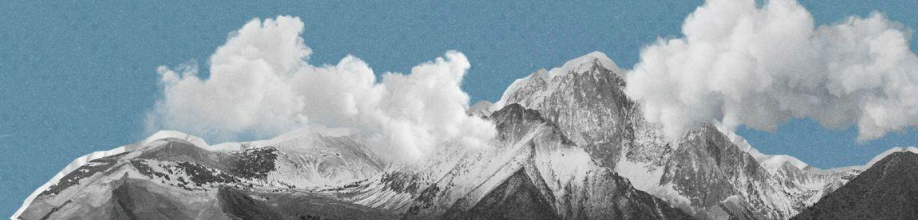


THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW



Matthew 10:1-15 **God's Workers**

Good morning. We are continuing our walk through Matthew's Gospel today. We are picking up in Matthew 10.

If you're new here, in our teaching portion of the service every week we walk straight through books of the Bible. We believe the Bible to be God's word to us, and so most of our Sundays are spent picking up where we left off last week and continuing to work our way through the scriptures one section after another.

In the passage Cody walked us through last week in Matthew 9, Jesus was going through the cities and villages and teaching in synagogues, healing diseases and afflictions. And at one point Jesus pauses and sees the vast multitudes of people that were coming to Him for His teaching and healing and to get their needs met, and

Matthew 9:[36] When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus was moved with compassion. He saw the people as sheep who were harassed and helpless and needed a shepherd. And He saw them like a

vast, ripe harvest field, with so few workers to bring in the harvest. So he teaches them to pray that God would send more workers.

Jesus, who is God Himself among us, doesn't try to speak directly to everyone, to minister directly to everyone. He has subjected Himself to human limitations in the incarnation, and He teaches the disciples that it will take many workers to meet the needs of these multitudes, so He teaches them to pray for that.

So we that's where we pick up in Matthew 10:1

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. [2] 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.[5] 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.

So Jesus told these guys to pray that God would send laborers into the harvest field. And then He immediately gathers the same people He just told to pray that God would send some workers and sends them.

So you can picture Jesus huddling with the twelve, and He says, "Guys, we gotta pray that God will send more people to help." And they go around praying that God would send them people who will help with the needs of all of these people.

They say amen and open their eyes and it's like Jesus says, "Guys, Look! God has answered these prayers! There are 12 people right here to help with the harvest! He's sending you!"

The people who pray for more help become the help.

What God wants to get done in the world, He wants to do through ALL of His people. That's the big principle for us here.

[Excursus: The Uniqueness of the Apostles]

Now I don't want to ignore the historical reality of the uniqueness of this group of 12 apostles. In some ways, they are unique in all of history, with a unique mission, a unique calling, one that isn't one that is constantly repeated.

Not everything in the Bible that is DESCRIPTIVE is PRESCRIPTIVE. I can describe to you a football game, but that doesn't mean I'm telling you that you should throw touchdowns and leap over defenders. We can describe without prescribing.

And so some things about this are a description of what Jesus did through a unique group of 12 apostles in history.

So, for example, this was a specific mission: go only to Jewish towns. That's not our calling, the mission has been expanded in our day to the ends of the earth.¹ So we aren't called to go only to Jewish towns and avoid gentile towns in our mission.

Also, we aren't Apostles. Matthew 10:2 is the only place in Matthew's Gospel that he uses the word apostle. It's a word that means "sent one", and unlike the word "Disciple" which applies to all followers of Jesus, apostles had to

¹ See Acts 1:8.

meet some criteria that we can't meet today. And though we have their writings in the New Testament, we don't have any more apostles.

These apostles had a unique authority in all of history. They were personally, face-to-face, taught by Jesus and commissioned by Jesus to take His teaching to the world.

You had to see Jesus in person to be an apostle. Paul describes "seeing the Lord" as a condition for his apostleship:

1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

OK, but Paul saw the Lord in a vision. (He may also have seen him in his day-to-day life when Paul was a Pharisee and Jesus was ministering.) But even if Paul only saw Jesus in a vision, He speaks like he was the last to receive the face-to-face commissioning from Jesus:

1 Corinthians 15:5-9. he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.[9] For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (ESV)

Paul was one that Jesus appeared to in this way "last of all."

Some would say there are apostles today, and usually they mean that God has uniquely gifted them to start churches, or gifted them with broad influence, or that they have a high level of respect among ministers because of their faithful ministry. Or maybe they have a high degree of authority in a church or denomination. And it's not that God doesn't gift people and use

people in some of those ways, it's just that that's not apostleship. They may be pastors or leaders, but Apostleship was unique in history.

