

When Jesus sent out the 12

Matt. 9:35-10:42

On the occasion when Jesus was moved with compassion for the multitudes, He called upon His disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. The "Lord of the harvest" was a reference made to the function of the owner or administrator of fields that were ready for harvest. His workers would report the condition of the fields and the administrator would allocate resources for the harvesting of the crop. A field that was ripe (ready) would be flooded with laborers to bring in the crop in order to the most productivity from the fields. Jesus saw the needs of the people as an indication that they were ready for harvest. When He called upon the disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest for laborers, He made them aware of the need and of the role that they could play in meeting that need. Those who pray for laborers soon become laborers on behalf of those for whom they feel compassion enough to pray.

Matthew 10 records the instructions that Jesus gave to the 12 before He sent them out into the fields to harvest lost souls. Some of what Jesus told them was specific to their time and place. They were the 12 apostles and this was their first solo mission under Jesus' tutelage. Their mission was a short term and local ministry. Jesus also gave them instructions that unveiled timeless principles that apply whenever and wherever the disciples of the Lord Jesus carry the message to the lost. Much that is timeless has to do with the attitude of those who labor in the harvest.

"Freely you have received, freely give." As Jesus sent them to preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." He empowered and commissioned them to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons." The spiritual blessings that they had received were not to be hoarded but were to be shared. The source of their blessings was not within but came from God who loves the lost. To have received the blessing of salvation was not the object of the blessing. God's purpose would be realized when they became a channel of that

blessing to others. This is the principle of every blessing that we receive from the heavenly Father. We receive from Him His gifts of grace, not so that we can build some great edifice with our name on it, but so that we can share the gifts and so that they can be multiplied in the lives of others. "Freely you have received, freely give."

"And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." Think of the Old Testament figures who held the blessing. It was an expression of their faith when they accepted the blessing as that which belonged to them and which was their

responsibility to pass on. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph each solemnly passed on the blessing to their heirs. We have ourselves entered into the relationship of blessing through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not to be the end of the blessing but a channel of that blessing to others. The disciples were to give a peace blessing to the homes that received them but to withhold such a blessing from the homes that rejected them. Coming from a ministering Christian, the words, "May the Lord bless you." are not trite or empty of meaning. No, they are powerful words that pack a punch. Your words of blessing can direct the grace of God.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." These words represent a reality check. The world is not full of well meaning people. There are many who are evil and who intend evil toward the devoted followers of the Lord Jesus. We are sheep in the sense that we have no offensive weapons. We have no ill will toward anyone and wish for everyone the grace of salvation. If there are those who seek our harm then we wish for them the grace of salvation which, should they receive it, would bring them to a place where they would no longer wish us harm. But, in the real world, not all come to Christ and among those who reject the Savior there are some who seek the harm of the saved. In these circumstances Jesus wants us to "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The serpent was wise enough to deceive Eve in the garden. This is no license to practice deceit but an admonition to be more aware than our adversaries of the issues that are at hand and thus better prepared for the conflict. The dove is a symbol of peace. It represents

goodwill. In the end, we want to be agents of God's love with goodwill for all. There will be some former wolves in the kingdom - for example, the Apostle Paul for one.

"But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." Rush Limbaugh says that he never prepares a speech but that his love for conservatism is so deep and his passion to communicate this message so strong that all he has to do when giving a speech is to just speak from his heart. How much more should our hearts be overflowing with the love of Christ. Given a chance to share that love, we speak from the heart.

This is not to belittle the struggle of so many when it comes to public speaking. And, there are many circumstances when the answer is not no preparation. I carefully prepare every sermon and you know that I do not say the same thing every week. Every sermon has its own specific object as an expression of what I understand God to be saying to us in a particular Scripture passage. But this is what often happens, I will learn from my own sermon as I am giving it, because the Holy Spirit will lead me to say things that I have never thought of before. They come as the sermon happens.

Let me also give this tip, nervousness when speaking is often caused by the distracting concern that we have about how we or what we are saying will be received by the audience. I have found that nerves disappear when my focus is on the message and on the help that it can be to the people. Give yourself completely to the message and then your nerves will get out of the way.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher, and a servant like his master." Jesus was speaking to the resistance that He encountered to His message and to the enmity of those who rejected Him. Ultimately, these disciples to whom Jesus was speaking would watch as He was crucified. He told them on another occasion, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world,

but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also." Of the 12, we believe that only John died a natural death and he spent his final years in exile. All of this to say that we should never be surprised by trouble. Jesus has called us to take up our cross and follow Him. If you feel as if the cross is not for you, then remember that "a disciple is not above his teacher nor is a servant greater than his master."

"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." We often feel as though our lives are out of control. Events can snowball and we find ourselves lost in the blizzard. These are secular conclusions. God is not in this kind of thinking. He is always present. He is omnipotent. Nothing escapes from His all seeing eyes and all hearing ears. Evil is sometimes so loud, so dominant that God is forgotten. People of faith sometimes panic. But God knows. It's ok. His love is deeper and stronger than any crisis. Any natural or human or devilish threat is nothing compared to the promise and power of God. So, trust in His loving care. Even when you cannot see Him, know that He is there.