

Four Lessons for Christian Service

3 ⁷Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. ⁸Hearing what great things he did, many people came to him from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and [from] beyond the Jordan, and [from] the regions of Tyre and Sidon. ⁹He spoke to his disciples, [requesting] that a small boat should be prepared for him, so that the people would not crowd upon him. ¹⁰Because he had healed many, all those who were suffering from diseases were pressing upon him, so that they might touch him. ¹¹And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, fell down before him and cried out, You are the Son of God. ¹²But he strictly charged them not to tell who he was.

¹³Then he went up into the mountains, and those whom he desired he called to [come with] him; and they came with him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve, so that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach. ¹⁵He also gave them authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶[These are the twelve he appointed to be his apostles:] Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), ¹⁷James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother (to them he gave the name, Boanerges, which means, Sons of thunder), ¹⁸Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who was also a traitor. (Mk. 3:7-19)

6 ⁷He called to himself the twelve and began to send them out two by two. He gave them authority over the unclean spirits; ⁸and he charged them to take along no provisions for their journey—no bread, no wallet, no money in their belts, only a staff. ⁹They were to wear sandals; but, [he said,] do not put on two tunics. ¹⁰Furthermore, he said to them, Wherever you enter a house, remain there until you leave that city. ¹¹If a community refuses to receive you or listen to you, as you go on from there, shake off the dust that is under your feet as a witness against them. ¹²So they went out and preached that men should repent. ¹³And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (Mk. 6:7-13)

See attached Appendix for parallel passage of Matthew 10:1-15

Introduction

Do you ever wish that you had lived in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry? Do you ever wish that you could have been a part of the apostolic band?

Mark tells us that Jesus went up onto a mountain, away from the crowds, and He chose twelve men to join Him; to be with Him, and to receive His divine authority (Mk. 3:13-14.) Wouldn't it have been great to be numbered among that original apostolic band?

But that was all so long ago. We were not alive back then, and no one is called to be an apostle today. What do we have in common with those twelve men? Is there anything we can learn from this teaching Jesus addressed to His apostles?

The apostles were unique: in being with Jesus, in being commissioned by Jesus; but you and I as Christians are not completely left out of the picture.

The twelve apostles are also identified as disciples (Matt. 10:1-2); as Christians, we too are called to be disciples. In giving the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus instructed His original apostles, *“Go, therefore, and make disciples from all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 28:19.)

As we consider Jesus’ instruction and commission to His twelve apostles—the original disciples—we can learn valuable lessons for our own Christian living.

I. Faithfully Fulfill Your God-Given Assignment (Matt. 10:5-6)

Jesus defines for His disciples their assignment—their sphere of service. In their case, He specifically charges them to confine their ministry to the house of Israel; they are not to extend themselves to the Gentiles or the Samaritans at this time. There were already clear indications that the gospel was also intended for the Gentiles, note Matthew 8:11,

Jesus said to His disciples and to the crowd, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 8:11)

Following the accomplishment of the work of redemption, that time would come. As noted in the Introduction, in giving the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus instructs the apostles, *“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 28:19.)

But prior to that time there existed a spiritual wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles. Ephesians 2:14 speaks of the spiritual wall separating Jew and Gentile, the spiritual counterpart to the physical walls of the temple court that served to separate the Jew and the Gentile, the wall of separation that was demolished by means of the Messiah’s atoning work upon the cross of Calvary:

[Christ] is our peace, [he is] the one who made the two [become] one and who destroyed the dividing wall [that served as] a barrier. With his flesh he destroyed the [source of] enmity. (Eph. 2:14)

A first valuable lesson for us to learn from Jesus’ instructions to His original disciples is this: faithfully fulfill your God-given assignment. That assignment first and foremost is to be a faithful Christian husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister. In addition, it may include the assignment to serve in some capacity in Christ’s church, perhaps as a Sunday School teacher, or elder, or deacon, or trustee, or member of some committee, or singer in the choir, or prayer warrior. Perhaps it may be a special assignment: to care for an elderly

parent, or to encourage a brother in need, or to bear a burden of pain or loss, or to undertake a special gospel ministry.

Let us not neglect our God-given assignment because it may seem to be “too routine,” or “too insignificant,” or “too hard.” Let us not neglect our present God-given assignment by daydreaming about possible future assignments or by overextending ourselves with other lesser tasks. Note the Apostle Paul’s admonition to Archippus: *“Tell Archippus, ‘See to it that you fulfill the ministry you have received from the Lord’”* (Col. 4:17) Let us bear in mind the words of our Lord Himself:

His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s joy!” (Matt. 25:21)

Whoever is faithful with a very little will also be faithful with much; but whoever behaves in an unrighteous manner with a very little will also behave in an unrighteous manner with much. (Lk. 16:10)

II. Carry Out Christ’s Ministry of Mercy and Grace (Matt. 10:7-8)

The assignment Christ entrusts to these twelve apostles is to carry out the same ministry that He Himself has been doing: preach the gospel, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

There is a distinction between the original apostles and ourselves: we have not personally received the divine authority to perform miracles—although we do have access to the Lord who can perform mighty works, and when it is His will He does so in answer to the prayers of His people.

But there is also a similarity between their God-given ministry and ours, that similarity being first the presentation of the gospel as first priority and of greatest importance. The Apostle Paul declared the ministry of the gospel to be of foremost importance when he reminded the Corinthians, *“what I received I passed on to you as of first importance; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Cor. 15:3-4.) He then gives this instruction to the Philippians:

Do all things without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, ¹⁶firmly holding the word of life. (Phil. 2:14-16a)

The Apostle Peter counsels Christians to be *“always prepared with an answer for everyone who asks you for an explanation concerning the hope that is in you”* (1 Pet. 3:15b.)

