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# The Authority of Jesus over the Mission

## Matthew 10:1-42

*Russ Kennedy*

<sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

What do we see from this text that leads us into the Word for today? Matthew shows us, one writer observes, “The motive for Christian mission is compassion, and the means are (first) prayer and (second) people: ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore *pray* earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers [*people*] into his harvest.’ Prayer and people.” (O’Donnell, p.279). The Lord of the harvest is now going to answer that prayer and request. The Lord of the harvest will send people into the fields.

We are a Commissional church. What does that mean? That means that we take the great commission seriously. We believe in sending and supporting followers of Jesus in the neighborhoods and the nations to make disciples. We believe we do this by evangelism that starts people on a path to being discipled so that they obey Jesus through baptism and by teaching them to live according to the Scriptures.

The book of Matthew has two of these Commissional texts in it. We are most familiar with the one at the end of the book. There, through the apostles, we receive a sending to go into all the world to all the people groups. Here, we have the first Commissional sending of the twelve apostles. This sets the stage for the great commission at the end of the book, helping us to think through what the Lord expects of us.

There are some challenges for us to wrestle with:

Some of this is just for the disciples Jesus is sending out. Often, we read the gospels as though the commands in them are directed to us. This text gives us both – some commands for a particular assignment and some principles for any who want to be truly Commissional.

Is this about becoming a disciple? Is it possible for you to follow Jesus and not be willing to take up your cross? Or is this about taking discipleship further? Is there a Commissional calling and sending here with a deeper commitment that the ordinary Christian is not subject to?

But, we are not in charge of the mission of the church. God is. Jesus is. He has the authority to tell us what to do, how to do it and what to expect from it.

## **The Disciples Identity (v.1-4)**

Matthew is establishing who has authority across the churches by showing how Jesus called and authorized them.

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. <sup>2</sup>The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

### ***Their Delegated Authority (v.1)***

Jesus chose them and summoned them. Matthew does not detail how each one was called. He simply declares that Jesus did so. Jesus gave to them the authority to exercise His kingdom power. They do not have the power in themselves. It is given to them by Jesus. They have the ability to cast out demons and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of affliction. This power authenticates that they are messengers from the King.

### ***Their Listed Names (v.2-4)***

What is the purpose of listing exactly who these men are? Not only are their names given, but it is so specific that there should be no question who the 12 apostles were. These men, and I believe, only these men were granted this particular mission and the powers that go with it.

What would this mean to the first generation of the church? All but Judas would be living when this book was written. It is fairly apparent from the book of Acts that the apostles continued to exercise these powers given them then even as they were going, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Matthew then is not just listing the apostles for our benefit. He is also identifying who has these powers. This was very important. In the early church many were claiming apostolic power and authority who were imposters.

## **The Disciples Instructions (v.5-15)**

Jesus gave the twelve specific instructions for the mission He was sending them on.

<sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup>but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ <sup>8</sup>Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. <sup>9</sup>Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, <sup>10</sup>no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. <sup>11</sup>And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house,

greet it.<sup>13</sup> And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.<sup>14</sup> And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.<sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

### ***The Limits of their Mission (v.5-6)***

This commission was to a very specific group of people. They were not to go to the Gentiles. They were not to go to the Samaritans, who were half Jewish, half Gentile. They were to go only to the house of Israel.

### ***The Message of the Mission (v.7)***

The promised kingdom is at hand because the King has come. Some refer to this as the offer of the kingdom. That is partially true. It is an Old Testament kind of message and invitation. But it is still a message that must be proclaimed. It is still a message that requires faith. Their directive is explicit. It is still true for us. We have a message, the message of the gospel. And as we go, we are to proclaim it.

### ***The Seal/Certification for the Mission (v.8a)***

The power to do miracles certifies the messengers and the message. The power of the kingdom and the new creation is here. They are representatives of King Jesus. They speaking on His behalf. But more than that, they are commanded to use, to exercise those powers. This is what the kingdom of God will bring in the last days at the new heavens and new earth. There and then will the end of spiritual oppression, the end of disease and afflictions. All things new when the kingdom of God reaches its ultimate fulfillment.

