

The Messengers & the Message

Please open your Bible to the book of Matthew 10, or turn to page ____ in the Bible under the chair in front of you. We're approaching one of the hot spots in the biblical storyline; one of the places in which transition is taking place. There is a change happening at this point, as God's plan for history unfolds.

Alex mentioned this last week, but I want to remind us again about the flow of Matthew's book: what's his plan as he writes it for us? First, introduce Jesus with kingly foreshadowing, showing how He is the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Scriptures. Next, hear Jesus teach and proclaim the way of the kingdom – one in which it is the meek and the peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who will flourish, and that the way of the kingdom demands a righteousness greater than the religious leaders of the day – one of wholeness and integrity. This is important because this is the message that King Jesus has come to teach.

Next, Matthew shows us Jesus living this message out as He goes to the outcasts and to those on the margins to heal and restore. And now, Matthew tells us about how Jesus is beginning to turn outward. Now, Jesus says, you must pray for laborers to go and carry this message of the kingdom to the harvest. Ask God to do it. And part of the answer to that prayer is found in the very next verses that we see this morning as Jesus sends out His disciples to the neighboring Jewish towns and villages. Part of the answer to the prayer is the disciples themselves.

So do you see the flow to the book? Matthew wants us to see that Jesus came as the King with all authority, He came bringing the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven, and now He is extending that authority and the message of the Kingdom. And at first, it goes only to Israel, but eventually, at the end of the book, we will see that it goes out to Gentiles and to the very ends of the earth.

So in these verses in chapter 10, Matthew wants to show us how this message of the kingdom is meant to expand in these early days. And as we read and look into it this morning, we'll see how God's plan for the message of salvation uses ordinary people, and how He calls and equips us to be a part of His mission in the world.

We live in a world like the one Jesus spoke about – people who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. They're messy people, with a lot of problems and struggles. You know people like that. I know people like that. They're in the break room where you work. They're at the park in town. They're in the pickup line at school. You know what I mean? Messy people. They're in your family.

I'm not just talking about people who have messy lives that are complicated and broken – that's every one of us. But there are people in our lives like the ones Jesus describes at the end of chapter 9, people who need freedom from addiction, people who need hope in their discouragement, people who need forgiveness for their sins, people who need a shepherd. We see them everywhere we look.

And what we'll see here is that Jesus is about to send His disciples into that mess, and friends, He's sending us too.

Read **Matthew 10:1-15**

"I guess I'll do it." That's what I thought to myself just a few years ago. I was reminded about that yesterday as I watched my son's soccer game in the 90 degree heat. This year, I am not a coach. And that's a change from the last couple years.

A few years ago, my sons wanted to play soccer, so we signed them up for a community league. On the registration, it asked if you wanted to be a coach. Or, you could pay an additional \$20 and not be a coach. Well...I paid the fee so that I wouldn't have to coach. I don't know soccer. I didn't play as a kid, not really even for fun on the playground. I played basketball.

So I didn't feel qualified to do it. I barely know the rules. Well, the first day of practice comes and I bring my son, who was around six at the time, to the field. And we're looking around. And I'm seeing all these other soccer moms there. But there's no coach. And there's no one else who seems to want to step up and fill in. So I thought to myself, "I guess I'll do it."

And I struggled through it. It wasn't the most coherent thing I've ever done. And it was somewhat messy and tricky to figure out, especially that first day. But we did it.

I wonder if you've ever been put in a position where you felt unqualified to do something. Maybe you felt like you were inadequate or didn't have sufficient training or knowledge to fulfill what you were asked to do.

As I talk with other Christians, this kind of feeling comes up a lot. Am I really able to do what God is asking me to do? Can I really serve in this way or lead in that way? Surely there's someone else who can do it, and I can just keep doing what I'm doing.

Sometimes, there are particular areas in which we feel this lack of ability. Do you ever feel unqualified to share the gospel? Like that should be someone else's job? Perhaps, you're afraid you'll mess it up or get pushback? The other person may ask a question that you won't be able to answer? Or maybe you're wondering how to make a difference in a world that feels so messy and dark? There's so much brokenness and despair all around us; what can I possibly do? Can I really help?

Or maybe it's something that you feel like you're just unable to do well. Can I teach kids? Would I be able to disciple someone else? I need a mentor; how can I mentor another person? I don't have any advice to give other than what not to do.

