

Matthew 9-10

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Date: 26 January 2014

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[0 : 00] I guess the sermon this evening we could call Apostleship Part 3, How to Do the Work of an Apostle.

Now, for those of you, as I had indicated earlier, who were not able to be here last week, and indeed those who were, and maybe could do with a little refreshing of your memory, let me explain a little where we are and where we're coming from.

So, last Sunday we began by noticing the intriguing and I think revealing use of both the words disciples and apostles to describe the twelve.

There in Matthew 10, that's where we're going to be focusing our interest this evening, in Matthew 10 we read, Jesus called His twelve disciples, and then in immediately following verse, these are the names of the twelve apostles.

So, the same group of twelve men described in such close proximity as disciples and as apostles. And we noted how our understanding of the significance of the words should begin by noting that these are words describing not so much status as action.

[1 : 10] A disciple is one who learns from the Master, and an apostle is one who is sent by the Master. And the point we were endeavoring to make and to stress is that we are not only to be disciples who learn, but we are to be also apostles, those who are sent by the Master, by Jesus, to do the work of Jesus.

I think it's the case. And if this is a point that I've made already, then, well, I wasn't going to apologize, but I won't apologize for making it again.

I think many of us enjoy being disciples. It's nice to be a disciple, a disciple of Jesus, to learn from Jesus, to admire Jesus, to listen to what Jesus has to say, to ponder on what Jesus has done for us, and to enjoy that.

And it's not wrong to do all of these things. But I think many of us, and certainly I would begin with myself, are less comfortable with being apostles, being those who are sent out by Jesus into a world that seems very scary and hostile and unwelcoming.

But apostleship, understood in the literal sense of that word, is integral to our identity as Christians. And we must not evade our responsibility to go as we are sent.

[2 : 40] Now, what we did last Sunday was to consider Jesus as the apostle, the archetypal sent one, sent by the Father to save His people.

And we noticed how in the fulfilling of His commission, Jesus went, we were thinking of the final verses of chapter 9, He went through all the towns and villages. He went, He saw, He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them.

And He said to His disciples, calling them to prayer, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest. And so on. And that third aspect of how Jesus said to His disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, introduced us to what then follows.

And the manner in which Jesus, recognizing the harvest has been plentiful, recognizing that the laborers were few, Jesus then sends His disciples to go out and to do the work that He was doing. In a sense, multiplying Himself by sending the twelve to do the work that He was already doing. So, we thought of Jesus as the apostle, but then we did, as we looked at how Jesus went on to send out the twelve, we considered in the evening of last week how not only is there the apostle, but there's also the apostles, the twelve.

[4 : 04] And we asked three questions of the twelve. Who they were, what they were to do, and there was a third question. I won't go over what we said regarding those first two questions, but the third question was, how were they to do it?

They were to do the work of Jesus, but how were they to do it? And that's what we want to fix our attention on this evening. And what we're going to endeavor to do is to identify what we can call enduring principles that we find in this passage concerning how we are to do the work of Jesus, how we are to engage in our mission as apostles of Jesus Christ, as those sent by Jesus into the world.

Now, when we read this passage, we've read the passage in Matthew chapter 10, and our focus this evening will particularly be from verse 5, where we have these instructions that are given. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions, and there's these instructions. And as we read the instructions, in some measure it seems rather strange, some of the things that are said. It doesn't seem very applicable to us, the tasks that they'll be given to do, and the manner in which they do them. And we wonder, well, what is there here for us?

[5 : 23] But while, as we also noted last week, it is important to see the passage in its historical context and understand that we must consider it in that light as the particular moment in redemptive history in which these men were being sent out to do the work of Jesus, there is also a way of looking at the passage that allows us to draw out these principles, going beyond the details throughout principles that are very applicable to ourselves.

And that's what we're going to endeavor to do this evening. And I want to look at seven principles. Now, actually, first of all, as I was going through this, I found six, but I thought, oh, seven's such a nice number.

It's kind of the right, perfect number, so I'm sure I can find another one. So, with a little bit of effort, I managed to find a seventh. When we get to number seven, and you're tiring, you'll wish that I'd only, that I'd stuck with six.

But anyway, there are seven principles that I want to draw your attention to this evening. And they can be captured, the seven principles can be captured with verbs, seven verbs.

And maybe that in itself is revealing. Doing the work of Jesus is precisely that. It is doing. And these verbs that capture the principles are, of course, doing words.

[6 : 47] And I'll mention what they are. Seven verbs that capture seven principles that I think we find in these verses. First of all, obey. And second, go.

