

Matthew 10

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Are you a disciple? Just give you a moment to, in your own mind, answer that question.

Maybe it won't take more than a moment to answer. Another question that maybe you'll need to think about a little more, are you an apostle? Are you an apostle? Well, without dwelling on this too long or giving you too much time, I suspect that you answered, many of you will have answered yes to the first question, and I suspect no to the second. And if you did answer in that way, you may be right, but then again, you may be wrong. That's all very cryptic. Well, let me explain. In Matthew chapter 10, it's intriguing to note how the twelve are identified and described as both disciples and apostles. Notice there in verse 1 of Matthew chapter 10, He, that is Jesus, called His twelve disciples to Him. That's fine, nothing untoward there, nothing that is particularly memorable in that statement. But then in verse 2, immediately following, we read, these are the names of the twelve apostles. And again, if we look at that verse in isolation, we're not particularly taken by it, the twelve apostles. Yes, we know about the twelve apostles. What I find intriguing, and I think revealing, is the way in which these two words, these two descriptions are used in such close proximity. The twelve were evidently disciples, and they were also apostles. Now, what is that all about? What we need to do is to focus on the meaning of the words disciple and apostle as they describe activity rather than status. I think here in this chapter very particularly, the particular concern in these words or the meaning that these words convey relates to activity rather than to status. Well, let me develop that a little more. A disciple is a learner. Indeed, that is the literal meaning of the word that is employed here by Matthew. Literally, it could be legitimately translated, he called his twelve learners. That's what it means. Twelve disciples, twelve learners. A disciple is one who learns. A disciple is one who learns from the master, and implicitly one who follows the master in order to learn from him. In order to learn, you need to be under his teaching. And that is what the twelve were. Indeed, that is what we are. We are learners.

And so, if you answered the question that I posed at the very beginning, are you a disciple? If you answered yes, then you're right to do so. If you are a believer, if you are a Christian, then you most certainly are a disciple. You are a disciple. You are a learner. You are learning from the master. But note this carefully.

The disciples, the twelve who are even named here—we didn't read on to that part of the chapter—but these twelve disciples become apostles—I think we can use that word, that verb—they become apostles, not as a result of some formal designation, but as they are sent out by Jesus, and as they obey and go.

And that is the meaning of the word apostle—sent out. An apostle is one who is sent out. So, if we develop this thought a little, a disciple who only ever learns and never goes cannot become an apostle.

[4 : 18] That person is not an apostle. They may be a disciple, but they're not an apostle. They may be learners, but they don't go. And so, they cannot be described as apostles. And of course, it's also true—this may be obvious, but it's worth just stressing—that in becoming an apostle, the twelve, particularly spoken of here in this chapter, do not cease to be disciples. It's not that they're promoted. Oh, well, we were disciples, but we've left childish things behind, and now we're apostles. This is so much better. You know, anybody can be a disciple, but now we're apostles. No, they don't cease to be disciples, but rather, they are disciples and apostles concurrently. They continue to learn day by day throughout their lives. They learn from the Master. But as they are sent out, so they are apostles, sent out by Jesus to do the work of Jesus. And this is how it ought to be for us. As believers in Jesus Christ, we must be both disciples and apostles—those who learn from Jesus and those who are sent by Jesus.

Now, I hope it's clear, but it's worth making the point explicitly that I am using the word apostle in its strictly literal sense, and legitimately so—an apostle as one who is sent out. I'm not going to be using the word apostle this morning in its more restricted technical sense, in which it is used in the New Testament of the Twelve in distinction to the other disciples. That is a legitimate way in which we can understand the word, in which the way the word is used. But this morning, we're going to use it in that more general sense, but also legitimate—its literal meaning—those who are sent out. So, we are both disciples, we are learners, learning from the Master, but we are also apostles, sent out by the Master.