Our passage this morning has a word for us if we've felt that way in the Christian life. Matthew 10 shows us Jesus doesn't just call the "super spiritual"; He calls regular folks like us, equips us, and says, "Go. Time to step up." And thankfully, Jesus doesn't just tell us to go, He calls us to follow Him. We are to learn from Him and do what He has both taught us and shown us with His example. And that's the main point that I believe Matthew wants us to see in these verses.

Jesus calls His disciples to imitate Him on His mission.

In this section, Jesus calls for these twelve disciples to go and do what He has been doing. And He equips them with His authority to do it. And that's the pattern we'll learn from today in our lives as well.

We'll look at our text under two headings. First, we'll look the messengers. And then secondly, we'll examine the message. And we'll see that both the people Jesus calls and the message they are to proclaim point us to imitate Jesus and His mission in the world.

The Messengers

So first, the messengers. Who is it that Jesus will send out at this critical point in redemptive history? Think back with me. Ever since God made a covenant with Abraham, way back in Genesis 12, there has been this growing anticipation that one of his offspring will establish a kingdom through which God will bless the world. And all throughout the Old Testament, there have been leaders like Moses and judges like Gideon, and kings like David and Solomon, and prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel – all of whom have pointed forward and anticipated the day when God Himself will come and establish a kingdom through the Messiah, the anointed King. Well, now the time has come! It's here!

Who will Jesus send out with this message for His people? The answer? These twelve guys. Twelve disciples who have been called by Jesus to become His followers. Twelve ordinary men. The only remarkable thing about them is just how unremarkable they are.

Verses two through four give us their names...

Matthew 10:2-4

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

If you study the New Testament, there are a couple who gain prominence as leaders – Peter and John. Another one is famous for his treachery, Judas Iscariot. He's a tragic reminder that we can be near to Jesus but still miss Him. But the rest are mentioned very little, some of them only in a list like this in the gospels.

There are a few things that are worth noting. Notice that Peter is listed first. The gospel writers present Peter as the leader of the group. He's usually the first to speak, even if it's to put his foot in his mouth. He'll deny Jesus three times, but then later on, the book of Acts will describe how Peter is the one who boldly stands up to preach on the day of Pentecost. He also writes a few letters that we have preserved for us in the New Testament.

Then there's James and John, the sons of Zebedee. We know them from their argument about who is the greatest in God's kingdom. They're also known as the 'sons of thunder.' But we don't know much about Peter's brother Andrew or Philip. Bartholomew may have also been known as Nathanael, but we're not totally sure.

We might recognize Thomas because of his nickname. A little Bible trivia? What's Thomas's nickname? No, not doubting Thomas. It's Thomas the twin (John 11:16). But again, we don't know who his twin is. And we don't know much about James the son of Alphaeus or Thaddaeus.

And then there's Simon the Zealot, included in this list alongside Matthew the tax collector. To be a Zealot meant that you belonged to the group who wanted to overthrow Rome. They were seen as terrorists, rebels, insurrectionists. But Matthew would have been seen as a traitor, one who worked for the enemy, someone who had betrayed his brothers for the sake of a dollar. And now they're following Jesus together.

So what does this list tell us? I think we see a few principles here that can be helpful. First, ***Jesus changes people.***

As we just mentioned, when Jesus selects these twelve men, He brings together a political zealot and a former tax collector. He has called these disciples to leave behind their old ways, die to self, and to follow Him. Jesus has the authority to command the very direction and trajectory of our lives. In the Kingdom of God, Jesus changes people who the world would tell you will never be able to get along. And He puts them into the same family.

I think of our church family when I read this. We've got teachers, factory workers, single moms, retirees, former skeptics, and people who've overcome crazy pasts. We have chemists and chemical engineers – two entirely different groups of people, I'm told. This list of disciples shows us Jesus takes all kinds of people: loud people, quiet people, broken people, skeptical people, and He makes us one in His mission. Jesus changes people.

But then the name Judas here is a gut check. You can sit in church, sing the songs, and still not know Jesus. The most dangerous place to be is close to the gospel but not changed by it. Remember, Jesus isn't impressed by external shows of religious behavior.

You can be near Jesus, come to church, and do good things. But that's not what Jesus is after. Jesus wants your heart. He wants to change you from the inside out.

A few weeks ago, one of the former pastors, Jeremy Brubaker traveled up from Florida to sing a song for Maureen Blackburn's funeral called "Inside Out".

