

Empowered for Kingdom Expansion

Matthew 10:1-15

My all-time favorite dream occurred when I was five years old. I was in my bedroom, by myself (or so I thought), and I was about to be attacked by several mean and scary pirates. They were pushing on the door with all their might so they could get to me, and I was restraining them with all my might by trying to keep the door closed. But in spite of my best efforts, the crack in the door kept widening, and I knew that I couldn't keep them out forever.

So I abandoned my position at the door and quickly dove under the triple bunk beds, where I hoped they would not think to look. And it was under those triple bunk beds that I discovered I was not alone in that room. My favorite cartoon character, Sinbad the Sailor, was underneath the bed waiting for me. Sinbad had a lot of experience fighting pirates, and he always won because he wore a magic belt. When he pulled that belt he instantly developed superhuman strength, kind of like what happened to Popeye when he ate a can of spinach. With that strength, Sinbad could singlehandedly overpower five or ten pirates at one time.

So while the pirates were rushing into my bedroom, Sinbad whispered his plan to me. He said that if I could hold on to him while he was pulling his magic belt, then I, too, would be endowed with the same power, and, together, we could defeat those mean, nasty pirates. And I took him at his word. So instead of waiting for the pirates to look under the bed and find *us*, we crawled out, locked arms, and jumped to our feet as he simultaneously pulled his belt. And then, with muscles bulging, swords flashing, and arms flailing, we made short order of those pirates.

That dream occurred, in pretty much that exact detail, nearly fifty-five years ago, and I can remember it like it was yesterday. I suppose it's because I enjoyed the sensation of being instantly empowered with supernatural strength. Even more, I loved that my fears and insecurities instantly evaporated after being empowered by my new best friend, Sinbad.

Which brings me to the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. At the height of His popularity, when Jesus was attracting huge crowds, the disciples started out being learners, observers, and companions of Jesus. They had seen Him heal the sick, cure diseases, cast out demons, calm storms, forgive sins, and raise the dead. These were signs that the kingdom of God had come, and each miracle was evidence that the kingdom was advancing. But at the end of chapter 9, in the passage that Pastor Mark taught last week, there is a shift in Jesus' method of kingdom expansion, precipitated by the words, *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (9:36).

Yes, people were being healed and restored and reconciled to God, but as the Son of God who was inhabiting a human body, Jesus could only do so much by Himself. There were many people that He could not personally reach or touch. And that compelled Him to lament, *"The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few"* (9:37). Then He urged His disciples to pray. *"Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest"* (9:38).

In other words, the Lord Jesus was confessing that He needed help. Indeed, it is *His* kingdom and as the Sovereign of that kingdom He is responsible for its establishment and its advancement. But because He voluntarily subjected Himself to the limitations and

constraints of a human body, He cannot do all the work by Himself. He needs *laborers* to help Him.

And as we come to chapter 10 we are going to find out just exactly *how* He wants those laborers to help Him, and how He empowers them to ensure that they do their work effectively. He says in **verse 10:1**. *And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.*

Pastor Mark reminded us last week that one of Matthew's purposes in writing his Gospel is to emphasize that the kingdom of heaven is an upside down kingdom, which is to say that it defied conventional expectations. For example, it is a kingdom that is not established and does not advance through political means or military might, because it is not a political kingdom. It is described elsewhere in the New Testament as a "kingdom of light" that is slowly, steadily, and relentlessly invading the kingdom of darkness that is ruled by a rebellious fallen angel named Satan and dominated by sin and evil. These are the real enemies of God, and these are the real enemies of mankind.

And so King Jesus' method of invading the kingdom of darkness is to assault and expel those evil things that have been so hurtful and destructive to the creatures God made in His own image. That's why He would heal sickness and cure blindness and deafness and lameness and other disabilities and diseases. That's why He would calm catastrophic storms and cast out demons and raise the dead and forgive sins. Because these things are the antithesis of goodness and peace and perfection, which is what His kingdom is all about. In exercising His authority over all these things, Jesus was proving His sovereignty and advancing His kingdom, little by little.