I want to focus on our call to be apostles, those sent out by Jesus into the world. And I want to do this in two ways that will involve two sermons with the following titles, and they will appear very, very similar, but I hope that very quickly it will be clear the distinction between them. The first sermon could be entitled the Apostle, with the direct article, the Apostle. And the second sermon will be considering the Apostles, with the emphasis on the plural. So, the Apostle and the Apostles. Before we move on to think of the first one, let me just explain who I'm talking about, if it's not already clear. Who is the Apostle? Who is the sent one? Well, I think we can say, and I would contend, that the Apostle is Jesus. Now, we don't often think of Jesus as an apostle. It's not a name or a designation that is given to Him. But when we think of that word in its literal meaning, we can describe Him as an apostle, and I would describe

Him as the apostle. Let's look in this same chapter, in Matthew 10. If we look to verse 40, we didn't read that far on in the chapter, but notice what Jesus says in verse 40 of Matthew 10. He's addressing His own disciples. He's addressing those He is sending out into the world to the towns and villages of Galilee, and He's giving them instructions about the work of apostleship that they will do. And what does He say to them? Well, one of the things He says to them is this, in verse 40, He who receives you receives Me. And then notice what He says, and he who receives Me receives the One who sent Me.

Notice what Jesus is saying. Notice how Jesus is describing Himself. He is saying, I am One who has been sent. I'm sending you, but before I ever send you, I myself have been sent. I have been sent by My Father.

[8 : 39] I am here because the Father sent Me to do the mission that He gave Me to do. And so, given that that is so, I think we can, for the purposes of what we want to do, describe Jesus as the apostle, the sent one. We have a summary of His apostolic ministry recorded for us in verses 35 to 38 of Matthew 9. And it's this passage that will occupy our attention this morning. But before we look at these verses, just quickly to identify who are the apostles in the plural. Who are the apostles? Who are the sent ones? Well, in our passage, the twelve named individuals said in verse 2 of chapter 10, they are the apostles, and they are the apostles. But as we are arguing and suggesting by legitimate and necessary extension, all of us, for we too are those who are sent. Let's just remind ourselves of the words of Jesus in John chapter 20 and verse 21 that would confirm our status, if you wish, or our responsibility to be apostles. In John chapter 20 and verse 21, what does Jesus say addressing His disciples? Jesus said,

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me. Again, an emphasis on Jesus as one who has been sent. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. I am sending you. And here He is addressing not only the twelve, but all of the disciples gathered there on that occasion. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

The apostles, the apostles, the twelve, and then by extension, each of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. But our concern this morning is to consider the apostle, the sent one, our master, our Savior, Jesus. To examine and explore the ministry of Jesus as the sent one, in the light of the verse we've just read in John chapter 20, verse 21, is much more than a matter of description or even admiration.

We could take these verses in Matthew chapter 9, and on the basis of these verses we could describe the ministry of Jesus, and no doubt we could helpfully, or I hope we could helpfully do so, describe what it was that Jesus did as the one sent by the Father. We might go further and admire all that He did as He walked through the towns and villages of Galilee. But if we understand and if we take to heart what Jesus said to His disciples, as the Father sent me, so I am sending you, we need to look at these verses in another light. We need to look beyond simply describing or admiring, and we need to see these verses as the opportunity for us to discover what it means to be a sent one. And as we discover what it means to be a sent one, an apostle that we would seek to emulate and imitate, the sent one, as we become sent ones.

Now, before we proceed to consider these verses, we need to take a brief step back and note that our passage, the passage that will occupy us this morning, verses 35 to 38 of Matthew chapter 9, is a critical connecting passage in Matthew's gospel. Thus far, in Matthew's gospel, the sole protagonist, to all intents and purposes, the sole protagonist has been Jesus. But from chapter 10, others will join with Jesus in His mission. So, these verses from verse 35 to verse 38 serve both as a description of Jesus' ministry and as a template for the disciples' ministry, for the apostles' ministry. Now, we can structure what we want to say with the aid of three key verbs that we find in our passage. The three verbs in the form in which they are used are went, saw, and said. Jesus went, there in verse 35, Jesus saw, in verse 36, and Jesus said, in verse 37.

[13 : 27] Jesus went, Jesus saw, Jesus said. As the apostle, as the sent one, He went, He saw, He said.

And the manner we're going to explore each of these actions of Jesus is by subjecting them to a series of questions. And there's lots of questions, so some of them we'll deal with very fleetingly, but I hope that's not going to be able to do it adequately. First of all, then Jesus went. Why did He go? Where did He go? What did He do? How did He do it? So many questions. Why did He go? Jesus went. Verse 35, Jesus went through all the towns and villages. Why did He do that? Why did He go? Why did Jesus go through all the towns and villages of Galilee? Well, because, as we've already made clear, as the Word of God has already made clear, He was sent by the Father. He was sent by the Father. And we don't need to discuss this any further. So, too, with us. We are sent. We are sent by Jesus. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Why did He go? He was sent by the Father. Where did He go? Where did He go? Where did He go?