*In my heart and my soul // Lord I give You control
Consume me from the inside out
Lord, let justice and praise // Become my embrace
To love You from the inside out*

This is a song that Judas couldn't truly sing. But this is how Jesus changes people – from the inside out.

Second, **Jesus uses ordinary people.**

We've mentioned this already, but the remarkable thing about these guys is that they're so unremarkable. And this is how God works – He uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary.

Many people get hung up on thinking, I'm not good enough. I don't have the right skills or abilities to be used by God. And so you stay on the bench or the sideline. But you know, there are no super-stars in the kingdom of God. Jesus alone is the hero. That's what we say we believe, right? And Jesus loves to use ordinary people like these twelve disciples to turn the world upside-down.

So can I just press on you for a bit here? Maybe there's been a thought in the back of your head somewhere. Maybe the Lord has been pressing on you in some way to get in the game. If that's true, then can I just alert you to some of the needs that we have in our ministry right now? Maybe the Lord will press on you to step in.

Right now at Cornerstone, we need someone or a few people who will help serve our 4th and 5th graders during the equip hour between services. We love having them in our service, but we want to help them with their own time and ministry.

We also need help with our young adult ministry – the Gathering. A couple, a few couples, whomever – provide some leadership and service to that age group.

Along with that, we are always looking for more grow group leaders. We can use more teachers and help in the kids ministry and nursery. We even need more help with our students, our teenagers. We need people who want to invest in the next generation.

Or maybe God has given you different skills that would be useful for His kingdom. There are several maintenance needs around the church. We could use more help from folks to keep up with our building and the vehicles we have.

Our boards are serving well – the deacons and trustees are working hard to serve our church family. But there are still needs we have to maintain and improve the ministry tool that is our building. The boards help lead our church in meeting these needs.

We've had many people use their gifts for hospitality – organizing funeral meals and hosting groups, helping with things like church dinners and volunteer appreciation. We could use more people who want to use their spiritual gifts in that way.

We could use some additional folks who want to help count the offering on Sundays after church. Maybe someone who is good with numbers who wants to stay behind the curtains, so to speak.

Or... maybe God has been working in your heart to consider full-time ministry of some sort. Maybe He's challenging you to become a missionary? Or become a pastor or church planter? Even if that feels impossible, like you're way underqualified, well... Jesus loves to use ordinary people to do the extraordinary.

This is how God builds His church, by ordinary people stepping up and stepping in. I've just given you a number of ways that you might be able to serve here at Cornerstone. Is God calling you to step up and step in?

By the way, why does God use ordinary people? So that His grace would be made known. God wants the glory. He has chosen the weak things to shame the strong. It's not about any one person – Jesus is the hero. It's not about our church – it's about Him.

You know, our pastors have been wrestling with how to lead our ministry well in this context, in this building with the number of people God continues to bring. We've been asking, what is God doing in our ministry? What should we be doing to lead us well? How do we press on in the mission God has given us in this location?

And just speaking honestly, it can get overwhelming. I feel like we're ordinary people here. Your pastors are just ordinary people, messy people. But our calling is follow where the Lord is leading. We're to find out where He is leading us and go there. And He is leading us as ordinary people. My job is to be faithful, to follow Him. And that's your job too.

So Jesus changes people and Jesus uses ordinary people.

Third, ***Jesus is doing something new.***

Matthew wants us to notice the number of disciples Jesus calls here – twelve. This is an intentional thing. There were a large number of people following Jesus at this point, but when it's time to get the word out, Jesus selects twelve men in particular to lead this mission.

So look at verse 1...

Matthew 10:1

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

Why twelve? Matthew doesn't explain it explicitly here, but the connection would have been very clear to the original readers. So let's do a little work to understand our Bibles better and the one over-arching story it's telling.

You may remember, that in the history of the Hebrew people, there were twelve tribes. And they had descended from the twelve sons of this guy who had been named Jacob, but was re-named Israel. So now, when Jesus appoints twelve disciples to go and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has arrived – he's picking up this historical fact and calling attention to what He's doing as the re-establishment of His people.

Later, Jesus will declare that these twelve disciples will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in the kingdom (Matthew 19:28).

So in calling these guys, Jesus is very clearly saying, “I’m starting something new again. I’m re-establishing my people who will receive this kingdom, not because of their ethnic heritage or their background, but by their connection to me as the King.”

