

¹ Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

⁹ “Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— ¹⁰ no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. ¹² As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³ If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

¹⁶ “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

²¹ “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²² You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³ When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ “The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

²⁶ “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

³² “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn

“a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’

³⁷ “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

If there is any passage of Scripture that has been meaningful to me over the last five years, it is the tenth chapter of the Good News as Matthew saw it. The automatic question in your minds is “*why is it so significant to you?*” In the interest of time I can’t elaborate on “why” at this moment, but it is. Suffice to say that if it is true that the Holy Spirit speaks to us primarily through the Bible, this for me has been a word that not only has been pronounced upon me but also is a word I have grown into, despite the way I still drag my feet in response.

Matthew 10 stands as one of the pivotal chapters in the story of Jesus and those whom he called to follow him in his itinerant ministry. Though Matthew 10 stands in the shadow of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, where the Sermon on the Mount speaks of God’s people’s life together, Matthew 10 speaks of their life as witnesses. This vignette is not important because there are great battles or intellectual debates. There isn’t even Jesus saying “*I saw Satan fall like lightning!*”¹ which is the grand proclamation he makes in the parallel passage of Luke. This is not a passage that makes it onto Get Well Soon cards or Precious Moments bookmarks because it is not written to make us feel comforted or comfortable. This is a significant chapter that deserves our extended reflection because it is an apocalyptic moment in the life of those who followed Jesus. What I mean by “apocalypse” isn’t that we see in this chapter some fiery “end of the world” scenario. What I mean by “apocalypse” is that the curtain of perception is drawn aside to reveal the good news Jesus himself preaches: “*The Kingdom of Heaven has come near.*” It is in this chapter that the eyes of Jesus’ disciples are opened to an alternative reality—but even more, the disciples of Jesus are invited to participate *in* this new reality, the one we call the Kingdom of God. *

¹ Luke 10:18

Matthew 10 is preceded by a series of stories about Jesus going about and doing Christ-like things: healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons. At the end of Matthew 9, we're told that Jesus looks on the towns he has just visited and all the crowds that followed him in hopes of being cleansed and cured. As he looks out on all the people lifting their empty hands, his guts are wrenched with sorrow for them because, he says, "*they are like sheep without a shepherd.*" Therefore, he tells his disciples, "*Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.*"² Foreshadowing? Yes.

In the very next chapter, Jesus calls his disciples to him. This is the first movement in all mission, that Jesus calls us to himself first. Mission does not begin with us feeling guilty about the state of the world and then trying to do something about it. Mission begins with a call to a person, to Jesus himself, to be assembled as disciples who have committed to follow him. However, committing to follow Jesus is not an invitation to sit on a mountaintop in a tent with the Lord and his buddies. This is what Peter gets wrong when he sees Jesus revealed in shining divinity and says "*let's set up a shelter and shoot the breeze with you, Elijah and Moses for a while.*"³ What Peter doesn't understand is that Jesus is a man on a mission, and that any who follow him are also put on this same mission.

Yet one of the great emphases of this passage is that though followers of Jesus can expect to be sent out as missionaries the rest of our lives, we aren't alone as we go. In fact, the authority for engaging the entire world doesn't stem from our talent or strength or cleverness, but from Jesus alone who gives us authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons. It may sound strange to us that Jesus is so specific in the way he outlines the disciple's mission, but in each of these, we see how each of us—the modern day disciples of Jesus—may find ourselves empowered and sent.

² Matt 9:36-37

³ Matt 17:4, Mark 9:5-6, Luke 9:33

Some of us here will be given the education, training, experience and empowerment to care for ailing bodies and heal the sick. Others will be called to use our intellects and gifts for speech and communication to proclaim the advent of this alternative reality. Others will be called to connect people into community and befriend the friendless—of which there are many in our world—and in so doing “cleanse lepers” so that those who are shunned by society and left outside the city can be brought into relationship with other people. Others may find themselves engaged with a struggle against spirits who do not wish our good but only our demise and death. Each of these are signs that God’s promised King and his Kingdom have come, as Jesus says to his cousin John when John is in prison. In the very next chapter of Matthew, right after the disciples go out into their familiar places, John asks “*are you the one, or are we to expect someone else?*” Jesus replies, “*The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.*”⁴

Yet over all, should we think the power for this mission comes from ourselves, we are invited to the stunning possibility that we are to raise the dead. Jesus, are you nuts? None of us can do that—except by the authority of one who has power over life and death. This last ministry reminds us that no matter whether we find ourselves in a life of mission to people’s bodies, minds, and spirits the entire scope of the mission is dependent on God’s initiative and empowerment. We may have specific skills and callings within the great mission of God that lend us to seasons of work within certain areas, but overall, the call to raise the dead points back to our complete and utter dependence on God to help us as we go.

This is the alternative reality that the disciples enter into as they go to the cities of their home county in Galilee: that they are humbly dependent on God for everything. As if to underscore their

⁴ Matt 11: 2-5

dependence on others and on God, Jesus tells his disciples not to bring along anything for the journey that might actually be useful. Bag? No. Extra clothes? No. Money? No. They are sent out as pure⁵ doves who, wise like snakes, know what they're getting into, but yet are singleminded in the task set before them by the one they call "Lord". On the way, they are to be dependent on others as a sign to all that they are not in it for the money or for personal gain, but to witness to the alternative reality that they are coming to know: *God is with us. The Kingdom of God is near.*

We live now in an age that is fond of discovering our strengths and using these for mission. Gifted writer? Write books about Jesus! Great cook? Practice hospitality and cook meals for the hungry! Have children? Use them to establish relationships and have play dates with unbelieving friends! These may be wise usages of the resources we have, but we often become so obsessed with looking at where we *are* that we close ourselves to the vista of where we *might go*. We sometimes look at ourselves and say "*I am good at this but not at this*" and think that the things we are good at are the only things we will be asked to do. No. We may be gifted and skilled and privileged in one way at the moment, but this is not *all* that we are going to be, especially not if we commit ourselves, body, mind and heart to the mission that Jesus sends us on. Very often, we will find that God does not minister to others out of our strengths, but out of our weakness. Can any of us raise the dead? The alternative reality that we are to bear witness to is one that constantly speaks of total dependence on the God who calls us, gifts us, and sends us.