But this passage suggests that Jesus decided it was time to accelerate that advancement. So He gathered His twelve disciples to Him and gave *them* authority. I want to pause there and let that sink in. These are twelve ordinary human beings, most of them uneducated, most of them blue collar workers, some of them with glaring weaknesses, and none of them religious professionals or Bible scholars. And yet Jesus is deputizing them; He's delegating authority to them, and not just any authority. *His* authority! *Divine* authority! Authority to do exactly what He had been doing—to cast out demons; to heal every disease and every affliction. And the word "*every*" suggests that Jesus delegated His authority generously—He gave enough authority to each disciple to be effective in every circumstance and to meet every need.

And Matthew goes on in the next few verses to introduce us to these twelve disciples. **Verses 2-4.** ² *The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

A couple of things to note. First, Matthew identifies these twelve disciples, of which he is one, as *apostles*. "Apostle," in its most basic sense, means "messenger" or "one sent on a mission." And that is the meaning I believe Matthew intended to communicate here in this passage. Jesus delegated His authority to His disciples and *sent* them out on a mission to invade the kingdom of darkness and advance the kingdom of light. And He sent them out two by two.

Matthew organizes His list of disciples by identifying who was paired with whom. Peter was paired with his brother Andrew, James with his brother John; Philip with Bartholomew,

Thomas with Matthew, the other James with Thaddaeus, and the other Simon with Judas Iscariot.

Very little is known about most of these disciples, likely because they were so ordinary they didn't stand out in any significant way. Once again, this is evidence of an upside down kingdom. Their only real significance was that they were chosen by Jesus to represent Him, proclaim Him, and perform wonders in His name.

Look at the instructions Jesus gave them beginning in **verses 5-6**. ⁵ *These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Jesus begins by telling them where and where not to go. Please understand that Jesus' specific instructions to go only to the Jews at this time does not mean that He doesn't care about Gentiles or Samaritans, or that they are not welcome in His kingdom. Later Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:14) and to make disciples of all nations (28:19). But Jesus is setting a precedent here that would become the pattern of missions even after He had ascended into heaven. The Jews, because of their special relationship with God and their place in the history of God's redemptive plans and purposes, are to have the first opportunity to respond to God's invitation to encounter the kingdom of heaven.

But there was also a practical component to this instruction. Jesus was giving His disciples some geographical parameters for their ministry. From where Jesus gave this instruction, the roads to the north and east led to Gentile territory, while the road to the south went to Samaria. Jesus was specifically sending them throughout Galilee for the time being, and from there the kingdom would spread to the rest of the world.

Verse 7. ⁷ *And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'* Or, "the kingdom of heaven is near." Or, the kingdom of heaven has drawn near." This simple message is to be the subject and the substance of their preaching, which, not coincidentally, is the identical message of John the Baptist (3:2) and Jesus (4:17).

At this point in His ministry, at this stage in the arrival of the kingdom of heaven on earth Jesus simply wants people to know that the kingdom is near, and that because it is near their long-awaited hope for salvation is about to be fulfilled. Now, as far as we know, Jesus has not explained even to His disciples what that salvation is and what He must do to secure it. We now know that He had to die on a cross for our sins and rise from the dead. But they did not know that yet, nor could they have comprehended it yet. Yet Jesus delegates His authority to them, sends them out, and has them proclaim the simple message that His kingdom is near. And, at this point, that's all they or the people to whom they were preaching needed to know.

And the proof that this kingdom had drawn near would be the miracles that Jesus' disciples would perform. Look at the first part of **verse 8a**. ⁸ *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.*

Jesus does not tell them how they are to perform these miracles; He simply tells them that this is their task. And regarding this task it might be helpful to study the grammar of this verse a bit. My version (ESV) and most other translations insert the definite article, "the", before *sick* and *dead*, which could suggest that the disciples are supposed to look for sick people and dead people, as though that was their mission. But the definite article does not appear in the original language before "sick" and "dead," which makes a difference in how you interpret it. It means that the main task of the disciples was to preach the kingdom, and,

as an aside, they were to do works of healing (Leon Morris, PNTC). So, while proclaiming their message to everyone that the kingdom was near, if they were to encounter sick people or dead people or lepers or demon possessed people in the process or along the way, then they were to heal them, raise them, cure them, and deliver them.

