

Mission 101

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to the passage there in Mark's Gospel that we read a few moments ago, Mark chapter 6, and from verse 6.

I don't often give titles to my sermons, maybe I should, it might lead to greater focus, but on this occasion one came to my mind, and it's Mission 101, and I apologize for the Americanism there, but Mission 101, first foundational course in mission for the disciples, certainly, here as Jesus sends them out two by two.

And although it wasn't planned in this way, this sermon, it's just the passage that comes next as we're going through Mark's Gospel, it does seem to be appropriate to follow up on what we were thinking about this morning concerning the ascension of Jesus.

We know that the final words of Jesus before His ascension, before He was taken up by the Father, were words of commission. And the disciples were given instructions as to their missionary task. Of course, they were to wait until they were empowered the day of Pentecost, but the commission was given on that occasion. And our passage here in Mark's Gospel, though before the ascension, does provide us with principles for the carrying out of that missionary enterprise that the disciples were given to carry out and that has been passed on to succeeding generations of disciples, and of course that includes you and me.

[1 : 47] So, we want to identify some of these principles. And it is important to acknowledge that what we have here is a descriptive passage. It relates to a particular moment in history.

And so, what Mark is doing is simply describing what happened. He's describing the instructions that Jesus gave and how they were followed. And it's not intended to be, in all its details, prescriptive.

It describes rather than prescribes. We don't come to a passage such as this and say, well, we have to do this exactly the same. And if that were the case, then, well, we've been very disobedient for generations because what churches, what believers follow these instructions to the letter in terms of the detail?

We don't. We're not intended to. But what we can do is we can draw out principles that are enduring and that are applicable for us today.

And that's what we'll try and do. It's not everything that we'll be doing, but it's part of what we'll be trying to do. All I'm going to be doing, you should have an outline there in front of you if you want to.

[2 : 59] You don't need to make reference to it at all. But if you had to have a little glance of it, really all we're going to be doing is following the passage really in the order that we have it and drawing out some of the points that we can note as we do.

The first thing that I want to identify in this Mission 101 course is identify who the mission director is, who is in charge of this missionary enterprise.

And it is, of course, Jesus himself. He is the mission director, but he is very much hands-on. He's not a bureaucrat behind a desk giving instructions to others to go and do the dirty work while he remains passive.

He's the mission director, but he's also, we could call him, the model missionary. Even in this passage, we notice that he's doing the work, and then he asks his disciples or sends his disciples to do the same work that he's been doing.

There in the second half of verse 6, then Jesus went round teaching from village to village. Of course, he was accompanied by the disciples, certainly some of them. He's doing the work.

[4 : 11] He's going, teaching and healing and casting out demons. And now he sends his disciples to multiply the impact in many ways by having them go out two by two.

So even in the passage, we see that he himself is the model missionary that the disciples learned from. But taking a step back from the immediate passage that we have here, we know that in a much more fundamental way, Jesus is the missionary par excellence.

He himself describes himself as one sent in John chapter 20 and verse 21. And not only does he describe himself as one who has been sent, he presents his own sending as the model for him sending others.

John 20 and verse 21. Some describe this as John's version of the Great Commission. But we're interested just in one particular phrase that we have in that verse.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Jesus, the ultimate missionary, the one sent by the Father into the world.

[5 : 28] And now he, having been sent himself, sends others. Jesus doesn't ask us. He doesn't ask you anything, to do anything that he hasn't done himself.

He is the director of mission, but also the model missionary. But particularly as the director of mission, he has particular tasks that he performs.

There in verse 7, we notice that he calls, he sends, and he empowers. Let's just read the verse there in chapter 6 of Mark.

Calling the twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. Now, as we've been going through the gospel, we would have been able to notice a sequence, an order to the manner in which Jesus deals with his disciples.

At the very beginning in chapter 1, we see how some of them were called, how they were designated, apostles, disciples, how they were taught. And now the time comes for them to be sent.

[6 : 34] Here in verse 7, when it says calling the twelve, I think it's more convening the twelve in a sense. They'd already been called, but now they're convened together in order that they might be sent on this particular mission, two by two.

Flying solo, you might say. Well, not solo, because it was two by two. But not accompanied by Jesus in any case. Called, sent, but also empowered.