The apostles were unique in that they took the place of the Old Testament prophets who spoke the word of God.

Remember in the Old Testament, the prophets would go around and say, "Thus saith the Lord," and everybody had to listen to what they said, because to disobey a prophet was to disobey God.

The prophets wrote the books of the Old Testament. And then on this side of the cross, the apostles wrote the New Testament and to go against the teaching of the apostles was to go against God. They had the same level of authority as an Old Testament prophet, and were uniquely miraculously gifted to prove that authority.

Nobody among us can say, "What I have to say is as much inspired as the Bible."

People with the gift of teaching today, even if they're gifted by God, can get things wrong. And we all have the obligation to test their words by the Bible.

1 Thessalonians 5 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

Sometimes we'll hear of someone who seems to be gifted at teaching saying something off the wall, and nobody tests it because, "He's God's man" or "He's so close to God, he knows better than I do," or to really take a verse out of context, "Touch not the Lord's anointed." But we don't have apostolic authority today. There is real church authority and pastoral authority, but it is a lower form of authority than apostleship.

In fact, in the writings of the first generation of Christians after the apostles,

So there is a uniqueness to their mission, a uniqueness to the miracles that were used to prove their authority. They had some very specific instructions for who they were and for this moment in history when the good news that the King had come had to be proclaimed to Israel specifically. Many in Israel would be saved, but the nation as a whole would reject their message, and then the message would go out to all the world of the Gentiles. So it's important to read the whole story and to see this for what it was in history.

But there are certainly principles for us.

And this first main one is that **What God wants to get done in the world, He wants to do through ALL of His people.** They pray for laborers, and Jesus says, "It's you!"

And we know this principle isn't just for these 12 at this time.

Because here he **sends the 12** out, but in **Luke 10** He will choose 72 to send out.

In **Acts 8**, thousands of people have become Christians. Great persecution breaks out against the church, and they all scatter except the apostles, and those who scatter go about *preaching the word* (Acts 8:4).

You get this growing sense as you read the New Testament that what God wants to do in the world, He wants to do through *all of his people*.

The way the Lord meets the vast needs of the sheep without a shepherd is that, in response to the prayers of His people, He calls all of His people to live with a sense that we have been sent by the Lord to serve.

John 20 As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

The Father sent Jesus to lay down His comforts, lay down his life, and do the hard work of bringing the kingdom to bear on our lives. And Jesus says that just as He was sent, we are sent.

So they pray for laborers.

Jesus says, "Look, a miraculous answer to your prayers, it's you guys."

They say, "Doesn't seem miraculous."

And Jesus says, "Have you seen you guys?"

It's miraculous that God would use a people like us to accomplish His work in the world.

Quickly looking at these 12...

First, you have **Simon Peter** in verse 2. He's up and down, shoots first, asks questions later, bold and arrogant. One minute he will claim that he will die for Jesus, and the next he denies Jesus to a servant girl by a fire. Jesus, prophetically and hopefully calls him Cephas, which is Aramaic for "rock," when Peter looked like he was anything but a rock. So Jesus calls him and his brother **Andrew**.

Then there are **James and John**, the sons of Zebedee, that Jesus calls the Sons of Thunder. They're edgy and fire and brimstone - in Luke 9:54 when some people rejected Jesus's message, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Jesus looks at the multitude and has compassion, these guys just want a fight.

Phillip, who seemed spiritually sensitive and asked Jesus to show them the Father (John 14:8).

Bartholomew, also called Nathaniel, first comes across as an elitist snob. Philip tells him Jesus the Messiah has come, and He has come from Nazareth, and Bartholomew mocks and says, “Can any good thing come from Nazareth?”

Thomas - doubting Thomas. He famously doubts the resurrection until he can put his hands in the wounds of Jesus’s side. But also seems to be the guy who struggles to believe anything good will happen.

When Lazarus died, Jesus told the disciples he had died and said, “Let’s go to his house.” We know Jesus was going there to resurrect Lazarus, but when Thomas hears Jesus say, “Lazarus is dead, let’s go to him,” Thomas says, “

John 11:[16] So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Woah, Thomas! Maybe something good will happen, too! Jesus has been known to raise the dead! Maybe not everything is bad, Thomas!

Matthew, the tax collector, a sell-out who fundraises for the Roman occupiers who are unjustly occupying their land. And, Jesus calls **Simon the Zealot**, the zealots were the people who wanted to over throw Rome. And Jesus calls them both to be in this first little church He’s planting.

This doesn’t work! Who does this? Who says, “I need to put together a unified team - I’ll choose the guy with the Biden tee shirt and the dude with the MAGA hat. I’m going to turn your worlds upside down and send you out on a mission together.