Another similarity between the ministry of the original disciples and Christians of all subsequent generations is the practice of deeds of mercy and kindness. We cannot heal the sick, but we can visit them. We cannot raise the dead, but we can console the bereaved. We cannot cleanse the lepers, but we can befriend the outcast. We cannot cast out demons, but we can combat evil with good:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt. 5:43-45)

Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but allow God to express his wrath, for it is written, “Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,” says the LORD.”²⁰But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing so you shall heap coals of fire upon his head.²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:19-21)

Yet another thing we have in common with the original disciples is the ministry of grace. The original disciples are reminded, *“You have received without charge, give without charge”* (Matt. 10:8.) Likewise, we, too, have been the recipients of grace and we are called to also be the dispensers of grace: *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”* (Eph. 4:32.)

III. Depend upon the Lord to Meet Your Needs (Matt. 10:9-10)

Jesus charges the twelve apostles to go forth on this ministry without money and without supplies: *“take no wallet along on your journey; neither take two tunics, nor [extra] shoes, nor staff”* (Matt. 10:10.) The apostles were not to calculate in advance what this preaching expedition would cost, and then make sure that they had the needed funds before they embarked on their ministry. (Whereas the instructions of Matthew 10:10 are to take no wallet, nor shoes, nor staff; the instructions of Mark 6:8 are to take only a staff. However, the context of Matthew 10:10 indicates that what is being referred to there is the provision of extra shoes and staff, as seen by the instructions not to take two tunics, plus the fact that the literal carrying out of the command to take no shoes would have meant that the apostles would go barefoot on their journey.)

We should understand these instructions to be a specific charge to these twelve men on this particular excursion, intended to impress upon them the fact that they could depend upon the Lord to meet their daily needs. Jesus immediately

adds to His instructions His reason for giving them, namely, the fact that *“the laborer is worthy of his food.”* In effect, Jesus is telling His apostles, “You do not have to worry about paying your own expenses. You are being employed, sent out, by Me; it is My responsibility to meet your needs, and you can trust Me to do so.”

The basic lesson also applies to us: complete, even radical, dependence upon the Lord is the norm for the Christian life. As the Psalmist testifies, since the LORD is my Shepherd, *“I shall not be in need”* [i.e.; I shall not lack the things that I need.] (Psl. 23:1.) Consider the counsel the Apostle Paul gives to the Philippians:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God ... ¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6,19)

IV. Make Friends with God’s Children (Matt. 10:11-15)

In Matthew 10:11 Jesus lays out the procedure His disciples were to follow: in each city they entered they were to locate a worthy household and make that home their temporary headquarters until they left that city.

Then in verses 12-15 He outlines the procedure His disciples were to use in locating such a household. When they arrived in a city the disciples were to go door to door, introducing themselves and their mission. When they found a household that welcomed them, they were to make it their base of operations. Note how this same mode of operation was employed by Paul and Silas in their ministry at Philippi: *“When [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house. And she persuaded us”* (Acts 16:15.)

A basic lesson we may learn from these particular instructions Jesus gave His original disciples is for us to make friends of God’s children. We are to develop Christian friendships: *“pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (2 Tim. 2:22.) A Christian friend will support and build our Christian faith; he will not tear it down. A Christian friend will point us to Christ; he will not draw us away from Him. A Christian friend will know what is right, and tell us when you are wrong. Not only are we to seek faithful Christian friends, we are also to be such a true friend to fellow Christians. We should be the kind of friend Jonathan proved to be to David: *“And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God”* (1 Sam. 23:16.) We may prove ourselves to be true Christian friends to one another in Christ by heeding the admonition of Hebrews:

Keep loving each other as brothers ... ³Remember those in prison [i.e., those who have been imprisoned for the cause of Christ] as if you were fellow prisoners with them, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. (Heb. 13:1-3)

Compare the Lord's words recorded in Matthew 10:10, "*The laborer is worthy of his food,*" with His word recorded in Luke 10:7, "*Stay in that house [where they accept you], eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages.*" The point is that the Lord Jesus often times provides for His servants through the ministry of His people—in Luke 10:17 His people are those who receive His apostles and their message and put their faith in the Lord who sent them out.

Conclusion

In many ways those original twelve apostles were unique; but, if we look closely, we will also find that we have something in common with them. We share this in common with those original twelve: like them, we, too, are called to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With that common bond between the two of us—the original twelve and we who are disciples in the twenty-first century—we can learn valuable lessons for our own Christian lives as we consider Jesus' instructions to them: 1) Faithfully fulfill your God-given assignment (whatever assignment the Lord has given to you personally); 2) Carry out Christ's ministry of mercy and grace; 3) Depend upon the Lord to meet your needs; and 4) Make friends with God's children—those who are fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Appendix: The Text of Matthew 10:1-15

***10** He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out. He also gave them authority to heal all kinds of diseases and all kinds of sicknesses. ²Now these are the names of the twelve apostles: the first is Simon, who is called Peter, Andrew his brother, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, ³Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew the publican, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who also was a traitor.*

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out and charged them, saying, Do not go among the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷And as you go, preach [the message], The kingdom of heaven is about to come. ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You have received without charge; give without charge. ⁹Accept no gold, nor silver, nor copper for your money bags; ¹⁰and take no wallet along on your journey. Neither [take] two tunics, nor [extra] shoes, nor staff; for the laborer is worthy of his food. ¹¹When you enter into a city or village, search for some worthy man there and stay at his house

until you leave [that place].¹²As you enter a house, give it your greeting;¹³and if that household is worthy, let your peace rest upon it. But if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you.¹⁴If anyone will not receive you or hear your words, as you leave that house or that city, shake the dust off of your feet.¹⁵I tell you the truth, It shall be more bearable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment, than for that city. (Matt. 10:1-15)