

Christ called His Apostles to minister to the Jews... and He will call 144,000 of His followers (during the future period known as the Tribulation)... to a **costly** mission that will involve suffering and opposition. ... But what about you and I...?

Today our passage deals with Christ's commission to His Apostles... (second) His commission to those who will suffer persecution through the Tribulation... and then... (third...) we will see His commission to us.

The overriding theme of all three of these time periods (Christ's day... the future day of wrath... and our present day)... is that He gives us a **costly** mission... that will involve suffering and opposition... but the sovereign care and protection of God are sufficient to sustain our faith.

A little more than two hundred years ago... Adoniram and Ann Judson boarded a ship and set sail for India... on a journey that would eventually lead them to Burma (modern-day Myanmar). ... Along with William Carey... the Judsons are considered pioneers... in the modern missions movement. These stellar missionaries were (and continue to be)... used by God in some extraordinary ways... for the cause of global missions. ... However... their journey looked anything but successful on the outside.

The intense suffering the Judsons endured on the mission field was foreshadowed by a letter written from Adoniram to Ann's father asking for permission to marry his daughter. The following is Adoniram's candid request:

*I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether*

*you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?*

Gratefully... Ann's dad said "yes" ... the couple was married... and a year later they set sail. ... Ann's dad would never see his daughter or son-in-law again. ... In fact... Ann would lose her life sharing the gospel with people who had never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. ... As a result of the Judson's service... today there are nearly 4,000 Baptist churches with more than a half a million followers of Christ... in the heart of Buddhist Burma/Myanmar.

This story seems unusual to us... yet it should be more normal... in light of the truths contained in our passage today. ...

Remember the main point of our passage is this: Christ calls His followers to a **costly** mission... that will involve suffering and opposition... but the sovereign care and protection of God are sufficient to sustain our faith.

The reality is that there's a world around us suffering... amid sin and trials of various kinds. This world needs to hear the good news of the kingdom. And it is incumbent upon us to spread this good news.

The good news is for everyone you work with and live around. ... It's for your own neighborhood... and for the unreached people groups of the world. ... We don't just live to *celebrate* this good news... we live to *spread* this good news.

But when we do... we must realize that just as Jesus faced opposition... so we will face opposition. ... That's what Matthew our passage today is about. ... May God use this passage to so grip our hearts with the good news of Christ... that students will risk their reputations at school... that brothers and sisters in Christ will risk their reputations at work... that the church will throw aside the fear of man... and that every one of us will give our lives — even lose them... if necessary — spreading the good news of Christ's kingdom everywhere we go. ... This is... after all... the clear message of our passage... that THIS... is what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

I am going to begin today with the final verses that we ended with last week. They are every bit a part of today's passage... as they are to last week's. ... Before we get to the commissioning of Christ... we first have to recognize the condition that prompts it.

### **Matthew 9:35-38**

Jesus said to his disciples, "*The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.*" This "*harvest*" language in Scripture is often associated with judgment. ... I don't think that Jesus meant for us to picture what we often think of today in our churches... when we use the word "harvest." This is not a term of an evangelistic crusade... where hundreds or thousands of people walk down an aisle... indicating they made a decision for Christ. No,

Scripture uses it to depict judgment. ... For example, the prophet Joel says,

**Joel 3:13-14 (ESV)**

*Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.*

Jesus also speaks of the harvest as a time of judgment in Matthew 13. At the end of the age, Jesus will bring the wheat (the righteous) to eternal blessing, and He will cast the tares (the unrighteous) into the "blazing furnace" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 42).

In light of God's coming judgment, Jesus knew the desperate condition of those to whom He ministered. These were people who were separated from God and who, if nothing changed, would one day stand before God in their sin and be cast into eternal darkness. *This is why* Jesus had such compassion on them. How much more so should this be true in our day? We live in a world of approximately seven billion people, with most liberal estimates labeling about one-third of this seven billion "Christians." That leaves more than 4.5 billion people without Christ—that's more than 4.5 billion people on a road that leads to an eternal hell. This is the condition of the lost.

Do we realize the gravity of eternity? Far more important than sports, money, sex, or success in this world, there are people around us today (and every day) who are eternally lost. Do we sense the urgency? Do we see the world with the eyes of Jesus? We don't have time to play games with our lives or play games in the church.

