

THE SCROLLS

Bridges: Connecting the Gospel with Everyone We Meet | Matthew 10:1-23

Life Lesson

Following Christ means stepping off the comfortable bleachers of observation and onto the battlefield of active mission, where we are sent not as self-sufficient experts but as ordinary ambassadors operating entirely under His authority and grace. Jesus calls us to travel light, relying on radical dependence rather than our own safety nets and resources, knowing that even when we feel like defenseless sheep among wolves, He provides the very words and courage we need. Ultimately, because we have freely received unimaginable mercy, our lives should become conduits of service and love to a broken world, enduring with steadfast faith, anchored in the Shepherd who goes before us.

Examine Scripture

Read Matthew 10:1-23

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

1. *What does this passage reveal about who God is?*
2. *How is God calling you to grow or change?*
3. *What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?*

Initiative: Taking First Step

Every great movement in redemptive history reaches a tipping point, a moment when the strategy shifts from preparation to execution. For the first nine chapters of Matthew's Gospel, the disciples have been in the Messiah's classroom. They have watched Him preach the kingdom's ethics in the Sermon on the Mount. They have stood by as He cleansed lepers, calmed raging storms, and exercised absolute sovereignty over the physical and spiritual realms. Up to this point, they have been captivated spectators. But in Matthew 10, the curriculum changes. The Master transitions His followers from observation to application. J.C. Ryle captured the weight of this transition, writing, "We see the great Head of the Church appointing the first ministers of the Gospel... It is a chapter which every Christian should study with deep attention, for it contains the germ of all the missionary work that has ever been done in the world."

Matthew 10, often called the *Missionary Discourse*, is far more than a historical account of a short-term preaching tour in Galilee. It is a profound theological blueprint. Here, we witness the mechanics of divine delegation, the strict boundaries of God's redemptive timeline, and a sobering, prophetic look at the cost of bearing the name of Christ into a hostile world.

Up to this point in the Gospel of Matthew, the Disciples have largely been spectators, watching Jesus. But here, Jesus shifts gears. He moves His Disciples from the bleachers to the battlefield. This is the moment they are sent out. In other words, as followers of Jesus, we were never meant to be mere spectators or only recipients of the Gospel. We are to actively fulfill the same mission as the Disciples. We are to be engaged in the mission, not merely its supporters!

Vs. 1-4

Throughout the Gospels, including (v. 1), the Twelve are primarily called "disciples" from the Greek "mathetes" (μαθητής), meaning a learner or apprentice. But there is a transition in (v. 2). Matthew uses a different word for the only time in his Gospel: "apostolos" (ἀπόστολος). In the Greco-Roman world, an apostle was an

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authorized representative, an envoy sent with the sender's full backing. We cannot simply dismiss Matthew's word choice as a matter of preference. Something is happening in the ministry of Jesus and in the lives of the Twelve. They are no longer just His disciples; they are now His apostles, His representatives. Jesus is officially shifting their status from students to ambassadors. There comes a time when you need to practice what you have learned.

Notice that Jesus does not simply hand the Disciples a "to-do list;" He gives them the power to accomplish the task. Again, word choice is important. Matthew uses the word "exousia" (ἐξουσία). This is quite different from the Greek word "dunamis" (δύναμις), which refers to raw, explosive power. It is where we get the word "dynamite." Matthew intentionally uses "exousia" in our text, and the distinction matters. "Exousia" is the right to act on behalf of a higher authority. Their success over demons and disease was not based on their own spiritual muscle but on the legal authority granted by Jesus.

When we look at the names listed in verses 2-4, we see ordinary men: fishermen, a despised tax collector, a political zealot, etc. These were not the polished, theologically trained elite. In fact, they were rabbinical school dropouts. In this society, they would never rise to the religious "cream of the crop." However, as we see throughout Scripture, God qualifies the called; He does not just call the qualified. The kingdom of God is not built on our impressive resumes but entirely on Jesus' authority. In other words, you do not need to be perfect to share the Gospel and fulfill the Great Commission; you just need to be surrendered to the One who holds all power. In fact, He promised to give us the same power to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8).

Vs. 5-7

As Jesus sends out the Disciples, He gives them strict instructions: "Don't take the road that leads to the Gentiles, and don't enter any Samaritan town. Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'" (vs. 5-7). Why the strict boundary? From a modern lens, this may seem exclusionary, but exegetically, it reflects the careful timeline of redemptive history. As one scholar notes, the emphasis here is "not primarily on the prohibition of a wider mission, but on the priority of the mission to Israel." The kingdom must be offered to the covenant people first. Only at the end of Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 28:19) is the restriction lifted, and the Great Commission expands to "all nations."