We don’t know a ton about **James the son of Alphaeus. Thaddeus** seems to also be named Judas, but not Judas Iscariot, and his agenda seems to be that Jesus would grab fame and power by showing Himself to the world. John 14:22.

And then, in this same group, is a false disciple, **Judas Iscariot**. One out of twelve of these followers is false, and stealing, sinning, selfish, back-stabbing, and will soon be betraying Jesus. For some reason, the Lord

wants to sanctify His people by having false ones in the mix.

And for 2000 years, God has used his church, as screwed up and disputatious as it is, to bring His message to the world. Along the way they fight, there is high drama, false ones are exposed, real ones stumble and fall, there are disputes and distrust among them, thunderous eruptions left and right. He calls deeply flawed and sinful people. He prunes them, exposes them, redeems them, sanctifies them.

He doesn't leave them the way they are - but He grows and changes them on the job. Judas is exposed. Peter grows ever more solid until he's writing 1 and 2 Peter and sticks with it as a pastor for decades until he's killed - a solid rock when all was said and done.

James is bold and courageous and goes to heaven first. His brother John outlives them all and stays faithful through every trial imaginable before he does.

Thomas, after the resurrection, puts his hand in the wounds and says, "My Lord and My God." And then, according to history, makes a dangerous trek to India where he plants 7 churches - maybe Jesus rising from the dead convinced him that something good could actually happen and he bet his whole life on it. In fact, he did that almost 30 years after the resurrection - so despite seeing immense losses and persecution, he wasn't cynical and doubting, he was still, after decades, hopeful in the power of the Gospel. Hoping Thomas.

He takes the weakest of people, and puts together maybe the worst possible mix of them and calls it the church. And uses them to minister to the world.

Why? Why use such sub-optimal people?

2 Corinthians 4:7–12 [7] But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. [8] We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of

Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. [11] For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. [12] So death is at work in us, but life in you.

So don't let your sin and weakness and doubt and pessimism convince you that the Lord doesn't call you to serve. Its through your weakness that His strength is made known, through your suffering that His power is made known, through your brokenness that his ability is made known.

What God wants to do in the world, He wants to do through all of His people. Even you.

And when God works in the world, it is often through many of his people being at work. Through people praying and then being sent.

At Grace Road we are approaching our 15 year anniversary - our first public service at the German House was 15 years ago this coming September.

And Grace Road started because a group of friends were praying, and some people said to me, "If you plant a church we will go with you." And for them, going with wasn't just sitting in a room while I did all the work - quite the opposite. These people, many of them still volunteering with us today, ran a kids ministry that immediately started booming and tiny spaces without pay, without enough volunteers, and they did it for years. For years they showed up at 6 am to clean up, set up chairs and classrooms, and stayed until 2 to tear it all down. They greeted, they prayed, they served the least among us, they endured criticism and hardship, they experienced hard times among each other. Most of them were introverts but they worked against that to make Grace Road friendly, they opened their homes to have people over again and again.

It was because those prayerful people were sent by the Lord to serve and because they faithfully responded to that call that we were able to establish a healthy church. Nobody said, "This church should have this feature," without understanding that, "I'm gonna have to be that feature." There is no "this church" apart from us.

People who pray for the Lord to send laborers can't have a consumer mindset toward church. They can't say: "I want a church with groups, and plenty of volunteers in kids, and plenty of building space and parking", shop for those things, but then not be one of the people contributing somewhere.

If everybody in church served like you serve, and gave like you gave, and committed like you commit - would it be the church you desire?

If everybody welcomed new people just like you do - would it be the loving and hospitable church you want it to be? Would the church have the kids ministry you need if everybody served like you serve?

For many of you the answer is yes. Your hand is on the plow and you understand that we can't make demands of the laborers and not be one of the laborers.

It's been encouraging to see so many serve, and also so many go when the need has arisen.

I get to go around and preach at some of the churches we've partnered in starting over the years and I stay in touch with the pastors. And it's incredible to know that this morning at New City Fellowship in Beechwood there are a number of people who once called Grace Road home that prayed and went and are serving there.

At Harvest Bible Fellowship, now called Beacon Hill, over at the Carlson there are a number of people that came here but then joined up with Brandon to establish that church.

In October I get to preach at Grace Life in Avon, where there are a number of people that attended Grace Road but departed to help them get established in Avon of all places. Can any good thing come from Avon?

Preston and Emily Smith served the Lord faithfully here for a number of years, and now he is pastoring and revitalizing Palmyra Reformed, where a number of people from here transplanted there.

