

“Be the Answer”

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If you don't care like Jesus cares, you won't go where Jesus sends.

Matthew 10:1-20

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A heart like his – Pastor Bob Thompson

Your first reading of this passage may raise more questions than answers. Why is Jesus so un-Jesus-like in sending his disciples only to Jews and not to Gentiles and Samaritans? Why do they have to mooch off their audience instead of taking their own supplies? What's the deal about shaking dust off your feet? Are we not being a good witness if people aren't trying to eat us alive?

Compared to the other gospels, Matthew gives us the most complete – by far – instructions of Jesus to his disciples for how they should fan out while he was still preaching and healing himself. We know very little of the results of this “divide and conquer” mission but Matthew tells us how Jesus frames it.

We need to observe two key ways Matthew sets up these instructions. Verse 1 says, “Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them *authority*....” Hold on. This is one of those unfortunate chapter divisions in the Bible.

Authority is so critical in Matthew's gospel. Jesus has already amazed people with his *authority* to teach (7:29), to heal (8:5-13), and to forgive sins (9:6-8). The gospel will end with Jesus saying, “All *authority* in heaven and on earth is given to me, so go and disciple all nations” (28:19). Now he's transferring authority to the twelve.

Matthew 9:35 says that Jesus was teaching, preaching, and healing. As he did so, more and more people came to him. As the crowds grew, Jesus “had compassion on

them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). You will never embrace or invest yourself in Jesus’ mission if you don’t have his heart for people. If you think people who are misguided or lazy or selfish or addicted or sinful or political idiots are deserving only of your condescension and separation – that you are perfectly justified in ignoring or excluding them – you’re not thinking like Jesus.

You probably remember that in Whoville the Grinch’s heart grew three sizes after he realized the Whos were still singing “Welcome Christmas” after he took away all their presents and decorations. Jesus is not a Grinch, but his heart grows ten sizes when he sees broken people, sinful people, aimless people, hurting people, sick people, people possessed by the devil himself. He says “They need a shepherd!”

If you don’t care like Jesus cares, you won’t go where Jesus sends. Remember, when Jesus was on earth, he could only be in one place at a time. So he turned to his disciples and said, “There are so many reachable people and I can’t get to them all. Get on your knees and ask the Harvest Boss to send more workers!”

Do you think they did? Do you think those disciples stopped right there and said, “Let’s pray, guys. God, please send more workers into the harvest field”? Maybe. If they did, as soon as they were done, Jesus said, “You can be the answer to your prayer!”

Do you think the harvest field is ripe today? Is it ripe in the Middle East? In London? In Myanmar? In Florida? In North Carolina? In Hickory? In your neighborhood? Are you praying for God to send workers and harvest the crop? If you aren’t praying that, why not? If you are, *be the answer* to your prayers.

Matthew’s second setup for Jesus’ training seminar begins in verse 2. As you read this chapter, you need to consider three speakers and three audiences. Jesus speaks to his disciples, Matthew to his readers, and the Holy Spirit to you and me.

Let’s start with that first circle. One of the ways we know this is a targeted message is Matthew’s repetition of the word “twelve” three times (1, 2, 5). This is a specific message for them in their moment. The fact that there are twelve is, of course, important for Matthew because he is deliberately connecting this new thing God is doing – the kingdom of heaven (4:17), the new covenant (26:28) – with what God had done in and through Israel. There is continuity with the larger story.

But *these* twelve, they matter. Matthew lists their names because he wants you to know that when God sends envoys they are individuals with stories and baggage and possibilities. You matter in God’s mission. Your name matters as you are the answer to your prayers for God to love the world with arms and hands and mouthpieces.

It’s a little early in the story to make too much of them being called “apostles” (2). The word just means “those who are sent.” Matthew’s readers may well know that eleven of them (including Matthew) will become large in the early church’s story, but

right now they're just "disciples" (learners) who are "sent out" (apostles). They're not poor and not dumb. They are ordinary – middle class businessmen and entrepreneurs.