Thirdly, preach. Fourthly, give. Then trust, bless, and move on. Okay? Seven verbs and encompassing seven principles.

Let's have a look. We'll go through this very briefly, each of them. First of all, obey. Verse 5, Then, or sorry, these twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions.

Now, last week we commented on that word instructions as being a word that carries the weight of authoritative instructions. We are, as disciples, as apostles, under orders.

You know, it's been said that the church has been guilty often of trying to domesticate the instructions and the commands of Jesus in the matter of the Great Commission.

[7 : 52] Some have suggested that the church has repackaged that as the Great Suggestion. You know, here's something you might want to think about doing. If it fits into your schedule, you might just consider the possibility of going into all the world, but if you can't make it yet, if this isn't an appropriate time, or you need to just wait till later on, well, that's okay.

But, of course, that isn't the nature of the instructions that Jesus gives us. They are authoritative instructions. They have a military ring to them.

We are foot soldiers under orders, and we are to obey the instructions that we are given. And that was certainly true of the twelve as they received these instructions from Jesus.

The nature of the instructions may vary, but the principle that we are under orders and we are to obey the instructions is one that is an enduring principle.

So, that's a very basic principle, but it is worth stating. But then moving on, there's a second principle captured by a verb, and that is that we are to go.

[8 : 57] Moving on there in verse 5 and continuing in what we read there, these twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions, do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans, go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

Now, here we have a very clear example of how the instructions, the precise instructions given by Jesus were appropriate to His day, but are not to be understood as permanent.

As was the case with Jesus Himself, the apostles were sent to the lost sheep of Israel. They were not to go to others, but to the lost sheep of Israel. Now, we today have no such ethnic or geographic

limitation placed upon us, quite the reverse.

We are to go into all the world, and so in that sense, the precise nature of the instructions are not the same, but we can draw important and abiding principles from this command, this instruction to go.

And let me suggest two. The first is this, that we are to go to people. Now, that may seem so glaringly obvious as to not worth mentioning, but when we think of this matter of going, maybe the first question that we might ask, some of us might ask is, well, where are we to go?

[10:20] And we can spend a lot of time pondering on this. Well, where are we to go? And maybe have difficulty in finding an answer to the question. But getting away from the detail of geography and destination, the crucial thing is that we are to go to people.

That's what the disciples were to do. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. They were to go to people, people who were lost, people who were in need, people who were harassed and helpless, people who were a sheep without a shepherd.

That is where they were to go. They were to go to people. And we too have that same imperative placed upon us.

Matters of geography are secondary and will largely be determined by God-ordered circumstances where any of us might go. In the course of our lives, we may go to different places.

Some will go in one direction, others in another. That is of secondary importance. But what we must all do is go to people, people who today, as in the time of Jesus, are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

[11:30] So that's one thing I would draw. But there's a second thing I would draw from this. If you want restriction that was placed upon the disciples, Jesus begins actually by telling them where they're not to go.

That in itself maybe seems somewhat surprising. Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. I think what we can draw from that limitation or that restriction that is of abiding significance is the importance of going, whatever it is we are going, of going with a clear sense of purpose and focus to our mission.

I think one of the reasons Jesus restricts them in this way, one of the reasons clearly is because at this point in redemptive history, it was not appropriate that the disciples go to the Gentiles, that they were to go first to the lost sheep of Israel.

That's the primary reason that Jesus places this restriction. But I think we can legitimately suggest that another reason was that they would maintain focus. This is what you are to do.

Don't go anywhere else. Don't do anything else. This is what you are to do. And be clear on what you're doing and be focused on what you're doing. I think that principle is true in so many things that we would do in life.

[12:46] And we could apply that principle in many areas of life. But certainly in the work of the gospel, in the work of mission, you achieve very little when you're going all over the place and you're going in this direction and that direction and have no clear sense of purpose or focus as to what you're meant to do and where you're meant to go and who you're meant to go to.

And here, the instructions of Jesus highlight and draw out the importance of having a clear sense of direction and focus. Now, now isn't the time to maybe delve into all the implications of that for ourselves, but certainly it's worth pondering on.

this matter for ourselves as a congregation. Do we have that sense of direction and purpose and focus in what God has called us to do?

So, we are to obey. We are to go. Then the third principle encompassed in a verb is that we are to preach. Then in verse 7, we continue the instructions.

As you go, preach this message. The kingdom of heaven is near. Now, while we ought to be a little careful about placing too much emphasis on the order in which the instructions are given, we've already noticed that Jesus begins by telling them where not to go.