Granted authority to perform the mission that they're being given to do. So, Jesus is the model missionary. He's the one who has the director of the enterprise, calls his disciples, sends his disciples, and empowers his disciples.

And notice that all of these three elements must be present together. We have to be called. But if we are called, then we will be sent.

There's no scenario in which you can be called and not sent. The two necessarily go together. And if you're sent, necessarily, you are granted the authority, the empowerment to do that which you are sent to do.

[7 : 48] It's a package that goes together. There are elements to the package, but it's one package. Then another aspect of what the mission director, what Jesus does, is that he gives instructions.

Then in verse 8, these were his instructions. Jesus' instructions. We're not going to think about them right now, the nature of the instructions.

We'll look at that as we draw out some of the principles for mission that we can discover in the instructions. But for the moment, simply to notice that it's Jesus who gives these instructions.

He's in charge. He determines how mission is to be conducted. And, of course, that remains true for us today. There's the mission director, but there's also the missionaries themselves.

What can we say of the missionaries? What can we say of the twelve? It's the twelve that this passage is concerned with. Well, again, if we've been following carefully the chapters that we've been looking at from the beginning of Mark's gospel, we've observed these disciples.

[8 : 53] We've been told of how often they misunderstood Jesus' mission. We've discovered how there has been occasion, on more than one occasion, where Jesus has had to rebuke them for their lack of faith.

It's very evident, and indeed subsequent as we go through the gospel, we'll discover very evidently that at this point they still don't really have a clear idea of who Jesus is.

And when we think of all these elements, it almost seems unwise for Jesus to send them out.

They're ill-prepared. They're not ready, surely, to be sent out two by two as missionaries, going from village to village and preaching and calling people to repentance.

Surely this isn't the time we might imagine. But Jesus does send them, and I think that in itself is a lesson for us, probably in a couple of ways, certainly in maybe the most important way.

It reminds us that the fulfillment of Jesus' mission depends not on the merit or ability of the missionaries, but on the authority, the call, and the equipping of Jesus.

[10:12] I think it's also an encouragement for us not to delay unduly in our own missionary calling, going out and sharing with others the good news of the gospel.

I think we're all, perhaps we're not all, but many of us by disposition, by culture, whatever excuse we want to identify, slow to go.

And here we're reminded, you know, we don't need to wait until we have a full grasp of the Bible, until we're able to eloquently explain the gospel and answer every question.

Because if we wait until that is true, then we could wait long enough. It comes to mind when we were working in Peru with the Presbyterian Church in Peru, and sometimes I would observe sister denominations within the evangelical community in the town where we were.

And it was striking to me how, as Presbyterians, we would always be very slow, really, not always, but often, in sending people out to maybe start new work in villages where there wasn't a gospel presence.

[11:30] And yet sometimes I would observe some of the other denominations. The one that comes to mind is the Assemblies of God, Pentecostal denomination. And they wouldn't delay. Somebody was converted.

It was clear that it was a genuine conversion, that there was a call to serve God, and they'd be sent out. Now you have to get a balance, of course. I'm not decrying the importance for preparation.

A prepared ministry is important. But I wonder whether we often get the balance very much on the side of being overly cautious. These disciples, they had a lot to learn.

There was much that they didn't understand, and yet Jesus sends them out. Ill-prepared, but, to their great credit, obedient.

They go. They go. Jesus sends them, and they go. We can identify, as we've just done, there are many limitations. We can do the same of ourselves. But what we can't deny about these men is their obedience.

[12:31] They're sent, and they go. And really what's going on here, and this in itself is something that we should maybe, or we could profit from thinking about, is that they're sent, really, as learners, as apprentices.

What we have here is on-the-job training. Jesus knows full well there are many limitations. But he also knows that in the doing, they will learn. In the doing, they will discover.

In the doing, they will learn what it is and how it is they are to perform the tasks that they're being given. So there are the missionaries.

Well, let's move on to just draw out some of the principles, we might call them values of mission, that we can tweeze out from the instructions that Jesus gives.

And I repeat what I said a few moments ago. We don't follow these instructions to the letter. We're not intended to. But we can draw out principles. What's the first one that I think we can draw out as a fundamental principle of mission from verse 8?

