

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE

MARK 6.6B-13

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1. When Jesus called the fishermen he promised to make them fishers of men; when the apostles were appointed it was to be with him so he could send them out to preach and work power. They have been with him and now it's time to send them out.

2. In this text we encounter another Markan Sandwich, stretching from 6.6b all the way to verse 30, and including both the commissioning of the 12 with their return, along with the martyrdom of John the Baptist Sandwiched in-between. Recall that these sandwiches give us a comparison between the stories, sometimes with the middle story providing the key for understanding the outer story. "The force of this sandwich is to show what the followers of the kingdom can expect from the kingdom of satan as they advance the mission of Jesus. The fate of John indicates what all disciples should expect as they engage the world with the Gospel." Because this textual sandwich is so long we will only consider the first part this week; next week we'll look at John's martyrdom and how it sheds light on the meaning of Jesus' mission.

THE TEXT

1. Our text seems to begin half way through verse 6, where Jesus is itinerating in the villages of Galilee. To this point in the Gospel Jesus has been doing all the heavy lifting; now it's time for the 12 to get to work. They have witnessed great power in Jesus and now it's time for them to both witness to that power as well as to exercise some of it themselves.

2. Some might balk at the idea of the 12 being given such a weighty task so early in their training; certainly what we've seen of them thus far in Mark is not sufficient to

clear from our minds any doubt about their fitness for the work. "The willingness of Jesus to abide the intractable nature and behavior of his followers is further testimony to his divine humility. The sending of these individuals, at this stage in their understanding, testifies to believers in every age, that the fulfillment of the word of God depends not on the perfection or merit of the missionaries but on the authoritative call and equipping of Jesus." "No matter how much exegesis, theology and counseling one has studied, one is never prepared for ministry. A genuine call to ministry always calls us to that for which we are not adequately prepared. It is only in awareness of such that the Christian experiences the presence and promise of Jesus Christ, and learns to depend not on human capabilities but on the one who calls and in the power of the proclamation to authenticate itself."

3. The practice of sending Gospel workers in pairs is common to the NT, and in the early church. It's practical benefits are obvious, and it may have some basis in the OT principle of at least two witnesses to substantiate a matter. Remember that the core of their responsibility as they itinerate is to testify to the coming of the kingdom of God in terms of what they have so far seen in Jesus of Nazareth. They are like witnesses in a court case, called to the stand to tell what they've seen.

4. And Jesus confers on them authority to release people from unclean spirits. This is significant because Jesus' ministry up to this point has had as an key element victory over the power of Satan through exorcism. Jesus' ministry should be seen in terms of the kingdom of God assaulting the kingdom of Satan on earth. Now this power to cast out devils is given also to the 12, who are do not exercise their own ministries, but are actually an extension of the ministry of Jesus to a wider area. "The 12 are not sent to do a new work but to continue and extend the work begun by Jesus. Jesus bestows authority on believers so that they may participate in and further his ministry."

5. Next Jesus instructs the 12 concerning how they will be provided for. In short, Jesus forbids them from compiling needful items for the journey, directing them

instead to rely on God to provide for their needs through the hospitality of righteous people they meet on the way.

6. Jesus permits them to take a staff, but little more. This staff was considered a basic necessity for travelers of the day. For some reason Matthew and Luke record Jesus as prohibiting the taking of a staff. One suggestion is that the "staff permitted in Mark is the walking stick or shepherd's crook which became the symbol of office, while the rod prohibited by Matthew and Luke was the shepherd's club designed for protection." They are not to take bread but to trust to the hospitality of those they preach to. The bag mentioned here was known in that time as a beggar's bag, and was a mark of the itinerant Cynic preacher. The Cynics were philosophers who called for rejection of authority and ascetic lifestyle; Jesus may have forbade the 12 to take such a bag to avoid the impression they were beggars. The money mentioned here is the copper coin, of lowest value, as if to say, "Do not take a dime," again, calling for a strong faith in God to provide for them as they are out on mission. Mark has Jesus allowing for sandals while Matthew and Luke have Jesus forbidding them; the latter two may refer to bringing extra sandals, as we should not suppose Jesus sent his disciples out barefoot. An extra tunic would normally be taken by those expecting to sleep outside in order to keep off the night chill. Jesus wants them to trust and depend on the hospitality of worthy people which will prevent them from sleeping outside, and so he forbids an extra tunic.