[14:06] But in terms of what they were to do, as I say, being careful not to give too much importance to the order, nonetheless, I think we can recognize that there is a significance in that in terms of their activities, the very first activity that they are given to do is they are to preach the gospel.

Before being told to heal the sick and raise the dead and drive out demons and all of these things that seem quite alien to us in many ways. But before all of these things, they are told to preach this

message, to communicate a message, to proclaim good news to the people that they were going to. And that is something that certainly remains as an abiding principle of our mission. Verbal communication of the good news must ever be central to the work that we do.

Now, such proclamation or preaching, if you wish to use the word that we have in the text, is not to be understood and ought not to be understood as being limited to what is done from a pulpit or in a church building like this evening.

But in whatever forum or space where we can secure an audience, we are to preach, we are to communicate, we are to verbally announce good news.

[15:27] That is our task and it remains our task. Having made that point, we can maybe identify two further enduring principles that relate to the content of our preaching.

I think we can, they're really very much connected, but we can distinguish them. regarding the content or the message. It is a message given by Jesus and it is a message all about Jesus. Notice in these original instructions given to the twelve, Jesus said to them, as you go, preach this message. Jesus gives them the message.

Preach this message. You're not going to preach any message. You're not going to preach what you think is the message or what you have determined is important or what you think the people need to hear. No, you're to preach this message.

And then he goes on to tell them what the message is. The kingdom of heaven is near. No, I can't imagine that this one sentence was the totality of the instruction they were given as to the message.

[16:29] These men, after all, had been following Jesus. They'd been listening to what Jesus had taught and preached. And so, this one statement or this one sentence summarized a greater or a broader message that they were familiar with.

But the point is that it was a message that was given to them by Jesus. And connected with that, it was a message all about Jesus. The kingdom of heaven is near.

And the kingdom of heaven was near precisely because Jesus had come. That is why it could be declared that the kingdom of heaven was near. Jesus, the king of the kingdom, had come.

Hence, the kingdom of heaven is near. The message was all about the king. It was all about Jesus and about his kingdom and about submitting to the king and becoming part of his kingdom and living the life of the kingdom.

Now, for the disciples at this time, it wasn't what we might call a full gospel message. They didn't preach about the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. and elements of the gospel that are, of course, fundamental.

[17:37] That is, these are matters they didn't touch upon because, of course, these things had not yet happened. But even so, their message was about Jesus. It was Jesus-shaped.

Well, how much more should that be true for us in the message that we proclaim? It is a message all about Jesus. So, we obey, we go, we preach, but then a further principle can be captured by the verb to give.

Notice as we read on there in verse 8, we read, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons, freely you have received, freely give.

Freely you have received, freely give. So, in the midst of these instructions, some of them very specific, you have this much broader principle, I suppose, that Jesus includes and introduces at the heart of what He's saying.

And He's saying, at the heart of what you are doing is giving. That's what mission is about. That's what the work of apostleship is about. It's about giving. And this giving that we are to engage in is marked by or characterized two characteristics that we can identify.

[18:54] First of all, we give because we have been given. That's what Jesus is saying. Freely you have received, freely give. Why are you to give freely? Why are you to give of yourselves?

Why are you to expend of yourselves in benefit of others? Why would you do that? Why would anybody do that? Well, because you have freely received. Mission is grounded in grace.

If we haven't got a conception of grace and of God's grace towards us and of God's generosity towards us and of God's rich gifts that He showers upon us, if we don't have a conception of that, if we're not profoundly grateful for all that God has done and continues to do for us, how difficult it will be for us to give.

Jesus is saying, really, it's impossible. If you don't recognize how much you've received, then how will you give? The only way you can give, as I would have you give, is as you recognize all that you

have received.

Freely you have received, freely give. We give because we have been given, but we can also say that we give what we have been given. We can't give what we do not have.

[20 : 05] In the case of the disciples, they were given. They were given authority to heal, to raise the dead, to drive out demons, and that is what they gave. We read that and it seems, to our minds, very strange.

These powers they were given, this authority they were given, but that is the way it was. That is what they were given, that is what they gave. God also gives to us.

He gives us a message, He gives us resources, He gives us gifts to exercise in the service of others and as we have received these things, those things that we have been given, those are the things that we are to give to others.

So, at the heart of mission is giving. We go out to give. We go out to give to those who need. But another principle captured by a verb is that we are to trust.