So you see how this is a turning point in the history of God’s plan for the world? Jesus has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament (Matthew 1-4). He is teaching with authority the way of God’s Kingdom (Matthew 5-7). He has proven that He has authority over sickness and disease and nature, over the spiritual world and even the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 8-9). And now, He is commissioning His twelve disciples to go with His authority and do the things that He Himself has been doing – casting out unclean spirits and healing diseases and afflictions.

And we will see this mission continue as God’s plan unfolds over the following chapters to include the Gentiles, and it will go through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus and beyond to the book of Acts as Jesus then sends His Spirit to establish the church that continues today, even right here this morning at Cornerstone in Lafayette, Indiana.

So in Matthew 10, unlike any time prior to that in history, the Kingdom of Heaven – God’s rule over His People in His place – it’s now close by. It’s at hand. It’s right on top of you. That’s the message. Jesus is doing something new.

And Jesus has called these twelve disciples to carry this message. So what is that about? How does He want them to do this? Let’s look next at...

The Message

Verse one told us that Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits and to heal disease and affliction, and then Matthew gives us their names.

We pick up in verses 5-7...

Matthew 10:5-8a

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, **6** but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. **7** And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ **8** Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.

Verse five tells us that Jesus ‘sent out’ these twelve. They’re called apostles in verse two. The word “apostle” means “sent ones.” It can be confusing. Sometimes, the twelve are called the twelve disciples because they followed Jesus. Other times, they’re called ‘apostles’ because they were sent by Jesus to proclaim a message. But the word itself, apostle, just means ‘sent one.’

Verse seven, then, gives us the message they are to proclaim, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This is what Jesus Himself has been proclaiming since chapter four. And they are to exercise authority just as Jesus did.

The main purpose of this mission is to proclaim the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And then, to support the truthfulness of that message, the disciples were given authority to perform miracles, even healing and resurrection. You like how Matthew throws that in there? Heal the sick, RAISE THE DEAD, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. It feels like a rather understated way to say that, at least to me. You’re going to have power to bring back those who have died!

But again, the connection that Matthew wants us to see is that we’ve seen Jesus do all of these things, including raising a young girl from the dead. And now, He’s calling His disciples to go proclaim the same message He’s been preaching and do the same miracles He’s been doing. They are to imitate Him on His mission.

Now, we need to make an important clarification about this passage and others like it. This authority to do miracles that Jesus gives to these twelve disciples has not been promised to all those who follow Jesus. This was a particular authority given to these particular disciples at this particular point in time for a particular purpose. As we’ve said, this was a key time in the history of God’s plan for salvation. The miracles these disciples were given the authority to perform was to validate the message that they were sent to proclaim among the Jewish people at this time in history.

You and I aren’t promised the authority to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, or raise the dead. That doesn’t mean that God can’t or doesn’t do those things in the world today. But it does mean that we shouldn’t take every passage that where we read about something that happened and apply it directly to our lives as though these instructions were given personally to us.

That said, even though this passage isn't directed to us, it still has lots of truth that is for us to apply to our lives. There are lessons here that the Spirit intends to show us.

So these twelve apostles are being sent by Jesus. And they have a particular target – the lost sheep of Israel. They are not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Why? Why only them at this point?

The reason is that God's plan has always had an order to it. Even way back when God first established His covenant promise with Abraham, He promised that through Abraham's offspring, all the world would be blessed. Paul will say the same thing in Romans 1, the gospel is the power of God to all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. God's plan begins with His people Israel and then extends to the nations.

Think of it like triage: If your family's in trouble, you help them first. Israel had the Covenant, and the Scriptures, and the prophets, but so many were spiritually lost, wandering without a shepherd. Jesus prioritizes them, but His heart is for all. He came to seek and save the lost.

So one of the truths that we can apply to ourselves today is to ask ourselves, "Where are the lost sheep in my world?" Who are the people God has placed in my life and my sphere of influence that He is calling me to reach?

You don't need to go to Southeast Asia or South America or Haiti to find a mission field. It's right outside your door. Who is in your circle that needs the gospel? Your kid's teacher? Your barista? The person who cuts your hair? Start there.

A few years ago, we encouraged each other to answer the question, "Who's your one?" Who is the one person that you are praying for and seeking to lead to Jesus? I think that's a good question for us to be considering all the time. Who's your one? We have a message to proclaim.

The second half of verse 8 through verse 15 tells us how Jesus told his disciples to go proclaim this message. They are to do so without charging, without accumulating, but with discernment.

Without charging

Look at verse 8...