When He was sent by the Father. That's where He went. When He was sent by the Father. In the same gospel, in Matthew chapter 15 and verse 24, we find Jesus speaking. And what does He say? He answered, I was sent. Notice again the same verb. I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus is recognizing that where He was to go was also determined by the Father. He went when He was sent by the Father. The Father not only sends. He also establishes where, or perhaps more particularly, to whom His Son is to go.

Now, this limitation, and we can call it that, to go only to the lost sheep of Israel was not permanent. Indeed, it was not absolute. We were thinking just last week of the faith of the centurion. But nonetheless, His primary mission field determined by the Father was the lost sheep of Israel. Not a permanent limitation, not an absolute limitation, but nonetheless, what the Father had determined. In due course, others would be included. But for the moment, the Father had established a defined field for Jesus' mission. Now, we, as we draw lessons for ourselves as those who are also sent, we are not subject to any such geographic or ethnic constraint. But the principle that we go where we are sent continues to hold true. It's perhaps just a little more difficult for us to discern and to be clear on where God is indeed sending us. Where did He go? He went where the Father sent Him.

As we maybe just develop that question a little more, notice that in answer to the question, where, we can also identify what we might call Jesus' direction of travel. His direction of travel, it's the best expression I could find, is ever outwards. It's ever outwards. Then in verse 35, Jesus went through all the towns and villages. He's not stationary. He's not based in one place, waiting for others to come. No, He is the one who ever outwards goes through all the towns and villages, seeking the lost sheep of Israel. That is the direction of travel. We've established where He was to minister to whom He was to minister. But notice the manner. He is ever outwards, seeking comprehensively to reach all those whom He has been sent to. Also note the intriguing manner in which Matthew describes the synagogues that He taught in, teaching there in verse 35, teaching in their synagogues.

[17 : 46] Why their synagogues? Jesus was a Jew. He was a rabbi. Were the synagogues not His synagogues as well? Why does Matthew speak of Jesus teaching in their synagogues? Is there a sense in which a distance is being recognized between those who considered themselves to be God's spokesmen in Israel and the Messiah who had come? It's certainly true that Jesus goes to where His audience are at home, in their synagogues? They're at home. It's their territory. And He goes there, not expecting them to come to Him. And there's so many suggestive lessons, even in these details. So many lessons and so little a time. Where did He go when He was sent by the Father? What did He do? Jesus went, but what did He do? Well, He did what He was given to do by the Father. Let's read what Jesus Himself says of His own ministry as it's recorded for us in Luke 4, verses 18 and 19. And then, having read those verses, immediately remind ourselves of what we have in our own passage concerning what He actually did, and the work that He is described as doing. In Luke 4, verses 18 and 19, precisely on one of the occasions when He did teach in their synagogues, what did Jesus do? Well, He read from the prophet

Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He began by saying to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." So, Jesus Himself identifies the ministry that He has been sent to perform, and notice the obvious parallels with the description of what He did, in fact, do, as we have it recorded for us in our own passage. Verse 35 of Matthew's Gospel, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness." He did what He was given to do by the Father. The sent one, went to do what the Father had given Him to do. And so with us. We are sent. And what are we to do? We are to do what we have been given to do, no more and no less. Finally, how did He do it? How did He do it? Jesus went. He did the things that the Father had given Him to do, but how did He do it? Well, He did it in the strength granted to Him by the Father. Jesus Himself acknowledges that in the verses that we just read in Luke chapter 4. The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me. What I'm going to do, what I am doing, I'm doing in the strength that has been given to me by the One who has sent me.

And so it is with us. You see, we don't look at Jesus and the ministry of Jesus as it's described for us only to describe it and to admire it. We see it as one who was sent. We see it as one who is the archetypal apostle sent by the Father. And as we discover how He ministered as one sent, so we learn how we are to minister as those who are sent. Jesus went. But we also find in these verses that Jesus saw. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, and then in verse 36, when He saw the crowds.

How did He see? What did He see? How did He feel? Three quick questions. How did He see? What do I mean by that? How did He see? He saw with His eyes. How did He see? Really what I'm getting at is He saw because He went. We might have thought the order would be reversed. You see, and then you go. You see, and you think, wow, there's so much to do. I've got to go. But of course, this is actually, when you think about it, a more reasonable order. It's only because He went that He could see. You see, had He not gone, He wouldn't have seen anything, or He'd have seen very little.