As we go out, we are to trust. Verses 9 to 11 capture this, 9 and 10 particularly, but also verse 11 in a slightly different way. Let's just read the verses.

[21 : 12] Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts. Take no bag for the journey or extra tunic or sandals or a staff for the worker is worth his keep. Let's just leave it there for the moment.

Now, in these verses, we are again confronted with instructions that can appear strange. And we might wonder what possible application that is for us. I'm not aware of anybody who has followed or who today is following these instructions of Jesus to the letter.

Now, what does that mean? Does that mean that we're unfaithful disciples? We don't want to really do it the way Jesus has told us to do it? Well, no, I don't think that's the case at all. Rather, what we need to do and what we're trying to do throughout this passage is to draw out the enduring principles, the details of how we are to go and the details of these limitations placed upon the disciples are details bound in time in great measure.

But the principles remain. And what is the basic principle in these instructions of Jesus? Well, surely the basic principle is that His disciples were to trust in Him.

That's why they weren't to take money. That's why they weren't to take a bag. That's why they weren't to encumber themselves with all of these things that they might put their trust in. As they think, well, we've got to go on this mission, so we've got to make sure we've got enough funds, we've got to make sure we've got enough supplies, and if we've got all of these things, well, then we could go because we've got everything we need and their trust would not be in Jesus.

[22 : 44] And so, what Jesus is seeking to impress upon them is the need that they would go trusting in Jesus, that they would trust in God, that He would provide for their needs.

It's interesting to kind of just confirm that or emphasize that is the language that Jesus uses there in verse 9 where He begins telling them what they are to take and indeed what they are not to take, rather.

It says, do not take along any gold or silver or copper. And it would seem that the literal meaning of the word translated take is obtain. And without wishing to stretch this too much, I think we can draw something from this.

I think what that seems to suggest is what Jesus is saying is you're not to obtain these things.

You're not to make extensive preparations. You know, if you've got money in your pocket, well, go with the money in your pocket, but you're not to gather money.

You're not to obtain these things. You're not to say, well, I haven't got a staff. I must go and get a staff before I can go. Don't waste time. And all these preparations, which all they're doing, really, is demonstrating that you're not trusting, that I will provide for you.

[23 : 59] Trust in me to provide for your needs. It's interesting that subsequently to really confirm that some of these instructions were specific to this particular time is that in Luke's gospel, and we won't look up the reference for reasons of time, but you may wish to do so subsequently.

Luke chapter 22 and verse 35 and 36, Jesus actually says, remember what I said to you before, you know, that you weren't to take these things. Well, now you should take them. And it's not that Jesus has changed his mind.

It's just the circumstances have changed, and what was appropriate then at one point was no longer appropriate in this new chapter. But the principle remains, trust in God to provide for your

needs.

And if we fail to go because we're consumed consumed with worry that we won't have the funds that we need, we don't have the money that we need, we won't be able to pay the bills, if that is stopping us from serving God and from going out as apostles of Jesus Christ, then we have failed to capture this principle that we are to trust in God for the provision of our needs, but also, interestingly, we are to trust in God for direction.

And by that, I draw your attention to verse 11. He's moving on to another aspect of the instruction, and Jesus says to the disciples, whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person, worthy or suitable person, welcoming person there, and stay at his house until you leave.

[25 : 34] This is just a practical matter. Where are they going to stay when they go to these towns and villages? And Jesus is saying, well, you're going to look for somebody who is worthy or suitable, who is willing to have you, and you're not going to work that out beforehand.

You're not going to go with an address already. You're not going to go knowing where you're going to arrive. You're going to trust in me to direct you to where you should go. Now, in that, in that trust, didn't mean that the disciples wouldn't have to exercise their own judgment and discernment, quite the reverse.

They're being told to do that. Discern who would be a suitable person, what would be a suitable home for you to stay. But in exercising their own judgment and discernment, they would do so, trusting in God to take them in the right direction.

This instruction, there in verse 11, it's all about the apostles being directed by God to the right people in the right place. And that is so important for us today.

Depending on the work we're doing, we may not require overnight accommodation, but we do need direction that God would take us to the right people in the right place where we can take the message that we have been given.

[26 : 50] And that remains crucial for us in the work that we do. Just allow me to draw your attention to an interesting twist in the account that illustrates how Jesus knew full well that His disciples would not always get it right as they sought His direction.

And why can we say that? Well, we're told there in verse 11 that Jesus tells His disciples that when they arrive in a given village or town, they're going to search for some worthy person and stay at the home of some worthy person.