Matthew 10:8

You received without paying; give without pay.

Jesus tells the apostles that they have received the message of the kingdom of heaven without paying for it, so you should give it away without charging. The gospel is free, so we should share it freely. Jesus didn't want people to question the motives of His disciples as they went out.

Like today, people then are naturally skeptical. Is the kingdom really here? Or are you just trying to get something from me? Where's the catch?

So today, the lesson for us is that we should treat people as whole people and not as a means to an end. We don't want to do ministry with strings attached or with ulterior motives. We don't want to treat people like projects.

Even as we ask, who is your one? We must remember that that person is a *person* – an eternal, embodied soul. We want to love them and try to reach them so that they might know the freedom and life and joy that is found in Christ alone.

We're not after making the church bigger or accumulating more stuff or trying to build our own kingdom. We want to see people know God. We want to help people, and love them, and lead them to the Great Shepherd of our souls. Next, the disciples are to go...

Without accumulating

Matthew 10:9-10

Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, **10** no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.

So Jesus wants His disciples to pack light. They're not to try to store up possessions on this trip. The point is that Jesus is sending out His disciples now. They're ready to go with His authority. They've watched Jesus, they've learned from Him, and now they need to get after it. There's no need for fundraising or stopping to get more stuff. You don't need to pack extra things – just go. And you can depend on the Lord to provide.

Again, this is a particular message for this time. It's not saying that if you take a missions trip to Detroit, that you shouldn't have a plan. Right Josh? Right?

And why does Jesus say that? So that they might trust God. The laborer deserves his food – God will provide through the ones who are being served.

This is a challenge to us, isn't it? In our consumer-driven world, where we hoard stuff and find security in our plans, Jesus calls us to simplicity and trust. His mission isn't about accumulation. It's about Him. Lastly, He calls them to go...

With discernment

Look at verses...

Matthew 10:11-13

And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. **12** As you enter the house, greet it. **13** And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

Not everyone is going to receive this message with joy. So the disciples are to find out who is worthy in it – that is, who is open to the message. Missions workers will sometime call them, 'a person of peace.' When you go to a new, unreached area, you're looking for a person of peace who is willing to hear you out. And if they are not, Jesus says, move on. God will have the last word.

Matthew 10:14-15

And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. **15** Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

This practice of shaking the dust off your feet is something that I'm told still happens in the Middle East today. The idea is that you are leaving this place behind and moving on. I want no part in your uncleanness. And that's a scary thing, because to reject the message of the kingdom means that you remain in rebellion against the King.

The book of Genesis famously records the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were Gentile cities, for their grievous sexual immorality. And Jesus says, to reject Him when you should have known better will incur a greater judgment than even they received.

So the disciples are to go about the region declaring the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and when they have an opening, they are to take advantage of it. God will provide through the generosity of those who are being served. And if they are rejected, then they should move on and leave room for the wrath of God.

I think the application for us is a sobering one. Even today, we should proclaim the gospel message of salvation with an urgency that fits the message. We don't share the good news of Jesus in order to charge people or accumulate more for ourselves, but we do need to be discerning. Jesus isn't say, if someone ever says "no" to Jesus that we should simply move on. But He is calling us to see where the Spirit is at work and join Him there.

You know, that Saturday morning a few years ago when I thought, "Ok, I guess I'll do it. I'll be the coach." I did it sort of half-heartedly, at least at first. I felt unqualified. But for that age group, I was ok. I actually went to Pastor Josh and said, "Help me. Tell me what to do." And he, if you didn't know, is a coach at heart. He's great at it. And he said, "Here's what you do...copy my plans. You just do exactly what I do."

That made all the difference. Here in Matthew 10, Jesus isn't just calling out random people to go and proclaim preach to people. He calls those who are following Him, those who are seeking be like Him. Those are the disciples He sends to imitate Him on His mission.

And Jesus said to them what Pastor Josh said to me, "Copy me. Do exactly what you've seen me doing. Proclaim the message of the kingdom, exercise authority to show the truth of the message. Don't do it for stuff and keep your wits about you."

Brothers and sisters, this passage teaches us how we are to imitate Jesus on His mission in the world. Where are you in that process? Are you following Him yourself? Are you helping others follow Him? Are you engaged in His mission?

We have been reminded that God uses ordinary people, He changes them, and He invites us to participate in this new work that He continues to do all around us. God is at work, let's join Him on His mission. Let's pray...