But as He goes, as He travels, as He walks, as He makes His way through the towns and villages of Galilee, it is only then that He sees. As He goes, He sees. How did He see? Because He went.

[22 : 46] But we won't see while we don't go. And we need to see face to face. We are sent to go, and until we go, we will see very little. What did He see? Well, the passage tells us there in verse 36, when He saw the crowds. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, the crowds who were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And the language that is used here by Matthew is language that is both vivid and revealing. It's vivid in painting a picture that we can identify with.

We all know in some measure what it's like to be harassed and helpless. So, in that sense, it's very vivid language. But more importantly, it's very revealing language because this language identifies Jesus as the Messianic Shepherd, the one of whom the prophet Ezekiel spoke in the chapter that we have read this morning. The Messianic Shepherd who had come to lead and to care for His sheep.

They were harassed. They were helpless. They were leaderless. They were lost. They needed a shepherd. And here we have the shepherd who they needed. And so, the language reveals to us. It points us in the direction of Jesus as the shepherd of Israel. The shepherd of Israel had come.

But we need to dig a little deeper as we consider what Jesus saw. We're told He saw the crowds. We're told that He saw that they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. But the question that I would ask you to consider and see what you make of this question, the question is this, how visible would it have been to the ordinary observer that the crowds were, in fact, harassed and helpless? Have you ever thought of that? To somebody who was walking through the villages and towns of Galilee at the same time as Jesus and saw the crowds, would they have concluded, oh, these crowds, they're harassed and helpless? Would it have been that visible to the ordinary observer that they were, in fact, harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd? Was it not the case that many of them didn't consider them harassed and helpless at all? Many of them didn't consider that they were sheep without a shepherd. It wouldn't have been their own self-designation. It wouldn't have been so obviously evident to others who looked on at these same crowds at these same people. I imagine you may have a different opinion, and that's perfectly okay, but I imagine that outwardly most of the good citizens of Galilee gave very little evidence of being harassed and helpless. But Jesus could see with a penetrating gaze. He could see their hearts. He could see their fears and their doubts and their guilt.

He could see them as they really were, harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. What do we see? What do we see? We need to learn from the apostle. We will never see as Jesus saw, and indeed as Jesus continues to see. We cannot see the heart. We have difficulty seeing our own heart, never mind somebody else's. But we can and we must endeavor to see beyond the outward appearance, to see under the surface of people's lives, and we will only do that in the measure that we are significantly involved in people's lives. What did he see? But how did he feel? Jesus saw, but as he saw, how did he feel? And in many ways, this is the heart of the matter. We're told that when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them. He had compassion on them. He was moved to compassion. The root of the word employed means entrails, the word translated compassion, and is roughly equivalent to how we might speak of a gut reaction. We see something, and there's a gut reaction. The language speaks of an intense emotional response in Jesus to the suffering of the people, the fact that they were harassed and helpless, even if many of them didn't consider themselves to be so. It's interesting, and it's possibly significant, that the word here translated, that he had compassion on them, is a word that in the Gospels is only ever used of Jesus or by Jesus in his parables, suggesting that what we are to see here is a compassion that straddles the human and the divine. Our God is a compassionate God, and the

[27 : 56] Son of God in his incarnate state was a compassionate man. And here we see the human and the divine responding in unison to the plight of the people. Jesus had compassion on them.

As apostles, as those who are sent by Jesus, do we know something of the compassion of the apostle?

So often, we just don't care. And what to do when we are honest with ourselves and recognize that so often we just don't care? We're not moved to compassion. What to do? Are we to pray for compassion? If we were to pray for compassion, I wonder if the answer we might get from Jesus would be along the lines of, you really need to get out more. You really need to get out more. You see, it was as Jesus went out, and as he saw that he had compassion on the people. It's not something that you can get by praying and asking for it. You need to get out more. And as we get out more, and as we see and as we discern how so many are indeed harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, then the compassion will follow. Jesus went, and Jesus saw, and finally Jesus said. Now, this follows on from and is explained by what Jesus is seeing and the need for compassion to find concrete expression in action. Verse 37, Then he said to his disciples,

