

The Directions to the Disciples
Matthew 10:5-15
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

Matthew 10 contains the summoning of the twelve disciples for their commission to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom to the Jewish people. After teaching the disciples to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest,” Jesus sends these twelve disciples to do this work. The entirety of chapter 10 contains the teaching of Jesus to the twelve listed in 10:2-4 for the purpose of preparing them for their mission that they would embark upon. This chapter concludes with the transitional, section-ending words of Matthew 11:1, “*When Jesus had finished giving instructions*” (cf. Matthew 7:28; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

The twelve had observed the works of Jesus and they would now be sent to do these works themselves. They will also be sent to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. This discourse of Jesus as they are sent is related to this specific occasion. It is a lengthy section covering Matthew 10:5-42 which divides into three units:

- (1) Directions to the disciples (10:5-15)
- (2) Perseverance in persecution (10:16-31)
- (3) Reward of the righteous (10:32-42)

Matthew 10:5-42 has parallels with the other synoptic Gospels, but the other two synoptics do not package these words in one section:

- Matthew 10:5-16 corresponds with Mark 6:8-11 and Luke 9:3-5 and 10:3-12
- Matthew 10:17-25 corresponds with Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-19
- Matthew 10:26-42 corresponds with Mark 9:37-41 and Luke 12:2-12

Based on this comparison, we again see Matthew constructing his material in topical fashion rather than chronologically. Jesus taught these words to the disciples upon sending them and did so more than once.

The sphere of the disciples’ ministry (10:5-6)

The surprising directive that Jesus provides is to limit their ministry to only the “*lost sheep of the house of Israel*.” This is a term frequently used in the Old Testament that describes the Jews (Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 50:6; Ezekiel 34). Specifically in this context, it excludes the Gentiles and the Samaritans (10:5).

Therefore, Jesus limited the disciples to the Jews living in Galilee. If they were to travel north, east or west they would head toward the Gentiles. If they headed south they would be in the land of the Samaritans. This gives us a sense that their mission might not have been lengthy.

This is the only time in Matthew's Gospel that the Samaritans are specifically mentioned. Matthew's audience was Jewish and his focus was less on the Samaritans than Luke or John. They were descendents of the Jews from the Assyrian invasion and were considered less than fully Jewish, having been mixed with Gentiles.

The obvious issue in these two verses is how they compare to the mission to "*all the nations*" that Christ sent His disciples on in Matthew 28:18-20. Why does He limit their ministry scope in Matthew 10?

The answer to this question lies at the heart of the dichotomy between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They were sent to preach the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 10:7) and the kingdom was promised to the nation of Israel. This is why the disciples asked Jesus, "*Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*" and why Jesus did not correct them but replied, "*It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority*" (Acts 1:6-7).

The Lord came to the people of Israel and these people rejected their Messiah. "*He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him*" (John 1:11). Upon His rejection, Jesus brought the kingdom to all who received Him regardless of their heritage. "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John 1:12-13).

This pattern of going to the Jews first was repeated in the early church. The book of Acts shows the gospel goes to Jerusalem first, and then to Judea, Samaria and then to the distant places (cf. Acts 1:8). Paul writes that the gospel is "*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16). When Paul preached the gospel in Gentile lands he went to the Jews first, "*It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH'*" (Acts 13:46-47).

This practice by Paul going to the Jews first was more than simply expediency, it was related to the plan of God. The plan of God for Israel was for the Gentiles to be reached through their nation. The Messiah was to come to the generation of God's people according to God's perfect timing (cf. Daniel 9:24-27). That generation of Jews were given every opportunity to receive their Messiah. This is why Jesus told His disciples to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Because the ministry to the Gentiles was planned to be through Israel and because of the nation's rejection of their Messiah, Jesus said, *"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it"* (Matthew 21:43). God's plan for the Gentiles would become the church, consisting of both Jew and Gentiles as one in Christ.

The church is distinct from Israel, which will remain in God's plan after the rapture of the church during the seven year tribulation period. Those who fail to see this distinction fall into the problem of placing the church under the Old Testament Law (cf. Acts 15). The understanding of the ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel during the life of Christ is an important part of understanding the ministry to all the nations during the church age with the New Testament.

The nature of the disciples' ministry (10:7-8)

The disciples' ministry was to preach the good news of the kingdom. This kingdom was "at hand," meaning that it was near. The reason the kingdom was near was because the King was dwelling among them. This was the same message that John the Baptist preached in Matthew 3:2, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Jesus Himself said exactly these same words in Matthew 4:17 and He had gone proclaiming this kingdom (Matthew 4:17; 9:35).

It was at hand, or had come near, but had not yet begun. This was not meant to be understood as chronologically near but as positionally near, which leads to the translation "at hand." The kingdom would be restored to Israel at some point in the future that the Father has fixed by His own authority (Acts 1:7). While the Jews had a genuine opportunity to receive their Messiah, biblical prophecy and the redemption of mankind led to His rejection and death for the sin of the world, thus delaying the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven awaits the return of Christ, who will come in the same way He left (Acts 1:11), with clouds and seen by men (Revelation 1:7). The Old Testament prophecies of an earthly kingdom will be fulfilled.