[13:39] Let's just read verse 8. These were the instructions. Take nothing for the journey except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in your belts. I think the thing that I draw out there in terms of a principle, a value of mission is trust.

Trust. I think it's very clear that what's going on is that Jesus wants them to trust in God. He doesn't want them to trust in their money belt. He doesn't want them to trust in their provisions.

He doesn't want them to be thinking, well, I've got enough. I'm going to be going for a week. Well, I've got enough for a week. So even if things go badly wrong, I'll be all right. He says, no, I don't want you to do that.

I want you to trust in God. I want you to go out trusting in Him. He'll provide, in His way, in His time, trust, a fundamental element in the mission that they were being sent on.

When you see all these things that they're not meant to take, for some reason the thought that came to my mind was, I suppose this is going back a few years, but when I went to camp as a boy, and many of you will have gone to camp, one of the things you get when you're going to go to camp is you get through the post, all the information, you've got the list of things you have to take.

[14:51] And, you know, you then have to set out all the things you've got to take. I don't know, the list, 20, 30 different things. Imagine if all of those things, your mom or your dad says, you know what you're going to do?

You're going to take your Bible and your toothbrush. That's all. What? No iPhone. Well, of course, in my day, there were no iPhones, but I'm trying to modernize the illustration.

You think, whoa. Well, maybe I wonder if the disciples thought, wow, can he be serious? We're not to take any of these things?

But, of course, the reason, I think the fundamental reason was this lesson that they were being taught, that they had to trust in God. And, of course, that's true for us. That is a principle, a value that applies from generation to generation, trusting in God.

But I think verse 8 also draws out another principle, another value. I'll say what it is or what I think it is, and then try and explain why I think you can draw that from the verse.

[15:58] And that is urgency. There's a curious, you might say, intriguing parallel between what Jesus says here, the instructions that he gives his disciples here, and what we read concerning the Exodus, when the Israelites were being given instructions to leave Egypt and make their way to the promised land.

Let me just read one verse and then explain the parallel. I leave it entirely to your own prerogative if you think that it's a legitimate parallel or not.

I'm not giving a definitive view on it, but it's certainly curious. And let me just read the verse. In Exodus chapter 12 and verse 11, these are the instructions being given to the Israelites as they're about to leave Egypt.

And we read there, this is how you are to eat it. And especially what follows, with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand.

Eat in haste, it is the Lord's Passover. So the instructions were concerning the participation in the Passover. But it's in the context of them having to leave Egypt, hence having to do so in haste.

[17:10] So there's an urgency about it. They need to participate with haste because they need to go. And they're given these four things that they should have. They should have a cloak.

They should have a belt. They should have sandals. And they should have a staff. And the curious thing is that when we turn to our passage there in Mark's Gospel, we find that the same things are what they are required to have.

We're sandals, but not an extra tunic. Well, from verse 8, really, take nothing for the journey except a staff. So there's a staff.

There's the sandals. And there's the tunic. So the same equipment, if you wish, was instructed to the disciples as had been instructed to the Israelites.

Now, I don't know if there's a connection or not. You might say, oh, it's just a coincidence. But I wonder if there is. And if there is, then certainly this is something we can draw out of it. The reason why the Israelites were given these very minimalist instructions as to what they could take was because of the urgency of the situation.

[18:27] The time was limited. They couldn't be gathering together all of their possessions. That would hold them back. It would delay them. The matter was urgent. And that's certainly true for us in the matter of mission.

It is an urgent task that we have been given. And I think that certainly is something where we need to pause for some self-reflection. Do we as a congregation demonstrate urgency in reaching out with the good news of the gospel?

Do we do what we do with any sense of urgency? Do we recognize the urgency of the missionary task? Are we conscious of the eternal consequences of the missionary task?

I ask that question of ourselves together as a congregation, but also it's a question we can pose of ourselves individually. Do you have a sense of urgency in reaching out with the gospel?

I think it was last Sunday evening we were thinking in the context of the resurrection, of the words of the angel, and also of Jesus directed to the women. Go tell. Go tell. And how those instructions, of course, come to us as well.

