

Reading: Matthew 9:35-10:15

Theme: God's work and God's way.

In the early 1930s in the USA an inter-university athletics much was planned between 2 universities. The story goes that the home team were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their rivals, when a taxi pulled up and out got 2 men. This was the opposing team and one of them was the trainer! The home team laughed. The home team were then beaten into 2nd place! That university incident may have been an exception, it was out of the ordinary, but so was the athlete! Actually, he later achieved track and field immortality in a span of 45 minutes on May 25, 1935, during the Big Ten meeting in Michigan, where he set three world records and tied a fourth. The athlete was Jesse Owens, who made a mockery of Hitler's claim for Aryan supremacy in the 1936 Munich Olympics games as he won 4 gold medals.

If we were planning to go for world domination, then we would want the best of everything to help us and certainly a great fighting force, but the Lord Jesus as He planned to spread the good news of the gospel - eventually all over the world, doesn't use exceptional men, the finest of His society, nor does He use great armies, but He initially uses just 12 disciples who were to do something people then as well as now laugh at. I want us to begin to look at chapter 10 this morning and to note 7 things briefly:

1. The People.

Jesus calls 12 of His followers to Him and on this occasion sets these aside. These 12 were a mixed bunch and had been with Him, heard Him teach and saw the miracles He did. They are given a special honour and office - that of Apostles - ones sent out specifically by Christ. They had been prepared by being with and learning from Jesus over a period of time, so that they were sufficiently ready and trained to go out in this work Interestingly they had been told recently to pray for workers and here they were being commissioned

and sent out by the Lord - almost as a response to such prayers and instruction.

They did not take this honour to themselves, but were sent out by the Lord. Matthew here records the list of the King's officers. We could say many things about them as individuals, but it is not my intention to do so. Generally, we note that none of them are marked out as being anyone special. If you dig a bit, you'll soon realise they were a mixed bunch - fishermen, some of these fishermen were owners of boats and employed others; a tax collector, who would have been educated and yet viewed as a traitor to his people as he served the Romans; a nationalist who would have hated the Romans and those who worked for them; some headstrong characters; one full of doubts and dark forebodings. One seemed to have potential as he a good head for money and was put in charge of the finances. These people, the personnel chosen, were no one special and yet Christ knew they were the right ones.

We may feel we are no one special and that Jesus wouldn't really bother with us and could never use us. Look again at the disciples, see Jesus chose and used the most unlikely ones in the most unlikely work for Him. No matter who we are, there is hope for us with the Lord Jesus. Yet we need to be warned, for we can have great privileges, learn much of Jesus, experience much, do many things in God's name and may still be someone who does not even have Jesus as our own Saviour! With all our privileges we can still go to hell. Judas Iscariot warns us all of such a danger! He warns us not to be content to know **of** Jesus, to do things **for** Him, to be **in** His service, to be a church member, a deacon, elder, youth leader or even a minister - yet we may not be truly His child. We all need to make sure we do not rely on someone or something else other than the Lord Jesus and all He has done to make us acceptable to God. That is something of the people Jesus used, now see:

2. The Purpose.

There was a purpose in commissioning these men. This purpose is shown in v7-8. They were to work as Christ worked - preaching, teaching and doing good. There were to be involved directly in the great work Jesus was doing. They are expected to be fellow workers with and for Him. They were to tell people that the kingdom of heaven was near and it was not something far distant or some great philosophy for the clever people, but it was real and close by. They were to tell of Jesus, all He was doing and the change He could make in their lives. Incredibly, to back up their message, they did miracles - amazing things; just as they had seen Jesus do! I wonder how these ordinary men felt as they were told they had to do these extraordinary, miraculous things? In and of themselves they could not, so we see:

3. The Power.

These apostles had been given power and authority by Jesus. They were not only called, but equipped and empowered. They were given His power and the right to use such power, so they also had authority. They were to be His ambassadors, His representatives and He gave them the power and might do these things in His name. By Jesus' divine power and enabling, they would be able to cast out demons, heal every disease and sickness and even raise the dead (v8)! To these ones, on their first preaching mission, was given this amazing, unbelievable power. Yet the emphasis, the primary purpose of their work is to preach - tell people that the kingdom of God was near.

We too in our days have the responsibility to preach the gospel. We also are to do good as we are able, but I feel that healing, casting out of demons and the like is not part of the normal course of things in our time. As I said last week, all healing does come from the Lord - whether He uses means or works directly. Rarely nowadays will it be miraculously administered through a person, or if it is, it is the exception and not the rule - but occurred with the apostles here and

in Acts. For someone to set up a healing campaign, to my mind, is not right and it is a distraction from the purpose we have been left to do - to proclaim the gospel. Yes, we really need God's power and enabling to preach the good news effectively and savingly. These apostles were granted this supernatural power to be effective in the mission they were set aside for. Yet it was not to be a random mission, but a specific one and so we see:

4. The Places.

The apostles were not sent out in an indiscriminate way, but were told where and where not to go! There were places they had to avoid and places they were to go to. At this time, it was a mission to the Jews only. The Gentiles, the Samaritans were to be avoided and so the apostles were not to go to their towns and villages (v5). The apostles were sent to the lost sheep of Israel at that time. In OT, Israel were the people of God and had amazing privileges - God's word, the temple, prophets, God's dealings with them over the centuries, yet so many were lost despite all the privileges they had previously.