The disciples were given the authority to proclaim this message with an ability to “*heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast our demons.*” They had seen Jesus do these miracles in chapters eight and nine. This is an instruction to them that we see them do in the record of the early church in the Book of Acts.

The command to freely give is based upon the gracious nature of God’s blessing to them. They freely received, so they should freely give. This was later the practice of Paul, “*For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God*” (2 Corinthians 2:17). This is true of Christians today, for we too have received the gift of eternal life freely. Any fee for service approach to ministry should be rejected.

The provision for the disciples’ ministry (10:9-10)

The next set of instructions to the disciples involve what they should bring with them. Simply put, they should travel light. They were not to be encumbered by gold and silver, for there was no need for such wealth. Nor were they even to bring copper for their money belts. Such savings were seen as unnecessary.

This intentional lack of planning for future financial need also included their supplies. They did not need a bag for their journey. This type of bag was typically for bread and other necessities while traveling. Likewise, there is a plan to have no backup provisions, but to only bring what was essential. Thus they were to only wear their inner garment or tunic, and only wear their sandals and not bring a secondary provision for themselves. One staff was sufficient.

Jesus explains the reason for this lack of supply, “*for the worker is worthy of his support.*” This statement includes certain implications. If the worker is worthy of his support, there must be those inclined to support the worker. Therefore, there is a sense of some success in the disciples’ ministry, as some people will respond to them, and in appreciation, to seek to share with them.

Also, this premise is the essence of 1 Timothy 5:17, “*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*” The basis for this honor is echoed by the words of Matthew 10:10 when Paul quoted Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, “*For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’*” Sustenance should follow faithful spiritual labor.

Fundamentally, this idea that the disciples were to embark on their work and freely give with only a sense that the worker is worthy of his support rests upon faith in God. There was no concrete expectation of where their assistance would come from. Their trust in these words of Jesus was dependent upon the words being truthful and God being faithful to move others to provide this support.

This trust for God's provision was taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. *"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"* (Matthew 6:31-34).

There is ample evidence that this limited supply was not intended to be normative for the disciples throughout their ministry. *"And He said to them, 'When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?' They said, 'No, nothing.' And He said to them, 'But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, "AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS"; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment"* (Luke 22:35-37).

We can conclude that there are certain intensive times when more drastic methods must be implemented. The disciples' life with Jesus was one of those special times. Later, they would need supplies in ministry when Christ is taken from them and Jesus instructs them accordingly. Christians were taught by Paul to *"attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need"* (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

The circumstances surrounding our ministry may at times necessitate deprivation or intensive commitment of time and resources. But these are not usual or typical. The wisdom of planning for our needs is commendable. In the words of Paul, *"with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you"* (2 Thessalonians 3:8) *"Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children"* (2 Corinthians 12:14).

The reception of the disciples' ministry (10:11-15)

The disciples were to stay with those who were “worthy” or in other words, those who would be receptive to their message. Thus, there would be people interested and the disciples were to give those people a greeting and be receptive to their hospitality (Matthew 10:11-12). This greeting would be the normal greeting of the day, which included an expression of peace. Luke 10:5 describes this as “*peace be to this house.*”

If the house (i.e.-residents of the house) is not worthy and is unreceptive, then the disciples should proceed to “shake the dust off” their feet, which is symbolic of renouncing their greeting. To withdraw their blessing of peace was to remove themselves as Christ’s representative from the house. Luke’s Gospel describes this act more vividly, “*Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you*” (Luke 10:11). The disciples should not want to be involved with even the dust from where they had been. This was also taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, “*Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces*” (Matthew 7:6).

What is true for people and their households was also true for the towns they would visit (Matthew 10:14). Jesus would later pronounce judgment upon the towns in Matthew 11:14, “*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*” This is an early precursor to the coming rejection of Christ by the nation as a whole.

The seriousness of rejecting the messengers of Jesus is emphasized by the comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah in Matthew 11:15. The reason that judgment would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah was because of the amount of the revelation that was rejected. The people of Jesus’ day had the opportunity to know much more than those of Abraham’s day. “*And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more*” (Luke 12:47-48).

Today, our revelation is great. Those who hear the word of God and reject it will clearly suffer on the day of judgment. Our responsibility is serious and each one will be held to account on that day (cf. Hebrews 9:27).

Conclusion

Imagine how confident the disciples must have been after hearing these instructions! They must have felt inadequate and ill-prepared, yet they trusted their Lord. They serve as an example for us with a willingness to follow Christ even when the path was not what they expected or ever thought they would be sent out to do.

As believers in Christ, we have a wonderful opportunity and a significant responsibility to be Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20). When we are faithful to share the gospel of Christ, we do so in His name and for His purposes as it is the Lord's work. If this message is received, it is not our cleverness that is received as Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 1:17, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void."*

Likewise, when the words of the Lord are not received, it is the Lord who is rejected (assuming that we are faithful to the word and not obnoxious). If our words are not received, we have no need to continue to pester people with the truth. We ought to *"honor all people"* (1 Peter 3:17) but we also ought to recognize when the Lord is being rejected and move along to other opportunities.

"Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person" (Colossians 4:5-6).