[19:42] Well, a week's passed. A week has passed. In that week, who have you gone and told? And I ask the question of myself. And if you haven't told anybody, then that really is proof that there isn't a sense of urgency.

I'm not being nasty. I'm just identifying a reality. If the call was to go and tell and you didn't go and tell, I didn't go and tell, well, that speaks volumes as to the measure in which we're conscious of the urgency of the task.

One other, or one or two other volumes or principles that we can draw from these instructions that they're given. Another one that some have suggested, and again, I leave it with you. You may think that too much is being read into this verse. But it's been suggested that these instructions and the very limited amount of gear that the disciples were to take and to have were partly intended to ensure that as disciples going from village to village, they would be as inoffensive and as unthreatening as they could be.

And we're still in verse 8. That modest provision would make them very unthreatening to the villages where they were going.

[21 : 06] Who would fear such ill-equipped missionaries as they came into their village? Well, they didn't have anything to make people suspicious or fearful or threatened. The only, we might say this, the only offensive weapon in their armory was their message.

Of course, not all would be offended by it, but many would. And that's certainly, whether we can draw that out from this verse or not, I leave it to you to take a view. I think we can.

But it's certainly true for us today that the only offensive weapon in our armory should be our message. If we offend people because of the way we approach them, the manner in which we present the truth, then we're falling short.

The message will offend. And that we can't avoid. We don't want to avoid. But that should be the only offensive weapon in our armory, the message itself.

A couple of other principles that we can draw out. Another one I think that we have here is the principle of partnership. Verses 9 and 10. Wear sandals, but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.

[22 : 19] What's going on here? Well, it's clear that Jesus expects the disciples will be helped by others. Presumably, those who would help them would be those, some of whom at least, responded to the call to repentance.

Perhaps others who, for whatever reason, were sympathetic to their mission. And these other people in the villages that they would go to would provide shelter. Not only shelter, but the provisions. They've gone without any bread, but they need to eat.

So, who's going to give them food to eat? Well, those who receive them in their homes. It's also suggested that the instruction to not carry an extra tunic is related to the fact that often the second tunic was used as a blanket.

So, when somebody went on a journey, they had their tunic, but then they carried an extra tunic. If they found themselves in their journey without shelter, well, that tunic could serve. If they were outdoors and having to sleep outdoors, it would serve that purpose.

And so, possibly what we have here is Jesus is saying, you won't need a tunic, an extra tunic, because somebody's going to put you up. You're going to stay in somebody's home. You're going to be working in partnership with people in the village that you go to.

[23 : 32] You're not going to be on your own. Well, there may be many directions in which we could try and apply that, but we'll leave that for the moment. One final thing in terms of principles is there seems to be very clearly a principle that the missionaries should be selfless in carrying out their mission.

I think we can draw that from this same matter of where they're going to be put up. In verse 11, we read, And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, sorry, that's not the one.

It's verse 10. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. You say, well, that's a curious instruction. Why do they need to stay in the same place? Just because they arrived in one house, if they're there for a while, why couldn't they go elsewhere?

I think what's behind that is you should be content with wherever you arrive. If that's where you've been received, well, just stay there. Don't be looking out for maybe better accommodation. Maybe there's a better offer.

Somebody with a more comfortable home says, well, why don't you come to my house? Jesus says, no, no, that's not what this is about. It's not about your comfort. You stay where you arrive. If somebody offers you hospitality, will you just stay there, however limited that hospitality might be.

[24 : 45] The goal here isn't self-advancement. That's not their concern. There's a number of principles that we can try and, in our own circumstances, apply.

Let's move on to some other aspects here. We're drawing things to a close, but one or two other things. What are the issues at stake in this mission, especially from what we see in verse 11?

In verse 11 we read, And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave as a testimony against them. And there Jesus very solemnly identifies that the issues at stake are of great consequence.

Life, death, judgment. What Jesus is proposing they do is something that the Jews would do when they were leaving a Gentile town. At least some Jews would do that. If they had been in a Gentile town, there was a sense in which they'd been contaminated by that town, and so they would shake the dust off their feet as they left.

So that idea would be familiar to the disciples. But what Jesus is doing here very tellingly is saying, you know, these Jewish villages you go to, they're not Gentile villages, they're Jewish villages.

