whom you love, to whom you expect to minister. Don’t go to Ukraine or India or France the first time you go on a mission, but go in your own neighborhood. Get good at that for a while, learn a few skills, then you can try something across borders.

How does the story of Jesus healing the daughter of the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15 figure into all this? This story of a Gentile woman persistently seeking Jesus’ help is part of a process of His revelation that His message was not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. He was sharing this with His disciples in small segments. He viewed her as someone worthy of His blessing and ministry, and this was to signal to the disciples that they were to take the kingdom to the Gentiles.

The message in the next passage is that the disciples should follow the pattern of Christ. Matthew 10:7 - 8 reads, “As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near.” Who preached that message before? John the Baptist. Jesus did too. The passage continues, “Heal the sick, raise the dead; cleanse those who have leprosy.” Who healed the sick? Who cleansed those who had leprosy? Jesus.

They were following in the footsteps of Jesus, not only in general, but also in the pattern of word and work. Preach the kingdom and then give signs. He said, “Do what you saw Me do; imitate Me.” Then He offered advice about how to proceed: “Don’t take any gold or silver or copper in your belts or bag for your journey or an extra tunic or sandals or a staff” (Matthew 10:9-10). He told them to take nothing with them. Then they asked, “How are we going to eat?” Jesus’ answer was, “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. Give it your greeting. If the house is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if not, your peace will return to you, and if no one welcomes you, shake the dust off your feet before you leave that home or town, and it will be easier for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town if there’s not one person who welcomes you” (Matthew 10:11-15).

To understand what “shaking the dust off” means, imagine a Jew traveling from Galilee to Judea. Samaria is between Galilee, where there are lots of Jews, and Judea, where there are lots of Jews. There weren’t many Jews in Samaria. So a traveling Jew had two options. One, travel through Samaria, which would save 40 or 50 miles of walking. Two, walk around Samaria, which might take an extra day and a half, but would enable you to avoid being polluted by Samaritan dirt, Samaritan dust, Samaritan food and water and so forth. Jews were expected to take this extra time to go around Samaria, but if they did travel through Samaritan territory, after crossing the border into Judea or going back into Galilee, they would just shake off their clothes to get the dust or dirt out (just like we shake dust off our pant cuffs today).

Jesus continued, “If you go to that town, you’re proclaiming the kingdom. They should receive you; they should take care of you. You don’t have to take care of yourself. Towns are close together; they’re waiting; they’ve heard of the miracles; they’ve heard of John; they’re expecting God to deliver. They’ll take care of you. And if not, treat them as if you would treat a Samaritan—move on.” This is also a relevant principle for a Christian mission today.

Jesus went on to tell the disciples to leave that town, and then a little bit later He said that they would know when they were persecuted. In Matthew 10:22-23 He said, “If you’re persecuted, if men hate you because of me, flee to another place. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” This is a reminder that there is a certain haste in missions or ministry. If people don’t receive you and your message, there is a place and a time to move on. If people persecute you, follow Jesus’ advice in this passage: don’t stubbornly stay there and get killed. Sometimes it’s the right thing to get killed, but if they persecute you, don’t stay and get slaughtered. Don’t compromise, don’t change your theology, but change your geography—move on. The time is not unlimited. Some around you may judge you for moving on too quickly, but you must consider that it is more kind to move on when people reject the message of the kingdom than to give them the impression that they can accept Christ any time, that they can say “no” to Jesus for years and years, that they can reject the messengers any time they want and that He will always be here to come back to. You cannot give them the impression that a series of rejections has no consequences.

Jesus described the dangers the disciples would face as they went out. In Matthew 10:17-23 Jesus explained that the disciples would be betrayed and handed over. He said in one of those difficult verses, “I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves, therefore, be shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” “Shrewd as snakes” means to stay out of trouble, to stay out of danger as best you can. In the phrase “as gentle as doves,” the word “gentle” probably means “guileless.” Be like a snake; avoid trouble. Don’t seek to be a martyr for God’s sake. On the other hand, don’t be so subtle that nobody even knows what you stand for. There’s a time to be guileless and state what you believe. Sometimes you should be a snake; sometimes you should be a dove. Sometimes you should be very crafty, hiding

yourself, waiting for the right moment to act. At other times you must just present your message and allow the hearers to figure it out. Both qualities are needed in Christian ministry.