### ***The Support for the Mission (v.8b-10)***

Now we come to a very tricky text. When you pay careful attention to what the words actually say, it can be taken two ways. It can either mean “take only the most necessary supplies” or “do not use the miracle working powers for gain.”

What tilts me toward the second one is the sentence, “You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts...” Jesus is articulating the principle of serving freely (v.8b). But more than that, anticipating the possibility for abuse, Jesus is warning against the use of the gifts in ministry to enrichen ourselves. In the church, those serving full time should be supported. But care must be taken not to “charge for ministry”.

They were to be provided for as they ministered. This is not either that or this. This is give freely, accept humbly. The apostles, as they were going, to provide initially and then depend on the generosity of those who responded to them.

### ***The Accommodations in the Mission (v.11-13)***

There was a long history of this care for itinerant teachers in the Jewish culture. Verses 8-13 reflect this expected hospitality. People would take them in. They would provide

their food and needs along the way. Basic provisions, cloak, purse, staff, shoes, yes be sure they have. But they will be taken care of as they go. This was simply a cultural custom.

They were to look for homes of "worthy" people to stay in. In other words, they were to look for people who had a genuine reputation for being devout. Lots of people might take in a stranger but often for their own gain. They were to seek out people who genuinely wanted to care for the apostle. The pronouncement of "Peace on this house..." was a part of the culture of the traveling Rabbi. If the people took care of them properly, then the house would be blessed. If they did not, then they withhold the blessing. The "peace" would be withheld.

This was probably not a special instruction to the apostles. The apostles, as they went, in a good way took advantage of what the culture afforded them. They were not doing something strange. They were doing something often seen in their day. Jesus is instructing them to follow the culture. People will expect that messengers, rabbis, representatives of the king will embrace the hospitality of worthy, devout people.

### ***The Significance of the Mission (v.14-15)***

Here again a common cultural act is infused with deep spiritual meaning. If the messenger or the message is rejected by house or town, then the apostle was to shake the dust off their feet. This was just a simple, common way that sandal wearing cultures have of rejecting someone. It is still done in many places in the world even today.

While the cultural act is familiar, the significance is not. Those who reject the messenger, and the message are eternally lost. This is not just rejection of the apostles; this is a rejection of Jesus as King. This is not merely the loss of the kingdom, this is the loss all in hell.

### ***The Disciples Warning (v.16-23)***

One my mentors, Dick Lucas, has a lesson in studying the Bible called "He's Not Talking to You, Silly". This lesson is a corrective against our tendency to read the Bible existentially - what is God saying to me? rather than historically - what did God say to them? There are particulars in this text as we have already seen that are not who nor where we are. But principles still hold true.

We come to a subtle shift from the particular mission the twelve are being sent on. Jesus is beginning to prepare the church for what the Great Commission has sent them into as well. We move into larger principles.

<sup>16</sup> "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. <sup>21</sup> Brother will

deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death,<sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.<sup>23</sup> When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

We are used to a tame Jesus. We are used to a Jesus who calls us to follow Him but with our comforts. There is nothing further from the truth. The teaching of Jesus was often hard, demanding. Jesus was not a preacher of convenience, but hardship, not a preacher of comfort, but suffering. Jesus sends his disciples to suffer because He has called us to suffering. Notice how what Jesus says will be about this mission and the early mission of the church after Pentecost.

### ***The Danger of the Mission (v.16-18)***

Jesus sends them into dangers. He is sending them as sheep into a pack of wolves. The wisdom here is not to avoid it, but rather how to engage it. With a certain irony, There was a wisdom that was needed and an innocence to be maintained. Serpents in the Bible are almost always viewed negatively. So what wisdom is "as serpents?" This is not a source statement; but rather, a comparison statement. While not relying on the wisdom of the world, they must not be less wise than the world. How do they do that? By maintaining their innocence and integrity.

Clearly the danger is from people. The most dangerous people to the mission are the people the mission is to. The apostles were to expect hospitality from some. But as the message took hold, particularly in the early church, the opposition rose from the Jews. They used the religious and legal means to try to stop the mission.