FIRST - **Jesus beckons us to pray.** He says, (Verse 38)... "*Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*" Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Here's the harvest, now go!" ... Instead... He says... "Here's the harvest... now *pray.*"

WHY...? Because prayer is not a part of ministry. Prayer is not one of the things we do in ministry. No – the true work of ministry is prayer! Ministry is a part of prayer. Ministry flows out of prayer. ... We don't decide what we will do and then tag a prayer onto it and ask God to bless it. ... That is backward. But it is what we most often do... isn't it? ... Here we see the proper order... that prayer is the work... and ministry is to be part of our prayer life.

First Jesus' followers must be on their knees... asking and pleading with God to send out workers. ... This is precisely what we should be doing in our churches... as we seek to send people out regularly into this dark world to proclaim the gospel. ... We should actually pray for people to leave... on mission! ... God *loves* to answer prayers like this.

And when we pray... God will send us out in different ways... to different places. ... For some... this will simply mean going back to your workplace... now... not simply to provide for your family... but also to spread the gospel. ... For others... this will mean being a part of a local outreach effort... and still for others... this may mean going to live with an unreached people group. ... Jesus beckons every person... who is a follower of His... to pray to the Lord of the harvest for the glorious goal of spreading His gospel to the whole world.

As we pray Christ will commission. ... His commissioning began right after He instructed His followers to pray. We see this in Matthew 10:1-15.

Now... before we look at this second section of our passage... let me remind you of two important things. #1. The main idea of our entire passage... is that Christ calls His followers to a costly mission... that will involve suffering and opposition... but the sovereign care and protection of God are sufficient to sustain our faith. #2. Is that Jesus' words in these verses we are about to read... are specifically aimed at *these* particular 12 Apostles... on *this* particular occasion. ... We know this because in verses 5 and 6 the command is... do not go to the Gentiles... but only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." This commission had a specific purpose in Jesus' day... concerning speaking the gospel to Jewish people.

### **Matthew 10:1-15**

We do not know how long this "evangelistic campaign" lasted. ... Mark 6:7 tells us... that Jesus had sent the men out in pairs... which explains why their names are listed in pairs... here at the beginning of Matthew chapter 10.

Notice how there is remarkable diversity among the 12 apostles... including fishermen... a tax collector (Matthew)... and a zealous revolutionary (Simon the Cananaean). ... On every list of the Apostles in Scripture... Peter is always mentioned first... and Judas Iscariot is always listed last. ("Iscariot" most likely denotes where he was from.) Judas Iscariot was the treasurer for the group...and the betrayer of Jesus. ... According to John 12:6... he used to steal money from the disciple's money box.

The commission in Matthew 10 is not the same as ours. Our ministry is not restricted to Jews in Israel. But this one was. ... Why...?

The Jews had a great spiritual privilege in being the first to hear the message of Christ. ...

**John 4:22 (ESV)**

*... for salvation is from the Jews.*

**Romans 1:16 (ESV)**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

**Romans 2:10 (ESV)**

*but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.*

Look with me again at verse 7 of our passage...

**Matthew 10:7**

The word translated "*proclaim*" means to herald as a crier, "to make a public proclamation with such gravity, formality, and authority as must be heeded". This style was not a mild-mannered man speaking in a mild-mannered way and giving a mild-mannered message.

This phrase "*at hand*" speaks of opportunity passing by. Here is a message that needs to be responded to immediately.

The apostles were to announce: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" to Jewish Nation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. ... And so it was—then. ... Now... ***if*** the Jews had accepted Christ as Messiah at that time... I believe that the visible kingdom would have been set up at once... right then and there... in

Jerusalem. ... But the message went unheeded... and the immediate offer of the kingdom was withdrawn – until the future time... when time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. A new commission **will** be given during the future period known as the Tribulation. During this time of much greater suffering... 144,000 Jewish evangelists will offer the Kingdom of Christ to the Jewish Nation once again. But first it had to be presented to them during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... so Christ commissioned His Apostles for this task at that time.

The Jewish nation rejected the Kingdom... when Christ and His Apostles presented it. ...But Matthew writing through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit also wrote about the next commissioning... when the Jewish Nation will be presented with the Kingdom of God - once again. ... And this... is still future... just before Christ returns... and after we (the church) have been raptured.

Let's read about this future commissioning...

### **Matthew 10:16-23**

I want to quote extensively from Warren Wiersbe here...

