



THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS HERE!

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 Matthew 10:1-20
 Second Message
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Many of you probably feel the same way about evangelism as I do about preaching: we should be doing both of these very important things but they scare the life out of us.

I am reminded of an incident on a Mexicali mission trip that I took in my sophomore year at Santa Clara University, when I joined with my home church in Orland for Azusa Pacific's annual pilgrimage just south of the border. What made this event a little different for me was that for the first time, I was one of the leaders. The trip went off as planned, and we experienced all the usual things that occur on a visit to Mexico.

What I remember best, though, is our lunchtime visits to the town square. Our leader, Grant, was one of those rare fellows with an unquenchable thirst and gift for evangelism. His zeal could make you feel both guilty and inadequate in comparison. His vision for us that afternoon was that we go to the town square and share our faith with whomever we met. One by one the students would approach a stranger and through an interpreter walk that person through the tract we were using. Everything went off without a hitch until it was Liza's turn. As she approached two unsuspecting young men sitting in the park, she suddenly looked at me, her leader, and said, "I'm not going to do it. You do it!" I insisted that she proceed, but before she finally relented, she insisted that the reason I wouldn't do it was that I was scared, too.

For the majority of us, with the rare exception of the Grant types among us, this story probably illustrates our response to evangelism: it scares us. The reason is twofold, I believe. To begin with, evangelism is such a personal matter to us, because we have so much invested in our relationship with Christ. And second, evangelism may involve rejection of both us and our Savior. If someone rejects Jesus, they also reject us in ways they probably don't have a clue about.

Unfortunately, I don't have any special secret to share today that will magically transform the tension we feel into pure joy when we share our faith. What I want to do is observe how Jesus instructed and trained his disciples in preparation for the great task that lay ahead of them, that of sharing the gospel with the entire world.

In Jesus' interaction with and instruction to his disciples we learn three things about evangelism. First, we are qualified or gifted to share our faith. Second, our message is simple: God loves me, and he loves you, too. And third, the final result of sharing our faith is God's responsibility, not ours.

Our text is Matthew 10:1-20,

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every dis-

ease and sickness.

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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

"Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 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, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Matt 10:1-20, NIV)

By Whose Authority?

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority over spirits so that they might drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness. (Matt 10:1)

Jesus' first word to his disciples in training is, "You have the authority to do this." What is the basis of this authority and what type of authority has Jesus given them? According to the text, it is "authority over evil spirits." We might miss this if we are not careful, but in the two previous chapters, Matthew records a rapid string of occasions when Jesus did the very things that he gives his disciples authority to do here. In chapters 8 and 9, Matthew paints a picture of Jesus doing miracles such as healing a man with leprosy, healing two paralytics, calming a storm, casting

out and healing a demon-possessed man, curing a bleeding woman, raising a girl from the dead, and healing the blind and mute. Matthew's purpose in arranging his gospel material in this way is to prove that Jesus does indeed have authority over creation and demonic spirits.

Now we can understand Jesus having dominion over everything. Nothing is impossible for him, and these two chapters illustrate that. But why do so many of Jesus' miracles have to do with the lepers, the lame, the dumb and the bleeding? Why not people with migraine headaches and back problems? It is because the lepers, lame and bleeding people are all unclean and unable to associate with Israel's worshipping community, thus they are unable to be in community or relationship with God. So when Jesus works these miraculous deeds he doesn't just do miracles for their own sake, but with the intent of drawing us back into relationship with himself. These miracles make us clean and worthy of being in relationship with him. After all, the greatest and truest miracle of all is that God himself desires and has called us to enter into relationship with him.

Notice that the authority that Jesus demonstrated in chapters 8 and 9 is given to his disciples, and in turn to us. We have been given authority over unclean spirits so that we too might cast them out and heal all types of disease. Jesus gives us the authority to remove those things that are keeping people we love from entering into a relationship with him. Here, Jesus is saying to his disciples that when he gives them authority over unclean spirits, he is giving us his authority, too. Each one of us has been given the authority to be agents of redemption, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is he who empowers us to cast aside and heal those obstacles that impedes the people we encounter from having a relationship with God himself.

Who Should Go? Me?

So we have been given the authority of Jesus himself to draw people to God. Despite this promise, however, most of us don't feel competent to actually pull this off. I often tell myself that I'm not gifted enough or that God must have meant this work for someone else. But our text gives us a clue that this simply isn't the case. Verses 2 through 4 go through the seemingly insignificant task of listing the disciples who were sent:

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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matt 10:2-4)

The characteristics of these disciples really aren't any different from ours. Let's look at some of the character traits of five of the disciples.

First, Simon Peter, the disciple who was capable of both greatness and disaster at seemingly the exact same moment. Peter is the one who seems to constantly have his foot in his mouth. At one moment he is proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, at the next, Jesus is telling him, "get behind me, Satan." With Peter's passion and misfortune we can all relate to him on one end of the spectrum or the other.