At the time of Matthew writing this, this was beginning to unfold. The early experiences of it were beginning to grow. The book of Luke chronicles so much of what happened. We are reminded that the purpose for being brought before governing authorities *is to be a witness to them.*

### ***The Provision for the Mission (v.19-20)***

Therefore, there is the provision for the moment. To all who find themselves in this situation, do not be afraid. The Spirit will give you the right thoughts and the right words in the moment. There was a special empowerment to the apostles. Their role in the mission is not duplicated by any since. But we can take comfort that the Lord will provide for us as well.

Personally, I have known the Lord's presence and provision in moments of interrogation by Chinese police.

### ***The Persecution in the Mission (v.21-23)***

I am fascinated by the way Jesus speaks that is local and Matthew writes that is global. The disciples will face this. Their families will turn on them. They will have to flee from town to town. Sometimes this is God's way of expanding the mission.

We see this not only in this mission, but in the book of Acts. This explains why Paul often flees from opposition and persecution. He is simply doing what Jesus commends. He stays until the gospel is planted and an initial group of believers are formed. As opposition rises, he moves on. It is the nature of the mission. Commissional people in a locale may stay and suffer great persecution.

~ So, we do have to ask, "How much of this so specific to the disciples that it does not apply to us? How much can we apply to ourselves?" Jesus warns the twelve that slander, suffering, and death are a part of the mission. Except for Judas who betrayed Jesus and John, all the apostles died a martyr's death. John suffered exile on the island of Patmos but died a natural death at a very old age. Bartholomew and James, the son of Zebedee, and Matthias who replaced Judas were beheaded. Thomas and Matthew were speared to death. Peter, Andrew, Philip, Jude, Simon the Zealot, and James, the son of Alphaeus all were crucified.

But what about us? We are called to share in the sufferings of Christ. Paul the Apostle wrote, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). We are all called to take up our cross, but not always to suffer unto death.  
~ (Adapted, O'Donnell, p. 284-285)

## The Disciples Pattern (v.24-25)

Why will people on mission for Jesus go through this? Here is one of the most important principles of the New Testament. Jesus is a pattern for us.

<sup>24</sup> "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

### *The Principle (v.24-25a)*

This is not something that we strive to copy. This is simply *the way it is*. The way Jesus was treated is what we should expect. We are not above receiving the treatment Jesus did. So, the persecution Jesus' disciples receive should be completely expected and frankly, humbly received.

### *The Result (v.25b)*

Notice the language of master and household. This is highlighting that this will happen to us as well. On the mission, even as empowered as the apostles were, we are all still both in the household and servants of the master. Beloved, we should simply expect that world will hate us, slander us, and malign us. Why do we keep seeking to be accepted or even worse, to be approved by the world?

But why this name? Who is Beelzebul? Is this merely Satan or is there something else also being alluded to? This is one of the names for the false god, Baal. Jesus is referring to 2 Kings 1:2-3, 6, 16. Baal was a Philistine god. He was the god of power, of rule. He was associated with war, particularly evil governments ruling nations that conquered the weak. Baal worship involved the sacrifice of children to the fires in the idol

himself. Israel often worshipped the Baals. Here Jesus is associating the Baal with Satan. Do not be surprised when the governments you are involved with on the mission are controlled by Satan or are themselves worshipped by people.

### ***The Disciples Assurance (v.26-33)***

The disciples need assurance. We will all need Biblical confidence and courage.

<sup>26</sup> “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

### ***The Courage for the Mission (v.26-28)***

Do not fear to preach what needs to be proclaimed. The mission depends on the willingness of the followers of Jesus to speak. Yes, people can see our lives. But faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Faith does not come by seeing a godly life. Jesus is talking about the unfolding of the gospel that will take place through His death and resurrection and subsequent coming of the Spirit. So confidence and courage will be needed to say what had been hidden and what has been shared that now is all out in the open.