The "atmosphere" of this section is different from that in the previous section. Here the Lord spoke of persecution, but we have no record that the Twelve suffered during their tour. Jesus also spoke of a ministry to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:18). The Holy Spirit had not been given, yet Jesus talked about the Spirit speaking in them (Matt 10:20). Matthew 10:22 seems to indicate a worldwide persecution; yet the Apostles were ministering only in their own land. Finally, Matthew 10:23 speaks about the return of the Lord, which certainly moves these events into the future. It is difficult to escape the

conclusion that these instructions apply to witnesses at some future time.

But, *what* time? To some degree, some of these events took place in the Book of Acts; yet Jesus Christ did not return at that time. And the ministry in Acts was not limited to "the cities of Israel" (Matt. 10:23). It seems that the period described in this section closely parallels the time of Tribulation that Jesus described in His "Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24-25). In fact, the statement, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 10:13), is definitely a part of our Lord's prophetic discourse (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13). It does not refer to a person keeping himself saved, but rather enduring persecution and being faithful.

If, then, these instructions apply to that future time of Tribulation, we can easily understand why Jesus said so much about hatred and persecution. The Tribulation period will be a time of *opposition*. God's servants will be like sheep in the midst of wolves. They will need to be "tough-minded but tenderhearted." This opposition will come from organized religion (Matt. 10:17), government (Matt. 10:18), and even the family (Matt. 10:21).

This section accurately parallels the Tribulation period. The prophetic Scriptures teach that... in the last days... government and religion will work together... to control the world. ... Revelation 13 describes a time during the Tribulation period... when a world ruler (the Antichrist) will force the world to worship him and his image. ... He will control world religion... economics... and government... and he will use all three to persecute those who stand true to Christ.

There will also be a decay of *family* love and loyalty. ... The three institutions which God established in this world are the home... human government... and the church. ... In the last days... all three of these institutions will oppose the truth instead of promote it. ... Just as this section here in Matthew 10 seems to describe.

The ambassadors of the King must "*endure to the end*" and faithfully perform their ministry... even if it costs them their lives. ... In spite of scourging... rejection by their families... persecution from city to city... and trials before leaders... the servants must remain true to their Lord. Their witness will be used by God to win others. Revelation 7:1-8 indicates that 144,000 Jewish witnesses will carry God's Word throughout the world... reaching out to the Jews who are scattered abroad during the Tribulation. As a result... great multitudes will come to Christ (we read in Rev. 7:9ff).

No doubt these words in Matthew 10 will become very precious and meaningful to witnesses during *that time*. Their primary interpretation and application are for God's servants - at a future time. We need to be very careful about trying to make the verses concerning this future commission – about *us*.

For example... I have heard some people in ministry use Matthew 10:19-20 as an excuse not to study their Bible in preparation for witnessing... teaching... and preaching. They say... "*God's Word promises that the Spirit of God will teach His witnesses what to say...*"

But these verses are not God's regular pattern for normal ministry today. This will be an unusual ministry of the Spirit that will be God's regular pattern for normal ministry – during the Tribulation period.

So let's turn now to the section of our passage that is about the day we are living in – now.

### **Matthew 10:24-25**

Follow the logic here: If Jesus was persecuted... and He is our teacher and master... then do we think that we're above Him... that we won't endure what He has endured?

If you proclaim the name of Christ... people will betray you... the world will hate you... and you *will* be persecuted... and it's all because Jesus Himself was betrayed... hated... and persecuted.

The reality we must face is this: **The danger of our lives increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ.** ... That is an unavoidable conclusion from what Matthew is telling us.

Everyone who wants a safe... carefree life free from danger should stay away from Jesus. ... The world responds with hostility to Him.

As long as we live lives just like everyone else—going to church on Sunday and keeping our faith to ourselves—we will face little risk in this world.

The only problem is... that we will know so little of Christ. But when we do know Christ... and when we're becoming like Him and proclaiming Him... things will not be easy for us. ... The more Christ is manifest in your life and in your family... the harder it will get for you in this world. ... You will become like the One who was mocked... beaten... scourged... spit on... and nailed to a cross.

All of this brings us to the question we must ask... Do we really want to be like Christ? ... I mean, *really*? ... Because if we really do want to be like Him... then our lives won't stay the same... and they won't be easy - they will be dangerous.