7. There are probably a few reason for such severe instructions as the above. One writer shows the similarity between this instruction on baggage and Ex 12.11 where the Israelites are instructed to eat the Passover in haste, with similar items prepared. He suggests the idea is similar, that just as Israel was instructed to leave quickly and with sparse baggage and yet they were miraculously provided for in the wilderness, so also would the 12 be provided for. Another suggestion might be made from Luke's use of the word Exodus in the transfiguration, on the idea that the sending out of the 12 is part of the new and greater Exodus of God's people from Satan and sin.

8. Another reason is indicated by the commentator who says "The barest of essentials ensures that they place their trust not in their supplies and training but in the one who sends them. It would be like laying out everything you planned to take on a trip and then leaving everything but your coat and toothbrush behind. True service to Jesus is characterized by dependence on Jesus, and dependence on Jesus is signified by going where Jesus sends despite material shortfalls and unanswered questions. If they go with an elaborate support system and provisions for every eventuality, then they need not go in faith, and apart from faith their proclamation is not believable," and "Jesus is not encouraging asceticism but emphasizing that loyalty to the kingdom of God leaves no room for a prior attachment to material security." Of course there would also be facility in travelling light.

9. So, having forbidden them from taking even some basic items to provide for their needs, Jesus proceeds to explain how they will be sustained on their trip. The answer is that those receptive to their kingdom message should be trusted to grant food, shelter, and perhaps other necessities. "In middle eastern society the expectation of hospitality for visiting teachers is no surprise; they ought to be able to take it for granted, and this apparently includes a somewhat extended stay." "Trust in Jesus includes trust in those he has designated to meet their needs."

10. And the 12 are to remain in one house per town instead of seeking out better accommodations elsewhere. "Moving from house to house dishonors their hosts and creates invidiousness among them." "They were not to dishonor the home by accepting more comfortable provision offered by another host."

11. Now Jesus doesn't promise a glowing reception everywhere. In fact, there will be homes and even whole villages which will reject the kingdom message. In that case the 12 are to perform a sort of acted parable in shaking the dust off their feet. "Shaking dust off your feet is a gesture of dissociation. The rabbis shook the dust off their feet when leaving Gentile territory to avoid carrying it's defilement with them. This constitutes a witness against them, further evidence for the prosecution

in the day of judgment. A community thus marked will be liable to judgment. "This is a searing indictment since Jews travelling outside Palestine were required to shake themselves free of dust when returning home lest they pollute the holy land. This commandment is tantamount to declaring a Jewish village heathen. Jesus is referencing Israel by a Gentile figure of speech, showing the lines between God's people and the rest have shifted (or better those lines, which always existed, are being made clearer in the coming of Christ)." "In a Semitic context it would be sufficient to say, 'Shake off the dust from your feet,' but for the benefit of his western readers who would not understand the symbolism of this act Mark adds 'as a testimony against them.'" This symbolic act by the disciples "indicates that the coming of the disciples, like that of Jesus himself, had the character of sifting and gathering the true people of God." This is because the act of shaking dust out marks certain cities and homes as being not of the people of God, effectively "gentile" in spiritual terms, and under the wrath of God.

12. The result of Jesus' commission is seen in verses 12-13: The 12 now take up the work of Jesus in preaching repentance, exorcising and healing. This is the advance of the kingdom, now not only through Jesus alone but also through his apostles.

13. The question arises as to why they used oil in their healing of the sick. "Oil was used medicinally in the OT and in other ancient societies, such as in the case of the Samaritan. Sometimes it was used symbolically to express the blessing of God or the restoration of sick people to society, such as the leper in Leviticus 14. Either sense is possible here." "Olive oil was a staple of life in antiquity, serving as food, anointing, sacrifice, lamp fuel, and medicine. Rabbinic sources frequently cite the medicinal value of olive oil for curing illnesses and well as for exorcising demons. It was prescribed for hip pains, skin diseases, headaches, and wounds. In our passage oil is more than a means of healing but equally a sign of the in-breaking of good news, an anointing with the oil of gladness, Ps 45.7." So the oil may have been used either medicinally or as a symbol of God's blessing upon the sick.