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V. 8

Jesus tells the Disciples how to minister to the people: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you received, freely give.” The only teaching element is “The kingdom of heaven has come near” (v. 7). The majority of their task is to serve the people. Why? It is much easier to get people to listen when you demonstrate unconditional love and service. Jesus also gives the Disciples their motivation: “Freely you received, freely give.” This is the heartbeat of all evangelism. We are not religious salespeople trying to meet a quota; we are simply beggars telling other beggars where we finally found bread and how they can find it too. We have received unimaginable grace, and our only reasonable response is to pour it out for others.

V. 9

In (v. 9), Jesus gives the Disciples an unusual condition for their ministry: “Don’t acquire gold, silver, or copper for your money-belts. Don’t take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his food.” Why does Jesus command them to travel so light? He is teaching them a posture of radical dependence. If we pack our own bags with our own resources and safety nets, we quickly begin to rely on ourselves rather than the Provider. Leaving the extra tunic behind was a physical exercise in spiritual trust. In other words, there is no excuse for not sharing the Gospel. We cannot say, “I can’t speak well” or “I’m not trained.” Jesus is telling us that fulfilling the Great Commission requires that we completely rely on Him, even in the very words we speak.

V. 10-15

To understand the core of (v. 10-15), we have to step directly into the cultural mechanics of the ancient Near East. When Jesus tells the twelve apostles to pack light, prohibiting extra money belts, spare tunics, extra sandals, or backup staves, He is not giving them an exercise in asceticism (severe self-discipline) for its own sake. He is embedding them in a specific cultural expectation of hospitality and total dependence. In the ancient Mediterranean world, guest-friendship was a sacred cultural contract. Traveling rabbis, philosophers, and messengers did not carry money, check into local inns, or pack weeks' worth of provisions. Instead, they relied on local hospitality. Jesus is deliberately structuring a dynamic in which the Disciples must depend entirely on the hospitality of the homes they enter. They were to find a “worthy person” in each town, stay in that home, and eat what was set before them.

Today, missionaries still use this strategy to find a “person of peace” to begin building relationships as a foundation for sharing the

Personal Reflection

1. Where am I being a “spectator” in my faith rather than an active participant?
2. What insecurities keep me from sharing the Gospel, and how can I rely on Jesus’ authority instead?
3. Who can I serve unconditionally this week to reflect the grace I have received?
4. What personal “safety nets” do I need to let go of so I can truly depend on God?
5. When my faith is challenged, do I fight back in my own strength or trust the Shepherd?

Commentaries

*Expositor's Bible Commentary
(Abridged Edition): New Testament*
Edited by Kenneth Barker

*NIV Application Commentary:
Matthew* by Micheal Wilkins

Matthew by John MacArthur

Mt. Zion's Mission

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MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.*

Gospel. It was a good strategy for the Disciples; it is a good strategy for missionaries; and it is a good strategy for us as well. We can find a “person of peace” in our neighborhoods, workplace, school, etc., to build relationships as a foothold for the Gospel.

What if there was no “person of peace”? Jesus said to “shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town” (v. 14). In the first century, devout Jews would literally shake the dust off their feet when leaving Gentile territory to avoid bringing ceremonial uncleanness into the Holy Land. For Jesus to command His Disciples to do this to Jewish towns that rejected the Gospel was a stunning prophetic indictment. It effectively declared those in those towns as outsiders to God's covenant.

Vs. 16-23

Jesus never sugarcoats the call. He is breathtakingly honest about what following Him will require: “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves . . .” This is a terrifying, vivid image. Sheep are essentially defenseless; they have no fangs, no claws, and no camouflage. Their safety is not in their own strength but entirely in the nearness of the Shepherd. Jesus promises that opposition will come. They will be dragged before councils, betrayed, and persecuted (vs. 17-18). As Bonhoeffer famously wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Yet nestled within this heavy warning is a profound comfort: “But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, because it isn’t you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you” (vs. 19-20). In our moments of greatest trial and inadequacy, we are never abandoned. The Holy Spirit will provide the exact words and courage we need.

Jesus drives the warning even further. The Gospel will cause division even within families. Yet the promise is given to the one who endures. Charles Spurgeon, preaching on this verse, reminds us: “It is not to be faithful for a time, but to be ‘faithful, even to the point of death,’ which will enable a man to say, ‘I have fought the good fight.’” True, saving faith has staying power. It does not quit when the wolves start howling. It endures, anchored by the Savior’s faithful grip.

The words of Matthew 10 are not merely ancient history; they are our marching orders. We are ordinary people He has called. We are the ones sent into a broken world with the message of grace. Yes, we are the sheep among wolves. But remember: The Shepherd goes before you, His authority empowers you, and His Spirit speaks through you.