Luke tells us that this delegated authority to perform these kinds of miracles was not only given to the twelve disciples, but to a group of seventy-two followers of Jesus (10:1-20). Likewise, this authority was given to many followers of Jesus after His resurrection, and there is no evidence from Scripture to suggest that Jesus does not give this same authority and power today to His followers. And the reason is the same. While miracles are never the goal of the “sent one,” they are a means of validating and reinforcing the message that the “sent one” has been commissioned to proclaim.

Jesus goes on to give some specific instructions about some of the practical matters of living on the road for a while. **Verses 8b-10.** *You received without paying; give without pay. ⁹ Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, ¹⁰ no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.*

Normally, before people go on a journey and spend some time away from home, they make preparations. They withdraw enough money from their bank account to cover their expenses. They pack a suitcase with changes of clothes and other personal items that will make their journey more comfortable. They make arrangements to stay in a home or in a lodge. But Jesus forbids His disciples to do any of these things. He sends them out, and insists that they depend on the Lord for all their needs and all their provisions.

So with regard to money, they are neither to charge money for their ministry, nor accept an honorarium. They are not to take any of their own money with them, not even copper coins, which we would call ‘small change’. Because Jesus wants them to know and experience that it is not money that will sustain them in the mission they are about to undertake, it is the One who commissioned them to go on that mission. Since they are laborers for *God*, He will go before them and He will ensure that their needs are supplied.

The two principles that Jesus is promoting here are simplicity and dependence, two principles by which Jesus Himself lived while doing His ministry on earth. Simplicity, getting by with the bare necessities, keeps us from being distracted by the needless worry that excess money and things inevitably produce. “What outfit should I wear today? Which shoes go with this outfit? Where are we going to eat? How much will it cost? Can I afford it?”

While these are questions most of us ask each and every day, they *can* be unnecessary distractions from the Lord’s work. What Jesus is saying is that the message of the kingdom’s nearness is so urgent, and the needs of the people are so great, that it demands one’s focused, undivided attention.

And then the principle of *dependence*—relying on others to provide for your needs so that you don’t have to spend time and energy arranging for the daily necessities of life. By the way, the principles of simplicity and dependence are just the opposite of our natural inclinations, and they are just the opposite of American culture. We are into accumulation, not simplification. We are into independence and autonomy, not dependence and reliance.

But for the disciples of Jesus who were being sent out on this mission, simplicity and dependence was not only the Lord’s will, it was the Lord’s mandate. And so important was this to Jesus that He told His disciples that His blessing upon the communities where they went would be proportionate to the community’s receptivity to them in terms of taking care of their needs. Look what He says in **verses 11-13.** *¹¹ And whatever town or village you enter,*

find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

Because public inns and lodges in the ancient Roman world were considered houses of ill-repute, most Jewish travelers relied on the hospitality of their Jewish brethren to provide bed and board. Jesus instructs His disciples to be on the lookout, in every location, for hosts who were open to their message and ministry and then offered them hospitality. And that is what is meant by the term “worthy” in verse 11—people who saw it as their moral duty to take care of those who did the Lord’s work.

And Jesus said that when they found such receptive and generous hosts, they were to greet the house, verse 12. For us, in our culture, the concept of greeting a house is foreign, but in most of the world it is still very much a common practice. The standard greeting for Jews, then and now, is *shalom*, meaning “peace be upon you.” For Arabs and other Muslim cultures it is “As-Salaam-Aleichem,” which means “peace be unto you.”

Greeting a house with these words is not taken lightly by people, and is believed to be efficacious, especially by those who represent the Lord or are doing the Lord’s work. When we visit Africa we are often asked to go to people’s homes and pronounce peace upon it, because they believe that the Lord’s servant has been given the authority to impart God’s peace upon it.