From here the passage takes on a certain highlight. The emphasis will be... "Fear not!" (In fact this phrase is used in Matt. 10:26, 28, 31.) ... The particular fear Christ discussed is explained in Matthew 10:32-33: the fear of confessing Christ openly before men.

God has no "secret service." The public confession of faith in Christ is one evidence of true salvation.

**Romans 10:9-10 (ESV)**

*because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

Several reasons show why we must not be afraid to openly confess Christ. The first is because God will bring everything to light.

**Matthew 10:26-27**

We do not have reason to fear... because God will give equip us and speak to us... giving us everything that we need. Our task is to proclaim God's message. He will lead us in this. Now... once again... we are not to use this as an excuse for not studying our Bibles. That is one of His primary ways He speaks to us. Whatever God whispers to us through His Word... we are to shout from the rooftops.

**Matthew 10:28-29**

Jesus knows that we will be tempted to fear man and to be intimidated by what people can do to us. However... it's not man that we need to fear. ...

God is the ultimate judge... and *He* holds our eternity in His hand... not men.

This may sound like a strange way to encourage followers of Christ... essentially telling them... "Don't be afraid of men—the worst thing they can do is kill you!" ... .... We may tremble to think that by going on mission to a certain region of the world we will be killed... but Jesus encourages us by telling us that that's all they can do.

Your focus must be on eternal things... so that nothing man can do to you matters. ... It has been said that saints of old feared man so little... because they feared God so much. ... Likewise... when you and I fear God alone... then we can stand boldly in front of people that we would previously have been afraid to share the gospel with... even those who would take our lives.... For in the end... death for the follower of Christ is actually gain (as Paul reasoned in Phil 1:21)!

### **Matthew 10:29-31**

Here... we have a wonderful picture of the Father's care. **He rules us sovereignly**... for He is in control of the smallest sparrow falling to the ground. He is... therefore... more than able to sovereignly direct our every step amid the danger of our mission.

We can also be comforted that **He knows us completely**; every hair on your head is accounted for. God knows every detail of your life, more than you know yourself.

### **Matthew 10:32-39**

In these verses... Jesus talks about the importance and the cost of identifying with Him. ... As disciples of Jesus we must **confess Him publicly** (vv. 32-33).

To confess means to affirm, to agree, or to identify with. When we follow Christ, we don't sit back in silence; we make it known to others that we belong to Him.

What about you—do people around you in your neighborhood... at work... or at school know that you are identified with Christ? ... Are you publicly identifying with Christ on a daily basis? ... It's incredible to think that one day all those who *publicly* identify with Christ will stand before the Father in heaven and Jesus will *publicly*, before the Father, identify with them.

Not only should we confess Jesus publicly... but we should also **love Him supremely**. This is Jesus' point in verses 37-38... where he speaks of loving Him more than our own family members.

Love for Jesus should be superior to love for a parent... or even the love one has for a spouse. ... These loves are temporal... but a relationship with Christ is eternal.

Finally, at the end of this paragraph, we are urged to **take the ultimate risk**. In verse 39 Jesus says that we must lose our life in order to find it. Pick up your cross, Christ-follower, and die. The end result is more than worth it.

### **Matthew 10:40-42**

Jesus' commission is not a summons to gloom and misery. ... It's a summons to joy and satisfaction. ... You take the ultimate risk... and in the process... you **find the ultimate reward**.

We find joy, peace, and life as we live in and with Christ for the spread of the gospel — but it's also for those who hear our proclamation of Christ. When they believe in the gospel... they too experience eternal reward!

Our passage this morning began with the exhortation from Christ to pray! Pray because the fields are white for the harvest.

In order to move from comfortable Christianity to a Matthew 10 kind of Christianity... I want to suggest two prayers... that we ought to be praying. First... **God, give us supernatural awareness of the condition of the lost**. ... We need help to see what God sees. ... We need to see it in the people right around us... the people we work with and live among... and the people who surround us in the world.

All of them—every single person around us and around the world—will spend the next trillion years either in heaven or in hell. God, give us a supernatural awareness of the condition of the lost.

Our second prayer should be this: **God, give us sacrificial obedience to the commission of Christ**. Obedience to the commission of Christ is the only proper response of those who celebrate communion with Christ. This commission requires great risk... but the reward is more than worth it—both for us and for countless others who come to know Christ through us.

Christ calls His followers to a costly mission that will involve suffering and opposition... but the sovereign care and protection of God are sufficient to sustain our faith.