Matthew 10:24-25 serve as a summary: “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.” This presents your goal in ministry: be like your teacher, Jesus. At first, Jesus ministered to the Jews. He did word and work; He proclaimed and healed. He traveled from town to town. You do the same things. And just as Jesus received opposition and even death threats, you will too. Just as Jesus sometimes changed geography so He could keep His ministry, you will do that too. Jesus was telling the disciples to try to live up to His example in their steadfastness to their mission. This is also His message to those in ministry today.

Jesus asked a disciple to do the things that He did himself. Jesus said to go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That’s where He went first. His destination and message was to become their destination and message—proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick. Then Jesus said to give freely. Jesus never charged for His miracles. It is never mentioned that He even took up a collection. He could have charged money for raising the dead or healing the paralyzed because there were no other means of therapy in town. But Jesus still said to give freely, and He conferred power to the disciples so they too could give freely. Jesus took no provision, no gold, or no silver with him. He also told the disciples to take no provision with them. He told His disciples be shrewd yet innocent. He was shrewd yet innocent—shrewd when people began to get hot and oppressive. When the Pharisees were plotting to kill him, He withdrew. He often started talking in parables so they wouldn’t know exactly how to pin Him down. He told the disciples to do the same thing. Yet He was also innocent. When the proper time came, He always told the truth—always tell it plainly when necessary. Persecution, He told the disciples, would be part of their lot.

Jesus said over and over again that to understand the contours of the Christian life one had to understand Jesus Himself. Jesus put Himself in the story, in the teaching. He *was* the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. He embodied them all. He was the one who showed us how to minister. He was the sower. He was the one who forgives sins as He commanded us to forgive sins. He was the one who came like a thief in the night. Much of His teaching was first of all fulfilled in Himself. Everyone in Christian ministry should meditate upon this theme. The principle that a disciple is not above his teacher and that it is enough for him to be like his teacher is stated here, in 10:24-25, and again in five other places in the Gospels, for example, Luke 6:40: “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” John 13:16: “No servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” John 15:20: “Remember the words I spoke to you, no servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours as well.”

Jesus repeatedly encouraged us to see Him and to aspire to Him as a model of Christian living. One of the ways in which Jesus modeled Christian living was in His fearlessness. In Matthew 10:26-31, Jesus reassured the disciples not to be afraid if they were persecuted. Then again at the end of the passage He told them that they were worth more than many sparrows and that the body can be killed but the soul cannot be killed. They are told not to fear—if God sees the death of a sparrow; He sees their lives as well.

Matthew 10:32-42 describes the worker’s condition once more for the disciples. Verses 32-33 describe the confession of a disciple: “Whoever acknowledges me before man, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” He tells them that even though He is the Prince of Peace, He comes to bring a sword

on earth. He comes to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother. In other words, a man's enemies will be within his own household. In a country like America, where there are so many Christian families, those in ministry really don't have to face this. But in other places around the world like Egypt and India and Brazil it can be much more of an issue. And even in America many of us know people who have come to a vibrant faith in Christ, not just in the church, and have allied themselves with another branch of Christendom, only to find that many people weren't happy with their decision. Furthermore, if one has a ministry to people like that, he will experience the sort of family division Christ refers to in this passage.

There is a price to be paid, and we must be willing to pay the price. We have to be willing to love Jesus more than family, to love Jesus more than we love ourselves. Verse 37 says we must love Him more than we love our own life. To share in His ministry is a wonderful and blessed thing. To give a cup of cold water in His name will get its reward, but it is a reward received at a cost. Jesus was very realistic about what it meant to go out.

So it is important for those in ministry to determine where they are on the continuum mentioned earlier in our discussion. As a seminary student taking a course of the life of Christ, it is important to be aware of the "well-fed" position on the continuum and to move away from it. There's no way to learn Christian ministry better than by doing Christian ministry. As one theologian said, "Do and you will know." One can know things in one way without doing them, but hearing it, studying it and then doing it, allows one to really know it. In ministry one can know the grandeur of it all—being like Christ, sharing in His ministry, but also the difficulty that comes with it.