Now, if they would always get that right, then what Jesus goes on to say in verse 13 would make no sense. It wouldn't be necessary.

Notice in verse 13, He says, now if the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it. If it is not, let your peace return to you. Now, if the disciples were always to get it right, then that would be unnecessary.

They wouldn't, Jesus wouldn't need to contemplate the scenario of being in a home where the people weren't deserving. But Jesus knows that even though they will seek to find a suitable home, a worthy home, they'll seek God's direction in arriving in the right home, sometimes they'll get it wrong and they'll be in a home that proves not to be deserving.

[28 : 07] And when that happens, Jesus gives them instructions as to what they are to do. And I think that's a very practical insight for us. We need God's direction, but even as we genuinely seek His direction, we won't always get it right.

And even when we don't get it right, God has instructions for us. Well, if that happens, this is what you are to do. But leaving aside that detail, the fundamental principle is that we are to trust in God for our needs and indeed for direction.

But then moving on, we're nearly there. The penultimate principle in mission that is found here, that is enduring, is that mission is about blessing.

We are to bless. Verses 12 and 13, As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it. If it is not, let your peace return to you.

Now, the greeting mentioned in verse 12 is much more significant than a routine good evening. The greeting was, Peace be with you. May the shalom of God rest upon you and your home.

[29 : 15] Now, no doubt, that greeting could be expressed in an unthinking way. But for the apostles, it was intended as an expression of their deep desire as apostles of Jesus Christ, that the homes where they were arriving, the men and women that they were bringing the gospel to, that they would be blessed, that they would know and experience the shalom, the welfare, the peace of God.

This is what they were about. They were about, they were in the business of blessing others. As they were blessed, so they were to bless others.

And the seriousness of this matter of blessing others is confirmed by what Jesus goes on to say in verse 13, that if these men and women don't receive your blessing, well, that it would return to you. This was not some superficial greeting that it could be delivered and, well, who cares what people make of it. No, this was a serious matter of the disciples of Jesus seeking to bless others.

That is what they were about. The matter of blessing and seeking the shalom, the welfare of those to whom we are sent lies at the heart of apostolic mission. This is the fulfillment, the outworking of God's covenant with His people, God's covenant with Abraham that involved not only Abraham being blessed, but being of blessing to others and so too with us.

[30 : 45] And as we think about the mission that we are engaged in, let us be clear that at the heart of this is the matter that we are to bless others. We are to be a blessing to others. And finally, we are to move on.

In some ways, that's, or this principle is the most difficult to apply, but it's there. In verse 14, we read, If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet and when you leave, when you leave that home or town, I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

The principle here, we're not given instruction as to the timing of these matters, that's very difficult, but the principle is clear enough that there comes a time and mission when we need to move on. Is it easy to know when that time is? No, it can be extraordinarily difficult. In many ways, as a denomination, we're facing that huge challenge of knowing if there are places and circumstances and ministry that we are engaged in where it's time to move on, be that overseas or be that back home and for different reasons.

But we do need to recognize that we have a principle here, that there are times and there are occasions when we need to move on. That can be very difficult, can be very painful. Now, in the circumstances of the disciples, they had been wherever they'd been for a relatively short amount of time.

[32 : 12] In many ways, it was perhaps less difficult for them to move on. But when one has been somewhere for a long time, has invested for a long time, it is difficult and it can be painful. But at the very least, we need to ask the question.

And we need to ask this question on at least two grounds. Well, in addition to the fact that Jesus is presenting it as a principle, we need to ask the question on the grounds of the value and solemnity of the message.

The message that we carry is so valuable that it cannot be wasted on those who despise the message we bring. There comes a time when we have to say, well, enough. This is such a valuable message that if you're not interested, well, we're going to move on.

And of course, the other side of the coin to that is the need of others. The harvest is plentiful. The workers are few. Others need to hear the message. And if we refuse to move on, then we are effectively denying others the opportunity to hear.

For it remains the case that the workers are few. Now, this is difficult. When do we move on? In what circumstances? But nonetheless, I think the principle is there and we need to bear it in mind and on occasions grapple with it.

[33 : 22] Well, there are seven principles, seven verbs that encapsulate or capture seven enduring principles of apostolic mission, of those who are sent by God to do His work.

And you, if you are a believer, if you are a Christian, you are an apostle. You are one who has been sent by God. You have been sent out by your Master. And you are commissioned and you are recommissioned even this evening to obey, to go, to preach, to give, to trust, to bless, and as God directs, to move on to others with this good news, this message that we have been given.

May God help us so to do. Let's pray.