

October 31

Luke 9

Mark 6

Matthew 9, 10 & 14

If you are a savvy Bible reader, you read the gospel through two simultaneous lenses. The first one is the interactions that Jesus is having with people. Who Jesus is, what he is doing and saying etc. At the same time, you should look at it through the lens of Jesus making disciples and ask "Am I doing that?".

Disciple making was always on Jesus mind. Because he knew that his ministry would be three years and then he would be gone. What would he leave behind? 12 disciples. 12 guys who would carry on the mission and the movement. Jesus biggest agenda was to invest in and train these disciples. This was at the top of Jesus priority list and it is nowhere more obvious than in todays reading.

We should never forget the disciple making agenda, because if we do, the secret for spreading the Good News of Christ will be in grave danger of being lost. Masses will dissipate, events will end, but disciples will carry the DNA of the mission.

For an extended period of time now, they have been with Him, -- watching, learning, and, from time to time, with Jesus close at hand, engaging in ministry. Now He sends them out on their own. Later he will tell them to take purse, bag and sword, but here, on this training mission, He sends them out with none of those things, to teach them, to cast themselves entirely upon God - to trust Him completely for everything. If this venture succeeds, they must know that it was entirely due to the working of God alone. He urges them to concentrate their efforts by focusing on teaching a few receptive people in depth, rather than by preaching to many others. This is still an important principle to follow today. It worked for Jesus - He focused His ministry on a few - and it will work for us as well.

There are a number of really important observations to make in Matthew 10. The first is to notice that Christ gave His authority to the 12. He gave them the authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. The divine power of Christ can be delegated. That is a tremendously important thing for us to understand because the astonishing promise of our Savior is that He has given that authority to His disciples to go and do even greater things in His name than He did during His earthly ministry. He delegates that power to us as well!

Next notice that the mission upon which Jesus sent the disciples was to go to all the towns and cities of Israel to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. During the life and ministry of Jesus, the scope of the mission was restricted to

Israel, but the emphasis is on mission. Jesus called the disciples and He told them to "go."

That Jesus should recognize an obligation to care for the religious people of Israel who were searching for God was not surprising, but that Jesus told them to go out and preach to the people of Israel who had not yet expressed any spiritual interest, might have been much more difficult for them to understand. We know that His last command to us was the great commission and all of that, but we do not really sense what the disciples must have begun to learn when He sent them out to preach. A shepherd's task is not merely to care for the sheep that are already in the fold but to constantly be pushing, extending and looking for more disciples to populate the kingdom of heaven.

Next, we need to look at what He told them to do. They had two basic responsibilities: to preach the gospel and to heal the sick. The latter injunction is expanded somewhat: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and drive out demons" but preaching and healing were the focus of their activities. Preach and heal -- deliver God's Word and do God's work.

The next important observation is that they were to expect opposition. Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master." Jesus was mocked, beaten and killed. We could be as well. Some of the things about which Jesus spoke here did not come to pass until after the resurrection when the first generation of Christians moved out to change their world and expand the kingdom in the dangerous atmosphere of the Roman Empire. It was then that they were flogged in the synagogues and hauled before governors and kings. It was then that some were called upon to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom and then that the Christians put into practice the advice of responding to persecution by fleeing to other places and to rejection by shaking the dust off their feet and moving on to find more responsive people.

Sometimes this opposition comes from family. This can be the hardest of all, but Jesus calls us to love him even more than family. Stay true no matter what.

The ominous warning of Jesus about coming not to bring peace to the earth but a sword must have sounded strange to His disciples and probably sounds even more strange to our ears. After all, wasn't He the prince of peace? Didn't the angel say peace on earth, good will toward men? Yes, but what Jesus is saying here is that when you acknowledge Him and accept the demands of discipleship and commands of the kingdom you are by those acts placing yourself in diametric opposition to the world. If you stand too close to Christ, then people who hate Him will hate you. This is why we need to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. We should expect to be dragged before officials to stand for Christ. And when we do, he will give us the power to stand for him. We need to hear the warning of Jesus here in Matthew 10. "Whoever acknowledges me

before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."

So the disciples obey. They grow. They see people healed and come to faith. Training mission complete. After a few years, these well trained disciples will turn the world upside down, but for now, Jesus takes them to a solitary place for a debrief... but we will find out tomorrow that there is no rest for these weary ministers.

See you tomorrow as we check out the ministry to the multitudes - oh, and as you read, watch what Jesus is doing to train the disciples.