Who does he speak to? Who does he speak to? What reality does he describe? And what action does he propose? Who does Jesus speak to? Well, he speaks to the disciples, and it's clear that Jesus considers that his disciples have a role to play in responding to the plight of the crowds. He can't, or certainly won't respond to their plight alone. Others are to be involved. Others are to be commissioned. Others are to be sent. He was sent, and now others are to be sent to respond to this situation, the plight of the people harassed and helpless. What reality does he describe? Well, there's two parallel or connected realities that are described by Jesus in what he says there in verse 37. The first thing he says is, the harvest is plentiful. I want you to just pause for a moment and just consider this. Do you notice the shift in perspective? What do I mean by that, the shift in perspective? What Jesus has just seen is a sorry sight, a painful panorama. It's heart-rending. It's gut-wrenching. The crowds harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. It's bad news. It's bad news. But how does Jesus describe it to his disciples? Now, this is really very fascinating. How does Jesus describe it to his disciples? Well, switching agricultural metaphors from sheep to a harvest, his description of what he has seen and what has moved him to compassion, his description is altogether positive. What he sees is a plentiful harvest. You see, he's not describing something else. It's the same thing. It's the crowds, harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. That's what he's talking about. But he describes it as a plentiful harvest. Now, isn't that a fascinating change of perspective? It is bad news that the people are in the state that they're in. But when Jesus describes it in commissioning his disciples, he presents it as good news. This is a great opportunity. This is a plentiful harvest to be brought in. The harvest is plentiful. But he goes on to say, but the workers are few.

You might say, ah, well, here's the problem. Okay, it's a great opportunity, but there is a problem, and the problem is that the workers are few. Well, okay, this is a problem, but only because the harvest is so great. It's only a problem because the harvest is so great. Put it this way, it's a great problem to have. It's a great problem to have. The harvest is so great, that's why there is a concern as to the number of harvesters. More workers are needed, but it's a great problem to have because the harvest is indeed so plentiful. Do we as apostles, as sent ones, do we see the world with the eyes of the apostle?

[33 : 12] It's all about vision. It's about what we see and what we discern in what we see. And finally, what action does he propose? Jesus said, who does he speak to? What reality does he describe, and what action does he propose? Well, what he proposes is prayer. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. This is where the disciples must begin, on their knees. Why? Because prayer demonstrates that we recognize that the harvest belongs to God. He is, in the very words used in this passage, he is the Lord of the harvest. It's his harvest, and if it is to be harvested, he alone can make the call.

He is the one who is responsible for the harvest. He will ensure that it is indeed harvested, and nothing has changed. As we go, and as we see, and as we are conscious of the great problems, but also of the great opportunities, the first thing we need to do is to pray, to pray to the Lord of the harvest. That he would be the one who would take charge and use us in bringing in this plentiful harvest that is out there for us to harvest. Well, let's return to where we began. Are you a disciple?

If you are a disciple, then this morning you will have learned something. Are you an apostle? If you are, then you will take what you have learned, and you will go. You will go into the world to see and to pray to do the work that Jesus sends you to do. May we be disciples learning from Jesus, but may we also be apostles sent by Jesus. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Word, and we thank you for your Son. We thank you for Jesus, your only begotten, your one and only Son, the one you sent into this world. And we thank you that as we consider the work that He did, we can draw encouragement and challenge and lessons for the work that we are given as those who have been sent by Jesus. Lord, we ask that you would help us to go, that you would help us to see, that you would help us to pray, that you would go before us as the Lord of the harvest, guiding us in the way that we should go, where we should go, what we should do, the manner in which we should do it, that all of these things would be matters that we look to you for direction and help and empowering. And we pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we'll close our service this morning singing Psalm 23 in the Scottish Psalter on page 229, a psalm that picks up on the picture of the Lord as our shepherd, the one who cares for those who are harassed and helpless, giving care and protection and leadership. Psalm 23, singing the whole of the psalm, and we'll sing this psalm to the tune Wiltshire. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.

[36 : 53] He makes me down to lie. In pastures green He leadeth me the quiet waters by. Let's stand. to sing this psalm to sing this psalm. The Lord, I shall let your crown on walk, He leads me down to lie. In pastures green He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

The quiet waters fly.

My soul be done, restore again, And me to walk of the bay.

Within the paths of righteousness, Before his own name say.

Though I walk in tests of air, Yet will I fear not ill.

[38 : 38] For thou art with me, and I walk, And soundly come for still.

My table thou hast furnished, In presence of my foes.

My head thou dost with iron eyes, And night thou overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life, Shall surely follow me.

And in God's house, For evermore, My dwelling place shall be.

[40 : 22] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, now and always. Amen.