The second disciple is Thomas, "doubting" Thomas. The only thing we know about this man from the gospels is that he refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Next is Matthew, the tax collector. His occupation officially made him a traitor. He was collecting taxes for the Romans, while almost assuredly taking a little off the top for himself — not the kind of profession to seek if you want to have a good reputation.

Then, Simon the Zealot. To be a zealot meant that your cause justified any means. It didn't matter to a zealot who or what got in the way of preserving Israel's integrity; violence was always an appropriate option.

Finally, there is "Judas who betrayed him." Not much else needs to be said about him.

So there was Peter, whose foot was perpetually stuck in his mouth, doubting Thomas, Matthew the traitor, Simon the vigilante, and Judas the betrayer. It is safe to say that this group did not represent the best and brightest that Israel had to offer. In fact, when we look at them in this light they seem peculiarly incompetent.

As I look around this room, I can safely say that we, too, have that look of peculiar incompetence. The power in this list is that these twelve men who changed the world weren't competent but, rather like us, incompetent to achieve the task set before them. The wonderful gift of incompetence that these apostles and all believers have received is a necessary one that makes us dependent on someone other than ourselves: it makes us dependent on Christ who has given us the authority to accomplish his task.

What Should I Say?

So we have established that Jesus has given us the authority and capabilities to be agents of grace, compassion and redemption in the lives of those whom we encounter. But questions about this evangelism process still remain. To whom should we go? And what should we say? Matthew helps us there, too. Matthew 10:5-8:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (Matt 10:5-8)

To Whom Should I Go?

When I first read Jesus' instruction to his disciples, I was a little troubled. Why would Jesus insist that the disciples only go to "the lost house of Israel" and forbid them from going to gentiles and Samaritans? This question particularly puzzled me when I considered Matthew's strong support of inclusion of Gentiles in his genealogy in the very beginning of his gospel; his references to Gentile wise men being the first to worship the newborn Jesus; and his conclusion with the great commission, where Jesus exhorts his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations." Matthew clearly doesn't see Christianity and evangelism as strictly a Jewish encounter, so why the admonition to go only to the "lost sheep of Israel"?

The answer to this difficult question has to do with

God's faithfulness. God's promise to save the world started with his promise to Israel. In Leviticus, God said, "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." God's promise to save the world from Abraham onward has been looking forward to his interaction with all people, you and I included, but it started through the small, insignificant nation of Israel. Jesus' ministry and his sending out of his disciples shouldn't be understood as a narrow-minded attempt to let Israel alone in on this secret; rather, it should be understood as God's last-ditch effort to call Israel back to faithfulness. They are his people and he is their God. Yet, sadly, Israel seems to have forgotten this. At any rate, in a matter of years the gospel would have graciously reached the far corners of the earth, where we all become wonderful recipients of God's grace and mercy.

Even Jesus' identification of Israel as "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" clues us into God's compassion. Although Israel was privileged to God's plan of salvation from the very beginning, they are now like pathetic lost sheep that need and receive Jesus' immediate compassion.

The example Jesus gives us here is powerful. Do we have compassion on the lost? Do we even notice the lost, or have we become so caught up in dot-coms and IPOs, or maybe PBCC and our own families, that we miss the fact that we live in a sea of friends, colleagues and relatives who don't know of the grace of God? As Jesus went around preaching he saw the crowds because they were harassed, helpless, and like sheep without a shepherd. After some 2000 years of changes, advances and setbacks, Jesus' words still describe us and this valley we live in. We are all harassed, helpless, and in desperate need for a good shepherd.

One last thought about Jesus sending his disciples to Israel. Who is this band of outcasts better qualified to take the good news to than their own people? Israel is their logical starting place for ministry. Why send them straightaway to the far-off city of Rome, where they don't know the culture or the language? They will be sent to Rome soon enough. For now, Jesus starts them where they already know the culture and the people. He sends his disciples and us to the place where we already are — first! There is no need to run off and chase Roman sheep when there are plenty of lost sheep right here.

I hope we see the obvious application here. We need not necessarily make elaborate plans and go to far-off places to find people to care for and share God's goodness. I'm not at all opposed to elaborate plans and far-off places — actually I really like them — but the best place to start is right where we are. Surrounding each of us are numbers of people who need a shepherd. Our challenge is to introduce them to the Good Shepherd.

The Kingdom of God Is Here!

So Jesus has given his disciples, and us by extension, the authority, the capability and an audience to share the gospel with. That leaves one very important question: What in the world am I going to say and/or do to pull this off? Jesus' answer to this question is simple. He tells his disciples to go out and preach that "the kingdom of God is near." That's it. "The kingdom of God is near." Many of you are thinking, "I don't know what that means. How am I going to explain that to my friends, colleagues and relatives?" Thankfully, Jesus expands on this a little by saying, "Heal

the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons! For you have received freely, give freely."