It hasn't been easy for people to make those moves, not see their friends as often, have to carry heavier loads of responsibility. But, moved with the compassion of Jesus, seeing the sheep without a shepherd, they've gone.

And right now at Grace Road, we are experiencing a major attendance boom. We've grown about 300 people or 25% this year. Once school comes back in session and people get back from vacations and college break, we will be very full.

And we talk every day about how to manage it and to further the mission to plant and multiply churches. None of the ways forward for us over the next couple years are comfortable. We will need to multiply services and then congregations somehow, and people will need to uproot and not just move to another service or building, but serve there. There are only costly and difficult ways forward. I'm confident that good things are in store, but the journey will be a hard one. Pray for wisdom for our leaders.

It will require lots of praying, and lots of understanding that what God wants to do He wants to do through all of his people, including me.

Matthew 10:[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. You received without paying; give without pay. [9] 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. [11] 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.

Notice that when God's kingdom comes, all kinds of good is done. There's proclamation of truth, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," and meeting material needs, "Heal the sick, cleanse lepers." Different people do different things in the work of God in the harvest field.

And Jesus told these apostles not to let the people they were bringing the good news to pay them for the good news. Now they were paid for their labors - they were provided lodging and food and for their needs by the people who were friends of the Gospel and supported their work.

But they didn't sell the message of the Gospel to people they were bringing it to.

And I know economies have changed, but this principal remains - we know we need to pay some workers and ministers as a church, but we don't want them to sell the message. Then they will be tempted to change the message to make more sales. So they are supported by the giving of the church so they can give the gospel for free.

Make the message free is the principle here.

And trust the Lord to provide through his people.

Jesus goes on:

Matthew 10:[14] 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.

One principle here is that Jesus doesn't want his followers to force the message down peoples throats. They are supposed to offer it, and if it is rejected, they can move on.

But there's something even bigger doing on here.

The Pharisees, if they would go to a Gentile town, would shake the dust off of their feet when they returned to a Jewish city. It was a way of not contaminating the holy, God-believing Jewish territory with the spiritually polluted soil of non-believing, pagan, gentile lands.

But here Jesus tells his followers to go to these Jewish towns, tell them that the kingdom of God is here in King Jesus. And if they reject it, shake the soil from that Jewish town off your feet.

Which means this new kingdom is breaking the old paradigm.

The old paradigm said if you were Jewish and religious you were good and clean. And if you were pagan and gentile you were defiled and condemned.

But now, everything will hinge on what you do with Jesus, whether you are Jew or Gentile. Jews who receive the good news of Jesus are cleaned and welcomed, Gentiles who receive the good news of Jesus are cleansed and welcomed. Jews who reject Jesus remain under God's condemnation, just as gentiles who reject Jesus remain under God's condemnation.

You don't get in or out by your religious observation, you are in if you humbly trust in Jesus and receive Him. And if you reject Him, you are out.

And this was the message these laborers brought, and it is the message that we bring. Only on our side of the cross, we know what it would take for the one True Laborer to bring in the harvest of our souls.

We believe Jesus went to the cross, gave his life for the harvest, so we could be forgiven and brought in.

And what we do with Him makes all the difference.

On the day of judgment, the question will be, “What did we do with Jesus?”

[extrapolate]

Lord’s Supper.

[extrapolate]

Prayer of Confession:

Father, we come before You, confessing our sins and shortcomings. You have called us to be Your workers, yet we often respond with hesitation and fear, or we live more like consumers and critics than servants and laborers. Like the apostles, we struggle with doubt and selfishness. Forgive us for failing to see the multitudes with the compassion Jesus had and for choosing comfort over the hard work of ministry.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for being the one true worker who accomplished what we never could. You laid down Your life, endured the cross, and rose again to bring salvation to us all. You showed perfect obedience, compassion, and sacrifice. Because of Your work, we are forgiven and made new. We praise You for Your unwavering dedication and love that has brought us into the harvest of Your kingdom.

Holy Spirit, empower us to live out Jesus' mission. Help us embrace our calling, serve with joy and dedication, and trust in Your power. Unite us as a community to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, knowing that what You want to accomplish, You will do through all of Your people. Amen.

Assurance:

Luke 15:7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) In what ways do you believe the Lord sends us to be the answer to the prayers we are praying?
- 2) How can we cultivate the same compassion that Jesus had for the multitudes in our own lives and communities?
- 3) Discuss a time when you felt unqualified or hesitant to serve. How can we draw strength from Jesus' example as the true worker who completed the work we could not do?
- 4) What are some practical ways we can move from a consumer mindset to an active participant in our church and community?
- 5) How can we support and encourage each other in our roles as laborers for God's kingdom, especially in facing challenges and doubts?