

Bible Study Guide: Week of 6-8-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Matthew 9:35—10:23

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

¹⁰Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. ⁹Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

¹⁶“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

¹⁷Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²²and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

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Here we see some of the hallmarks of Jesus' earthly ministry—traveling from place to place, teaching, spending time in synagogues, preaching about the kingdom of heaven, and healing the sick. The mention of synagogues shows the distinctly Jewish nature of Jesus' earthly ministry. Further confirmation of Jesus' concern for the Jewish people of his own day and age comes in the mention of “sheep without a shepherd.” This calls to mind the kings of Israel, particularly David, the shepherd boy turned king. Jesus' compassion for the crowds is not merely generic compassion for people in need, but compassion for God's own chosen people who were living under Roman occupation.

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Matthew switches metaphors here from sheep and shepherds to laborers and harvests. Jesus realizes that the need for the good news of the kingdom is too great for one person to work alone; he intends to send others to do his work in his name.

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Jesus' followers are listed here as “apostles.” Although we often use “disciples” and “apostles” interchangeably, they are distinct from one another. The word “disciple” simply means one who follows another. The word apostle, however, means “one who is sent.” Here, the twelve are listed as “apostles” because they are the ones Jesus sends to do his work on his behalf. The list of disciples is interesting because it begins with Simon Peter, the chief apostle—who would also go on to deny Jesus. The list ends with Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus. In between we have several other names that probably sound familiar. Most interestingly, we have Matthew the tax collector (whom tradition holds wrote this gospel). As a tax collector, Matthew would have been allied with the hated Romans. He abandoned this life to follow Jesus. Here, he is sent to proclaim good news to the people he formerly oppressed.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Compare this command to the later “Great Commission” of Matthew 28 (which we looked at last week). This passage is sometimes called the “Limited Commission.” Jesus is not interested here in spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Instead, he is concerned with the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Jesus sends the apostles to share the same words he began his own ministry with and to do the same work he has been doing. He reminds the apostles that he did not charge them for his gospel; neither should they expect to make money on the deal.

⁹Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and

stay there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Jesus' commands to the apostles may seem harsh to us. He is clearly expecting them to face hardships, but orders them to travel lightly and trust those whom they will be staying with to provide for their needs.

¹⁶“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²²and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

This part of the passage seems in part to anticipate the later mission of the apostles after Jesus' resurrection—particularly the parts about being dragged before governors and kings and the testimony to the gentiles, as well as Jesus' words about the Spirit speaking through them. The warnings about being betrayed by biological family members also seems to speak to a time after the ministry of Jesus when families were divided over the issue of Jesus and his ministry and identity. Jesus' words in verse 23, however, seems to refer more clearly to the immediate mission of the apostles, for at the end of this gospel Jesus sent them “to the ends of the earth” rather than just to Israel. The coming of the Son of Man could mean Jesus' second coming, but more likely here refers to Jesus' reunion with the apostles after he sends them out or, perhaps, to his coming passion, death, and resurrection. Either way, Jesus pulls no punches here: the life of an apostle—one sent to bring God's good news—is not going to be a walk in the park.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Do you think “the harvest” Jesus mentions is still plentiful today? If so, where do you see evidence of this? If not, why not? Who are the laborers in the harvest today?**
- 2. How might we translate Jesus' commands to “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” into the work of the church today? How are we to participate in this ministry Jesus commands?**
- 3. Jesus commands his apostles to carry very little with them. What items do you hold onto on a daily basis that may hold you back from the mission and ministry God is calling you to?**
- 4. What do you think about Jesus' warnings that family members will betray one another for the sake of the gospel?**