7 Principles for Our Mission

1. The mission of Jesus is a community endeavor, as we see by Jesus sending them out in pairs. This is not a mission that should or usually can be done alone. We need all parts of the body healthy and operative, focused and informed to complete the mission. If just one of us attempts to do this alone, we can count on failure. Jesus gathers a church out of the world, not stand alone Christians here and there. He seems to like a community of people in a locality determined with one mind to advance the mission of Jesus and rescue captives from the devil. That means we need every Christian in this church to ask themselves what their part in the mission is and to work at it faithfully. Over the coming months and years we may attempt various things to advance the Gospel, and we want everyone to contribute however they can, according to their gifting and design, but even more according to their love for Christ.

2. Our mission is a fight against Satan, as we see from the prominence of exorcism in their ministry. Our job is not to fight flesh and blood, to hate them as if they were the real enemy. The real enemy is the anointed cherub who covers, who walked among the fiery stones and was covered with every precious gem, but who was cast down to the earth in contempt. This is a world under siege, and only the church can do something about it. No social agency, nor political program will ever wrest control of the earth from the prince of the power of the air; it is up to the church to do it and we must not forget who the real enemy is nor how serious is our task. All the wars ever fought on planet earth are child's play compared with the war waged by the saints since the beginning, against the powers and principalities. As we pray and plan for evangelistic openings and development of our church, let's not forget what is happening behind the scenes.

3. Our mission does not require great earthly resources, since Jesus taught them it could be accomplished without even providing for necessities! The agencies of the world rely on wealth and material resources to accomplish their tasks, since they

have no other power to call on; not so the church. We have an infinite sea of divine wealth at our fingertips, and we have only to pray persistently, and in faith, to access it! We do not need what the world needs because we are the children of God, and his wealth of spiritual power is available to us. Certainly let's use whatever material resources he gives us to advance the kingdom, but let's never rely on it since it isn't necessary; Jesus feeds 15,000 people with handfuls of bread and fish. And let's be ready, if need be, to labor in his mission with very little, depending on what circumstances God sends us in his sovereign will.

4. In connection with the last point, our mission is one which will be hindered by seeking excessive material comforts, as we see in Jesus' direction to stay wherever they are provided for. They were not to look for the best accommodations in town, but to be content with whomever hosted them, however humble the lodgings and board. We are the wealthiest nation on earth and too often the church acts like it! Our greed is often let loose in seeking great comforts and pleasures for ourselves, but we ought to be content with what we're given. If we're not, our mission will stagnate as we seek after the very same things the world does; they won't believe us. They will say, "You Christians are just the same as us! You don't really have anything better after all, so why should we listen?" Contentment and self-denial are essential for the completion of our mission.

5. Our mission cannot succeed without faith, which is something Jesus taught them by depriving them of necessities when they set out. Jesus wanted to teach them they would lack nothing in the mission but God would provide all as they went. On the contrary, if we will not believe, like Ahaz, we will not be established. God honors faith because faith honors God; unbelief insults God and treats him as if he were not worthy of trust. Remember, unbelief results in a lack of redemptive power, as punishment. But if we will continue in faith, with prayer and persistent spreading of the Gospel, we are going to see the glory of God as sinners are rescued from the lion's mouth.

6. Our mission has grace consequences for those who reject it. Whoever receives us receives Jesus; whoever receives Jesus receives the one who sent Jesus. And whoever rejects us rejects God the Father himself. As I often say, the preaching of the kingdom may not cause a conversion, but it will cause something. Those who deny the clear revelation of God in the gospel will be marked out for condemnation, and will not escape it unless they repent later on. What should this do for us? We need not be angry or frustrated at those who reject our message, as if they were getting the better of us. Actually, we can have compassion and pity for them, knowing their terrible condition and danger when they reject the gospel. We can deal gently and patiently with such people with this in mind.

7. Our mission is not our own, but rather the extension of the earthly ministry of Jesus; we see this as the 12 begin to do the very same works Jesus did. We too confront the powers of darkness and redeem their captives, with supernatural power and a supernatural word. The same power which worked in Jesus has now indwelt the church and is available for great success in the will of God. If we don't experience any success whatever, we can know something is likely wrong, and probably we are the ones to blame. Our task is far greater than any of us who are called to it, being the very works of Jesus himself to overtake the kingdom of Satan. Jesus was a tidal wave, overwhelming Satan and his demons, and evil men, and I wonder what reason the church has to be so different from her Lord? Do we not have the Holy Spirit? Should we not also have great and lasting impact on the world for Christ? Jesus began this work and we have been called to continue it, and the same Power he had is now with us, ready to help as we confront the devil.