And who are they? Two pairs, maybe three, are brothers.¹ Later in the chapter Jesus will say that his message will divide families – but not all families. Some families serve him together. Some of them are identified by their father's name (Zebedee and Alphaeus), perhaps because their fathers were well-known to Matthew's readers.

Matthew is described as a "tax collector" (meaning he was a collaborator with the Roman government), while Simon is "the Zealot" (meaning he was ardently and possibly violently opposed to the Roman occupation). These descriptions would mean the same thing to Matthew's readers as if you said today that Jesus called a member of Antifa and a member of QAnon to his inner circle. My sanctified imagination wonders if Jesus didn't say, "OK, Matthew and Simon, you're going to team up."

Then there's Judas – always listed last in a list of disciples, and always identified as the betrayer long before he did any betraying. The gospel readers consistently remind us that one of these guys is not real, not changed, not on board with Jesus' mission. But Jesus includes him (a) to give him a chance and (b) because if we're trying to root out every possible weed we're sure to pull out some wheat (13:24-30).

These are the twelve Jesus brought closest to him as disciples, and these are the first twelve he ever sent out on a mission in his name. Not everything Jesus said to the twelve is precisely applicable to Matthew's readers or to you and me. But the underlying principles are. What are they?

Principles – Paul Cummings

Start with strategy. Eventually my good news will be for everyone, but let's start with the ones most like you (5-6) and most likely to respond (11-13).

Early in Jesus' ministry, he gets his disciples together and sends them out to be fishers of men and to build his kingdom. He knows some of them will fail, and he knows they will not do it perfect.

When we look at the world, we get discouraged. We think nobody is out there. What is the Spirit telling us? We need to start with a focus and a strategy. Jesus tells the disciples to go to the Jews first not the Gentiles. Jesus says look at it like concentric circles. Instead of looking at the world, look first at your little circle. Who has God put in your circle that you can text, call, visit, etc.? Jesus calls us to do this first. Then we can work our way further out concentrically. Start right there. Who in your first circle needs to hear about Jesus? What's your plan?

¹ James and John are brothers. Simon Peter and Andrew are brothers. James is identified as "the son of Alphaeus," and the father of Matthew (aka Levi) is identified with the same name in Mark 2:14.

Your limitations don't limit God. If you wait until you are fully supplied (9-10) and fully trained and equipped for every situation (19-20), you won't think you need God.

Jesus starts by saying what the disciples are *not* going to take, and here is what they are *not* going to worry about. Your limitations don't limit God. We think "If only I were a bit more prepared."

What if you waited until you were ready to have children? Would you have had them? No. You didn't know about midnight diaper changes. You just went. You will learn to be dependent on him.

If you wait until you are prepared, you will never go. Go ahead and begin the conversation. Where do you go to church? Do you watch online? Bring them to church. Bring his name into the conversation. It changes everything. Bring up Jesus and see what happens. Learn to depend on God, not yourself.

Authority sends you but humility holds you. I'm giving you authority, but results are not up to you (11-14) and you're not the judge (15).

The Lord has commissioned you and sends you out. Judgment is not on your plate; it's God's. The outcome is not up to you.

If I tell the team to do something, they are not going to do it because Cummings said so. But if I say "Coach said," they are likely to do it. Authority sends you out but humility holds you before you open your mouth. The outcome is up to the Lord. It's not you that saves anyone. You are the vessel, and the Lord works through you.

Expect it to be tough. You'll face rejection (14), vulnerability (16), and opposition (17-18). Go anyway and be my hands and feet. Be the answer to your prayer.

Expectations are huge. You are going to be rejected, chastised, ridiculed. Expect it. You are going to say something to someone and even though you are kind, they don't want you to bring that into their life right now.

If they crucified Jesus, they may not want to hear what you have to say. Expect it to be tough. When you look into the mirror each morning, you are looking into the eye of the person God has commissioned to go and make disciples. You are worthy because God says you are. Amen.