Do not fear their killing your body. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell,” is not about fearing Satan. Satan is not in charge of who goes to hell. God is. Do not fear death. Cast out our fear with loving reverence for God. So, courage will rise when the fear of God rises and the fear of man diminishes.

### ***The Affirmation in the Mission (v.29-31)***

Why will we have courage to speak? How will we not fear the opposition of man? Why will the devil hold no terrors for us? Because God cares for those He sends. We will trust in the one who spoke words like this in the sermon on the mount. We will serve one Master. We will not be anxious or afraid.

### ***The Caution in the Mission (v.32-33)***

The suffering and persecution that may attend the mission requires a caution. In the end it has a winnowing effect. It actually will define whether you are a true follower of Jesus or not. Here it is... deny Jesus before men, Jesus will deny you before the Father. Your response to what will happen does not determine whether you are believer or not. Whether or not you are a true disciple determines your response.

## **The Disciples Cost (v.34-39)**

Wrong thinking leads to false expectations. Right thinking prepares us for realistic expectations.

<sup>34</sup> “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

This section is constructed on Hebrew parallelism. Note the structure as I have represented it in the outline.

### ***The Sword He Brings (v.34)***

“Do not think...” So many people have this wrong. They think being a Christian will solve all their problems. Being a Christian will heal my family. It will bring people together. Jesus warns us that this is not what He came to do. Jesus came to save His people. The sword of the cross will often divide, particularly in the day of suffering and persecution. We may not experience it so much here, but everywhere I travel this is true.

### ***In their Family (v.35-36)***

Families will be divided. Not just close relations, but extended families as well.

### ***In their Priorities (v.37)***

All through the New Testament there are warnings like this. It is possible to make idols of family, of our children. We love them more than we love the Lord. Many, many people prize their families more than they prize God. How do we know this? Look at the choices they make...

### ***In their Sacrifices (v.38)***

I do not believe this is extraordinary Christianity. This is basic discipleship. If you are unwilling to make the sacrifices being a Christian requires, then don’t pretend. Don’t act like you are when you know good and well you are not. If you want to be a true disciple, then you must consciously and intentionally choose the hard road, the cross-life.

### ***The Life we Lose (v.39)***

Why is this? Jesus came to bring a sword (v.34). That sword takes our old life, the old person, the old way and puts it to death. Our old man dies and the new man lives the resurrection life. If you keep trying to preserve your human life, you risk the loss of

your spiritual life. If you are willing to lose your life, then you will be willing to risk all and therefore gain your spiritual life.

## The Disciples Expectations (v.40-42)

<sup>40</sup> "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. <sup>41</sup> The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup> And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

### *A Proportional Reward*

There is much that could be said here. Jesus is simply pointing out two important proportional rewards. Those who receive the messengers and the message of the mission, the gospel, are receiving Jesus. And those who assist those on the mission by sending and supporting will receive a proportional reward to those who actually go.

### *A Promised Reward*

But anyone who does the smallest deed because they are a follower of Jesus receives the promise of a reward. These little ones refers to children who were in Jesus' audience. These words remind us that some will go, some will support those who go and some will take care of those near to them All, will receive the reward from Jesus.

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## Reflect and Respond

We want to be a Commissional church. We want to be sending and supporting discipleship in all the nations. And praise to the Lord, we are doing much.

But are you a Commissional people? Are you on mission? How are you engaged with evangelism and discipleship in the neighborhoods? What are you doing to support or even to go to the nations?

Bluntly, do you love your comforts, your children, your family more than you love Jesus? So, prove it...

I know people don't like to hear this. But I believe in our lifetimes we will cling to texts like this. Without them, we will be fearful and cowardly...

Don't be afraid of rewards. The Bible holds our rewards as incentives for faithfulness and for ministry. I want to serve Jesus. And I hope for the "Well done" from His lips.

Do you take up your cross? Are you genuinely a Christian? Has the old life died? Is the new life, the resurrection life of the Spirit you real and present reality?

Jesus sent His disciples on a mission. Jesus is still sending His disciples on mission. It will be hard. It will entail suffering. It may bring division. It may even mean dying. But brings us all to glorious end. May the Lord make it so...