[25 : 55] But if they reject you, if they reject your message, it's as if they've become heathen villages because of their rejection of you sent by me and because of their rejection of your message.

And that is a solemn, somber consequence that Jesus is identifying of a village rejecting, in this case its villages rejecting, the message that is brought.

There's also possibly a sense in which Jesus is helping the disciples by giving them this particular instruction, helping them to understand that acceptance with God is not determined by ethnicity, by nationality or race.

These Jewish villages could be treated as pagan villages because of their rejection of the gospel. And no amount of privilege that they might have would secure them acceptance with God.

That's not what determines acceptance with God, your nationality or race. But then as we move on, we can also notice what the actual task of mission was for these disciples.

[27 : 10] We notice what Jesus was doing right at the beginning. He was going around from village to village teaching. And then in verse 12, they went out and preached the people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

It's a mission that comprises word and deed. But there does seem to be a very clear priority on word. When it speaks of what Jesus did, the focus is on his teaching.

He went around teaching from village to village. He did other things. But when Mark wants to give a summary of what he did, this is the thing he focuses on, his teaching. And equally, the disciples there to preach a gospel of repentance and faith.

Though, curiously, it's just repentance that's mentioned in our passage. Well, let's just draw things to a close by one final thing we can highlight here in the passage.

And that is the outcome of this missionary adventure, if you wish. Maybe before we comment on the outcome, just notice how the manner in which the disciples minister.

[28 : 17] In the sense that it's similar to Jesus, but not the same. When it speaks of the healing of those who were healed, it says that they were to anoint many sick people with oil and heal them.

Or that's what happened. They anointed them with oil and healed them. The curious thing is that Jesus didn't do that. And yet, that's what they did. The disciples did. And I think that's interesting in that it's an acknowledgment that in many ways what they were doing was very similar to what Jesus did, but not exactly the same.

The use of oil would suggest, if we compare it with the passage in James that speaks of the use of oil, it would suggest that prayer was to be present. And so, the healing that is spoken of here was a response or in response to the disciples praying for sick people.

And they were healed. It's miraculous, but it's different to the way Jesus healed. And that is a curious thing that we can note there.

But the outcome is fruitful. Men and women are liberated. Those who had been oppressed with demons, the sick, are healed.

[29 : 25] We're not told specifically that there are people who responded to the message and the call to repentance. But it seems reasonable to presume that there were those who responded to that call.

The fact that it's not mentioned maybe is an acknowledgment that it wasn't dramatic. There weren't multitudes responding. But there is fruit for their endeavors.

Similarly for us. The outcome, the results may not be dramatic, but that's okay. Our call is to be obedient to what we're asked to do and we leave the outcome in God's hands.

Are you called? The disciples were called and sent and empowered. Are you called? Have you responded to that call? If you have been called, then you are also sent.

But do you go? When I was a student in Aberdeen, more years ago than I care to remember, there was a gospel singer called Keith Green.

[30 : 31] If you're of my vintage, you may remember that name. And I'll just leave you with the first verse of a song that he composed. It goes by the title, Jesus Commands Us to Go.

And this is the first verse of the song. Jesus commands us to go, but we go the other way. So he carries the burden alone. While his children are busy at play, feeling so called to stay. Especially the end of it is quite probing. While his children are busy at play, feeling so called to stay. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you for the gospel of Mark and all that it records of Jesus and of his work. And also of the calling that was laid upon the disciples and the manner in which they were sent, village by village, to preach a gospel of repentance and faith.

We thank you that as they were called and sent and empowered, so we too as your disciples, as the disciples of Jesus are called and sent and empowered. We pray that you would help us to conduct that mission, to be obedient to that call, and to do so seeking to be faithful to the instructions and principles of your word.

[31 : 53] Help us to wrestle with these principles, some of which we may find difficult to apply in our own particular circumstances, in the generation in which we live.

But we pray that you would help us to wrestle with these issues seriously and carefully. And in that, you would be guiding and directing us. And we pray also that as we do go, perhaps timorously, perhaps fearfully, but that as we go, so you would own and bless our witness and grant fruit. And rejoicing as we see the work that you enable us to do for the blessing of others and for the glory of your name. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.