That is precisely what Jesus seems to be saying in **verse 13**. *¹³ And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.* An unworthy house is an unwelcoming house—a house comprised of people who refuse to provide hospitality to the disciples. And the penalty for this is that the house forfeits an opportunity to be inhabited by the peace of God.

But there is more. **Verses 14-15**. *¹⁴ And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*

Once again there are serious consequences for those who do not welcome the disciples as their guests and those who fail to heed their words. In such a case the disciples are to register God’s disapproval of them with a gesture of renunciation. They are commanded to *shake off the dust from their feet*. The way this was typically done was by taking off one’s sandals and slapping them together in order to remove any dust, but it was a symbolic act of renouncing a person or a home or a community. It was a way of saying, “I’m not taking anything of you with me—I don’t want to have anything to do with you.”

You should know that the Jews believed that even the earth in Gentile lands was unclean, and it was their custom, when they returned from abroad, to shake from their feet the dust they had acquired when abroad, so as to not bring any of that uncleanness into their home territory. Jesus is telling His followers to treat the unwelcoming Jews as they would treat Gentiles (Morris).

So, what do we make of Jesus’ instructions in terms of how we are called and commissioned today? First, it’s important to know that Jesus’ specific instructions to His disciples in this passage are not necessarily prescriptive of how He sends out His laborers today. We are commanded to go into all the world and reach every nation, for example. We also have a much broader, more comprehensive message to proclaim—the gospel—rather than just that the kingdom of God is near. Furthermore, it is not inappropriate for God’s

laborers to receive money for their labor, or to live in their own homes, or to provide for their own needs. The Apostle Paul was a tentmaker, precisely so he would not be a burden to anyone.

But there are several principles in this passage that still apply. Certainly *simplicity* and *dependence* on the Lord and His people are still valid considerations for those who are sent out. So also is the principle of delegated authority that comes from Jesus. Ministry still requires supernatural empowerment and enablement, and Jesus reinforced this point in John 15 when He said apart from Him we can do nothing (15:4). But what is different (and better) today than with the disciples in Matthew 10 is that Jesus has given us His Holy Spirit to indwell us, who empowers us and enables us to do even more than the disciples. And that's even better than the dream I had more than fifty years ago where I was empowered by Sinbad to defeat those pirates in my bedroom. Because the Holy Spirit not only enables us to fight and defeat our spiritual enemies, we can proclaim His message (the gospel), we can still heal and perform wonders in His name, we can express the unconditional, unlimited love of Jesus, we can usher people to the door that leads to salvation, and we can advance His kingdom in every part of the world.

But there's one more principle that is essential. Jesus still uses ordinary, common people to do His work—people who don't have outstanding abilities or personalities, but people who simply let Him do what He wants in them and through them. And this is so that people who know them and see them can say, "There's no way that person can do that; it must be Jesus doing it through them."

“Empowered for Kingdom Expansion” **Matthew 10:1-15**

Main Idea: In order to expand his kingdom, King Jesus delegates his authority to his disciples so that many more people can come under his influence

Jesus Delegates Substantial Authority to His Disciples (1)
Over evil spirits

Over every disease

Over every affliction

Names of the Twelve Disciples (2-4)

Jesus Sends His Disciples Out with Specific Instructions (5-15)
The Target Group (5-6)
Avoid Gentiles and Samaritans (5)

Go to the lost sheep of Israel (6)

The Message: “*The kingdom is near*” (7)

The Method: Perform supernatural wonders (8a)
Heal the sick

Raise the dead

Cleanse lepers

Cast out demons

The Living Arrangements (8b-10)

Do not charge or accept compensation (8b-9)

Do not take food or extra clothes (10)

The Reception (11-15)

Search for hospitable hosts in every town (11)

Bless hospitable homes (12-13a)

Curse inhospitable towns or homes (13b-15)

Application:

How Jesus delegates authority today

The kind of ambassadors Jesus is looking for

The role of the Holy Spirit