So Jesus sent out the disciples at the end of Matthew 10 and in chapter 11, He went on to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. Considering chapters 11 and 12 together, we can see there is a lot of misunderstanding and opposition. Misunderstanding came from John the Baptist. Jesus' pattern of ministry threw him off and maybe some other faithful people were surprised that Jesus was not marching on Jerusalem or throwing out the Romans. This was the pattern of His ministry. So John wasn't quite sure about things and he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the One who was to come. Jesus told them to go back and tell John about the Messianic deeds He performed. Then He started talking to them about John the Baptist, praising him and calling him the greatest prophet. The people were fascinated by John, but didn't really respond to him.

In Matthew 11:16-17 Jesus said, "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to others, 'We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we sang a dirge and you did not mourn.' John came neither eating nor drinking and they said he has a demon. The Son of Man [Jesus] comes eating and drinking and they say 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" Jesus was saying that John was having his doubts. Maybe John could be judged for that. But Jesus made it clear that John was a mighty man of God. People chose not to respond to John, but they also chose not to respond to the Son of Man. Jesus said that this generation was like a bunch of kids sitting in the street trying to decide what to do, and they don't really want to do anything. So they say, "Let's dance, let's get some music going here." Then they decide not to sing and dance like they would for a happy occasion. In other words, they wanted to criticize anyone who came along.

They didn't like John. They said, "John has a demon; he's too negative." John said things about laying axes at the root of the trees and repenting. He was too negative. Then Jesus came along saying, "Let's eat, drink and have parties. Let's dine, let's get a lot of people together, let's celebrate, the kingdom of God is here." And the people judged Him as a drunk and a bum. There are always some people that

can't be pleased. If God's agents come with judgment some people will criticize them for being too negative, and, if they come with the Gospel, they will criticize them for being too sweet. The problem is not with the message but with the recipients. That's what Jesus was saying. It was a reminder of the harvest analogy—the harvest was ripe. These people were ripe for judgment because, by and large, they did not respond positively to the message of Christ. In fact He hinted several times that they would be called members of the house of Beelzebub. He said in Matthew 10:25 that things would be better for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for some of them because no matter what the message was, they were not very happy with it.

To clarify this idea of “those who don't want to dance” think of the analogy this way. When Jesus said, “We played the flute for you,” He was referring to Himself and John. Whether it was the positive message He brought or the negative message that John brought, the people of Israel did not want to be pleased. Jesus indicated that wisdom would be justified, proved right, vindicated by her children. In the end, they would see that John the Baptist and Jesus were the wisdom of God.

There's a valuable lesson to be learned in comparing Jesus' attitude toward those who are completely resistant to His message and His attitude to those like John, who doubt. Jesus is hard on those who resist His message, but much different in His response to the doubt shown by John. Doubt is not good, but there's a huge difference between doubt and unbelief. The believer who doubts is still heading in a certain direction, toward God. The person in the midst of doubt may not see where he is and may not see where it's going, but God does and knows if the direction of his life and of his heart is toward Him. So although John could be taken to be deeply disappointing in his response to Jesus in asking if He is the One, Jesus knows that is doubt. What Jesus does with doubters is give them information and treat them tenderly. When Jesus was confronted with Thomas' doubts, He didn't rebuke him and ask how he dared ask for proof of His identity after following Him for all those years. He said, “Reach out your hand and put it into My side.” Jesus offered the same sort of gentle answer to Peter when he started to fall while attempting to walk on the water. But for the unbeliever who has rejected Him, Jesus gave the unalloyed word of judgment: it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment.

To wrap up, then, we need to keep three things in mind as we study these passages about Jesus' life. First, we need to consider the historical context. Second, understand that these passages contain a message for ministry that applied then and applies now. Finally, we need to understand that this was an historic moment. This was the day when Jesus stopped ministering one-on-one with everybody and started sending out His emissaries who would multiply His work; they could reach twelve times as many people. But the initial global response in Israel to this idea of reaching out was fairly negative.