The Lord Jesus was concerned initially with these lost sheep. Yes, His work would reach out and include the whole world irrespective of race or nationality, but the focus of His work **at that time** (*though not exclusively*) was to the Jews and so the apostles are instructed to keep to them at that time. In our day and age, we also are to have a concern for the Jews, but not exclusively. We are to seek to present the gospel to all - near and far, whatever nationality and background. The apostles were told later by Jesus to go into **all** the world and preach the gospel, they were told to begin at Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.

We are to be ready to spread the good news too - in our Jerusalem = home areas e.g. homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, our Judea = town, our Samaria = the surrounding area and also to the ends of the world. While we may not be able to go to such places ourselves, yet

we can still pray for and support those who do go out and tell of Jesus in many places near and far. The disciples went out as they were instructed by the Lord and we see:

5. The Provisions.

These apostles were sent by the Lord on His work. Here they were not expected to provide for the work themselves. This was to be a short-term work and so they were not to plan, prepare or make provision as if it were a long-term work. Theirs was to be a short term, roaming ministry and they were not to be weighed down with provisions. Neither were they to be concerned about finances or take excess luggage, extra clothes or sandals, not even a staff – probably a heavy staff for defence. They had to take only that which would be strictly necessary.

Basically, Jesus is saying to them “*You are working for Me and all you need will be provided*”. In other words, “*the worker is worth His keep*” (v11). Here the Lord is saying that their needs on this short-term-ministry work would be provided by God. So, they were not to worry about their needs and it may also have been designed to prevent greed on their part and not give this initial outreach-work a bad name.

They had received gifting and authority freely, so they were to go out and minister freely also. Because of this there was no need for belt, for bag, for extra clothing as their needs would be met. This did not remove the obligation upon those who had received the good they gave. For the ones who received such had the obligation to meet the needs of these men. God has made provision for gospel workers to partake of the fruits of their work - including adequate material provision. In this connection the apostles were expected to use their minds as they sought accommodation etc. and so we see:

6. The Prudence.

The apostles, when they came to a town or village, had to search out some worthy person and to extend their greeting and peace to such a home and if they were welcomed and accepted, then they were to stay there until they had to leave. It does not mean the apostles sought out the posh homes and areas. Probably, as they went into the town or village square and preached, they would note the responses of the people and the worthy ones would probably be those who readily received their message and who would also welcome these messengers warmly; counting it an honour to lodge them. These ones were the worthy ones and their homes were to be the disciples' local HQ. Such ones were worthy of their greeting, the pronouncing of peace and if time proved they were not, then their peace would return to the disciples.

I have just a few lessons for us all from this point - it underlines that we are to be those who are hospitable, especially to God's servants. We are also to seek to encourage each other in hospitality, having open hearts and open homes to all. We are to realise the rightness of seeking God's blessing on those we meet and have contact with. I feel that also, as we're able, we are being encouraged to support God's work and workers in ways we are able.

Such provisions would be made for the apostles as they proclaimed the kingdom of God and sought to do good. To receive such ones with such a message and ministry, would be right and an honour, unfortunately they would not be universally received and so Jesus speaks of:

7. The Punishment.

Jesus makes a solemn statement which prepared the disciples for their message to be rejected by some and also speaks of punishment on those who did so (v15). The punishment such people received would be worse than that of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (v15) - which were OT cities that were so corrupt, so base, so wicked

that God destroyed them in a very graphic way. Yet their evil would be seemingly punished less by God than the places which rejected the message of the apostles, because they rejected the message they proclaimed as they spoke of the Christ and Saviour.

Jesus is not saying that those of Sodom and Gomorrah would be unpunished, but that they would be ‘comparatively’ better off than those who rejected the gospel message. It is a solemn thing to neglect, especially to reject the gospel message and the good news it proclaims of salvation in Jesus only. To knowingly do so not only adds to your guilt, but you will eternally realise you condemned yourself and so ‘aggravate’ your eternal suffering.

The apostles were told to shake the dust off their feet from the places that rejected the message and so leave the contamination of unbelief there. It was open and graphic sign of disdain and distaste. Paul and Barnabas did this with the Jews at Antioch Pisidia when they rejected their message Acts 13:50-51 *“But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.”*

This is such a solemn warning to us here, for we now have the privilege of hearing the gospel, of having the great benefits and comforts from God’s word, but if we neglect the gospel, even reject it, then we can expect an awful punishment, even worse than those who’d never heard! We will be without excuse - that is why it is dangerous to hear the gospel as it leaves us with no excuse at all. It underlines that we either couldn’t be bothered to seek God and His forgiveness or we simply rejected it and didn’t want such! Would you want be in that awful position? I hope and pray you will not be. I try to present the Saviour and the way of salvation He has made - not perfectly I know, not with the power and wonder it should be

proclaimed with, but I try faithfully, clearly to present the Lord Jesus Christ – who is the only Saviour for us all.

For your own sakes, I would encourage you to listen to the gospel as told here by whoever preaches. I would urge you to, beg you to call on and trust the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour. Why will you not be kind to, have pity and mercy on your own soul and its well-being by seeking God through the only Saviour He has provided. I have to warn you not to play about with God's word, because it has consequences. Realise now the gospel says that at this moment you can make this God your own Saviour through Jesus. I urge you to do so and then live for God's glory and honour from this day forward and marvel at how He can use you in your life – whether young or old.

If we are believers, then we too have to calling to tell of Jesus as we are able in our lives and where we live, work, study and everywhere we go. We can also get actively involved in the life of the church here – there is the need for workers in so many areas in the life of the church. Join with those who are doing so and help the work be maintained and even grow as together we serve the Lord here.