Jesus adds to his encouragement to preach the kingdom of God these four formidable commands. I have never healed a sick person, raised someone from the dead, cleansed a leper or cast out a demon. But I think the essence of what Jesus commanded his disciples to do literally, and what we are to do with those that we encounter, is a little more involved than merely performing those miraculous deeds. If we take a close look at Jesus' actions in the previous chapters, we see that chapter 8 starts with Jesus cleansing a leper, and then he proceeds to heal the sick and cast out demons before he raises Jarius' daughter from the dead, in chapter 9.

What Jesus is really instructing us to do when he says to preach that "the kingdom of God is near" is to simply tell people about the King. And who is that? We all know the answer: Jesus is the King. And he is a good King!

Our challenge of telling people who the king is reminds me of a scene from the first book of C.S. Lewis' "Narnia" series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Susan, Peter, Edmund and Lucy have a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan. Lewis wonderfully describes our good King in this way:

"Who is Aslan?" asked Susan.

"Aslan?" said Mr. Beaver. "Why, don't you know? He's the King. He's the Lord of the whole wood, but not often here, you understand. Never in my lifetime or my father's time. But the word has reached us that he has come back. He is in Narnia at this moment..."

"But shall we see him?" asked Susan.

"Why, daughter of Eve, that's what I brought you here for. I'm to lead you where you shall meet him," said Mr. Beaver.

"Is — is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion — the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he — quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most of us or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."¹

Lewis well illustrates well for us what our task is: we are to be Mr. and Mrs. Beaver to the world and introduce those we come in contact with to our good King. How do we know that he is good? Just look at what he's done. He's performed many "good" miracles and given his disciples authority to perform these same types of miracles. Jesus' encounters with the world he lived in and the miracles that he performed were certainly life-changing. I wouldn't

dare underestimate the thankfulness and joy that the lepers, the sick and possessed felt upon being healed by Jesus. But remember the significance of these miracles that we spoke of earlier. Jesus healed these people physically, but by removing these ailments from them he also included them again as part of the worshipping people of God. The real power and healing that takes place when Jesus heals these people is that they are restored into a relationship with God himself. To borrow the words of the father of the prodigal son, these people “were once lost and now are found.”

What then is our message as we go amongst the lost sheep of Silicon Valley? We are to tell them who the King is! Notice Jesus’ final words in his command to his disciples: “Freely you have received, freely give.” Evangelism is the process of introducing people to our good King and freely sharing with them, both overtly and subversively, how the King has been good to us. Our challenge and commission is to simply introduce people to a King and his kingdom, which is not just near, but here. It is a kingdom that doesn’t offer us stock options or 80-hour work weeks. Instead, it offers us grace, mercy, forgiveness and healing. It offers us a relationship with the Creator and Redeemer, who isn’t always safe, but is certainly good.

Living the call to evangelism and living the Christian life is best accomplished by thinking of yourself as a mirror. Mirrors don’t produce or provide light, they merely reflect it in a new direction. Our calling as we “freely receive and freely give” is to reflect the light of our good King to those that we live life with.

What Will the Result Be?

Jesus gives us some more clues in the last part of our text that I believe will help us in considering how we might share Christ with those we love and care for. Verses 9-20:

“Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 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, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Matt 10:9-20)

Jesus gives three last instructions to his disciples as they go out into the world to proclaim their King.

First, he instructs them to take no money and little clothes. I think the point here has to do with dependence. Who are you dependent on, your own ability to provide for yourself or on God’s promise to provide for you? As we proclaim the King, our hope, faith and trust need to be in our King alone.

Second, Jesus tells his disciples that some will respond to the Kingdom and some will reject it. That’s all right. The job of saving people is God’s, not ours. We are only responsible to proclaim him and reflect the graciousness he has shown us.

Finally, in verses 17-20 and beyond, Jesus reminds us again that the cross and suffering are at the heart of Christianity. Suffering can be at the heart of following Jesus, but as we suffer for our faith and King, we can rest assured that the Holy Spirit goes with us.

Conclusion

Jesus’ words to us in Matthew are really rather plain and simple. I hope that by looking at this story together, some of the anxiety we feel about evangelism will diminish and grow instead into excitement and thanksgiving over how deeply and graciously Jesus has loved us, a love that took him to the cross. In Matthew, Jesus reassures us that:

We have been given the authority of Jesus to remove the obstacles that keep us from God. In all our incompetency we are competent enough for God to use us. We have been called to proclaim and reflect the goodness, graciousness and mercy of our King.

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver, “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”²

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet walk with you on the road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart open your hearts to love.

May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Macmillan Publishing Co., 1950) 75-76.

2. Ibid.