It almost goes without saying that this alternative reality is not the reality that many of us live in. The version of reality that we most often shape our own lives according to is that we provide for ourselves and then bless God with what we have gotten. Yet the alternative view that the Kingdom of God presents is that everything is given to us as we *go*. If ever there was a word that critiqued a

⁵ Gk: *Akeraioi*, "artless, pure"

sedentary Christian life, it's Jesus' own assurance that we will be provided for *along the way*.

Contrary to the way most of us have been raised, settling down and waiting for God to stuff our faces with every good thing is not what being Christian is all about. Most of us tend to look at our identities as Christians as something of an add-on, another extracurricular activity outside of work or school or home that we need to schedule in with everything else. Yet the call to follow Jesus—to discipleship—is a call to a mission that envelops our entire lives, not just a segment. Everything in our life is now given over to the new reality of the Kingdom to which we belong. If you and I are not keeping awake and aware that we are people on a mission, people on *the move*, we are not following Christ and therefore cannot call ourselves Christians.

Yet what often keeps us from fully committing to living in this alternative reality is the lingering idea that what we have planned for ourselves is better than what God has planned for us. If we had it our way, each of us would seek comfort, respectability, and peace with family and friends with religious activity on the side to hedge our bets. We don't inherently trust that God's vision for the way things are *becoming* is reliable. We need convincing. As though knowing that this is somehow at the heart of much of our fear over joining God on his mission, Jesus spends the rest of chapter 10 reassuring us. Though we will be separated from everything we once held dear—from family, from friends, from respectability, even sometimes from safety—this is the means by which we lose our life and in so doing, find it.

This is the paradox we can't seem to get over. Lose our lives by finding them? Find our lives by losing them? What does Jesus mean by that? Could it be that we are called to be like lemmings and find our lives' meaning by throwing ourselves *en masse* off a high cliff?

No. What Jesus means is that we are all born self-interested people who haven't got the faintest clue what it means to live out this alternative reality of the Kingdom of God. We may achieve good deeds without an awareness of God, but living in God's reality takes vision that will sustain our

faith as we take Jesus at his word. This is what's at the bottom of many of our struggles with God. We don't often live as though what Jesus says is true because we are afraid of losing what little we have, and the rewards that Jesus holds out seem so intangible.

Yet if Jesus is speaking the truth about what it means to be re-made in his image and what it means to follow him, what do our lives say about what we believe? If we think Jesus is a nice man who wants us to be nice, we might try our best to be nice people. If we think Jesus is a teacher who said some wise things, we might try our hand at being wise. But if we believe Jesus is the incarnate Son of the living God, and if we call ourselves his followers, *his* version of reality must become the *only* version of reality by which we live.

This is where being a citizen of God's Kingdom requires faith that is renewed every day as we decide in both the seemingly small and worrisome big ways to take Jesus at his word. What rings out from this text is the most-repeated commandment in the Bible: *fear not*. We may think that we have nothing to give, but *fear not*, for the authority and power of Jesus for all Kingdom work is given to us. We may think we will not have enough, but *fear not*, our worldview of "not enough" is turned on its head to become "enough and more" by the provision of God who cares for you and I. By sending out his first disciples to familiar surroundings, Jesus shows that he accommodates our fear. We get small steps in the places we know, not so that we can pat ourselves on the back when we are faithful with a few things, but so that we learn to live by faith and trust God all the more. Even though the disciples are first given the mission of reaching out "where they are" in Galilee, this is in preparation for the rest of their lives in reaching the ends of the earth. Matthew 10 is a challenge for us as disciples of Christ to take up our deaths and, while we have some light left, to follow Jesus. Yet it also is a challenge in the sense that we are to *trust* Jesus, to find him as our firm footing and go against our instincts and other voices that tell us that Jesus can't be trusted. "*Don't go out there,*" our culture says when it tells

us to pursue jobs that are stable but leave us cold. “*There won’t be enough,*” our hearts may say as we look at our bank statements. “*You can’t trust that Jesus guy*”, whispers the Enemy in our ears.

Yet he *can* be trusted. Matthew 10 is, above all else, an invitation to trust that the living God does not mean you harm, but loves you deeply and dearly. However, as with all invitations, it is contingent on us to respond. You won’t know this until you step out your door in faith and say “*where you go, I will follow.*” This is where we learn the faithfulness of God in providing everything we need and more. We will not learn this while we deceive ourselves in thinking we provide by our own hands, but because the Kingdom we are a part of is not of this world⁶ we will learn this when cut ties with the trappings of the world that hold our hearts down.

There is an echo in this text that comes back at the end of Matthew’s gospel when the disciples are sent out on mission for good. Jesus’ speaks to his disciples on a mountain, where the last words he has for them in person go like this: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”⁷ This Commission isn’t just for a few. It isn’t just for the men and women who stood with Jesus on that mountain as he spoke those words. It’s Jesus’ directive for us all—and not so that we can earn our way into his good graces, but because the alternative reality which is inaugurated by the death of Jesus and vindicated by his rising from the dead is now *here*. The question is, which reality do we bear witness to? In which reality do we live? The one we had handed to us or the one that even now, breaks in with freedom and healing and wholeness?

⁶ John 18:36

⁷ Matt 28:18-20