

## JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

Matthew 10:1-42

Key verse: 10:1

“He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”

In today's passage, Jesus calls his twelve disciples and sends them out on a short term mission trip. The mission field is the lost souls of Israel. It was the disciples' first chance to go out into the world and put Jesus' teachings into practice. But what should they do? Jesus gave very detailed instructions about what to do and what to expect. Jesus gave them all necessary preparations, including the authority from God to go out. As we study this passage, I pray we may refresh our calling as Jesus' disciples and grow to be courageous disciples who have absolute faith in Jesus.

Look at verse 1. “He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” This event takes place after Jesus asked the disciples to pray for the Lord to send out harvest workers. (Matt 9:38) When Jesus saw all the people suffering from sin in Israel, he had great compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus came as the Good Shepherd to lead wandering people back to God. However Jesus' time on earth would be limited. So it was God's plan to raise up Jesus-like shepherds who could tend to wandering sheep after Jesus.

Verse 1 begins, “He called his twelve disciples...” It is a mystery why Jesus chose twelve people. Historically, this number was significant because it represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus wanted to reach out to the whole world (Matt 28) but he didn't choose a lot of people. This was God's wisdom. Sometimes we may feel that serving only a handful of people with God's words and prayer is insignificant. However, to Jesus raising twelve disciples was very important, and it was one of the main works during his ministry. Crowds come and go, but disciples of Jesus impact the world for generations to come.

“He called” means that Jesus called them. Being called as Jesus' disciple doesn't depend on our own efforts or zeal. It originates in Jesus' heart and compassion for the lost world. So being called as Jesus' disciple is the one-sided grace of God which we should always be thankful for. While we were still sinners, Christ called us through Bible teachers and saved us.

The word “disciple” means learner. In those days disciples committed themselves to a

teacher to follow him and learn from him. They didn't study for only a few hours a day. Instead, they lived with their teacher and shared life together. In this way, Jesus' disciples learned more than subjects and techniques. They learned the inner heart of Jesus. They learned to think like him. They learned to live like him. They learned to share like him. Although the disciples were all ordinary people from various backgrounds, Jesus had vision to make them great and united. The more time we spend in intimate fellowship with Jesus, the more we become like him.

So what should the disciples do? Verse one says, “[he] gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” Their main work would include driving out evil spirits and healing. Of course, this is work which only God can do. The world has seen many smart people such as Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking. However, none of them could drive out the evil spirits in people. Evil spirits are Satan's agents. They are stronger than people. They work to rob the joy and peace from our lives. I know one young man who has been suffering from evil spirits for several years. Although he is young and a very able person, he became paralyzed because of lustful sin. Even though he wants to find a job and study hard, he has no power or motivation to do so. Even worse, he became very depressed and lonely and can't make friends with others. He feels trapped like a prisoner in his situation. But the situation isn't the problem. It is a sin problem. May God help us to pray for this man until Jesus sets him free by his power and he gets healed. Amen!

Look at verses 5-6. “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.” Jesus' disciples can't just go wherever they please. They must follow God's leading and instructions very carefully. This verse doesn't mean that Jesus didn't care about the Gentiles or the towns of Samaria. In fact, Jesus later gives instructions about what to expect when they are sent out to these regions. (Matt 10:18-19) More than anything, Jesus wanted to teach the disciples obedience to his words. When we think about Japanese mission, there seem to be many places we can go. For example, large cities have more business opportunities and better schools for children. However, Jesus' disciples shouldn't follow their own plans or ideas. They must obey Jesus and stay or go where Jesus calls them.

In verse 7, Jesus said, “preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near.” The kingdom of heaven was near because Jesus was with them. Through his death on the cross, Jesus would open the door to the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. When we believe in Jesus, the kingdom of God is born in our hearts and we are given a free ticket to enter heaven when Jesus returns. When we think about our lives, it's possible we'll live for at most 60 more years. Then we will sleep until Jesus returns. The kingdom of heaven is near.

The message about God's kingdom should not be taught quietly or only in a church. The disciples should share it wherever they go. They should share it on the streets. They should share it in restaurants. They should share it with friends, workmates, children, in the park, and when they ride public transportation. Proclaiming the message of salvation is not just a weekend job. It is our lifestyle. Jesus said it should be proclaimed from the rooftops. (Matt 10:27)

Of course, preaching boldly like this isn't easy for many people. Satan often plants fear in our hearts or robs us of our compassion for others. When we read this passage carefully, we see that the main topic Jesus addresses in sending out the disciples is their fear. Jesus repeats four times not to worry and not to fear men (19, 26, 28, 31). Satan's main work is to plant fear or doubt in people. We fear rejection. We fear being mocked by others. We fear losing things such as our friends, family, jobs, or personal time. However, Jesus said not to fear. When we feel fear in our hearts, we must fight to overcome it. We must learn to live by faith in Jesus alone. We must learn to obey Jesus absolutely in all circumstances.

In the beginning, Jesus' disciples couldn't overcome their fear. For example, before Jesus' cross, Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times. When Peter relied on his own strength, he couldn't conquer the fear problem. But through several failures, he became humble and learned to trust in Jesus. When we read the Book of Acts, we see that Peter was completely changed. He stepped up as a leader and proclaimed boldly about Jesus. He healed many people including even raising dead people to life, by using Jesus' name with confidence. Jesus' disciples don't do the work by themselves. They do all things through faith in the power and love of Jesus.

Since coming to Japan, I learned more about my fear problem. It is not easy to preach about Jesus among unbelievers. Even praying before others in the workplace is a hard thing to do. But Jesus said, "don't be afraid." Although Jesus sent out the disciples, actually they didn't go by themselves. Jesus gave them authority. This means the Spirit of Jesus went with them. They could drive out demons because Jesus was with them. They could heal others because Jesus was with them. Although we can't see Jesus, he is with us until the very end of the age.

When we were in Chicago, I remember Sarah Barry told us a story about her mission life in Korea. In those days, taking airplanes wasn't so popular so she needed to travel by ship from America to Korea. The trip took a long time. While on the boat, she wondered why she was going to Korea and she realized it was because Jesus was sending her. There was no other reason. Like Jesus called his disciples and told them to go to the lost people of Israel, so Jesus had called her to go from America to Korea. In the same way, Jesus called us to

Japan. We are here because of Jesus. We are in Oita because of Jesus. I am working in a computer company because of Jesus. We belong to Jesus. Jesus wants to use us as bold witnesses. Jesus wants to help us overcome the fear problem and be spiritual victors. The secret is to abide in Jesus and be Jesus' disciple day by day.

Look at verse 32. "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven." Acknowledging Jesus before men means to share about Jesus. It is to share about Jesus' ministry. It is to share our personal testimony of how Jesus changed our lives. People will have different reactions. However, changing how people react isn't our job. Our job is to share about Christ and keep moving on until we find people who are hungry to hear the gospel message and make an environment where Jesus can raise them as disciples.

Look at verses 37-38. "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Being a disciple of Jesus requires total commitment to Jesus. We must love Jesus first, with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. Jesus didn't say we shouldn't love others. Jesus meant the priority must be on him.

Jesus also said that disciples must carry their cross and follow Jesus. The cross was God's mission for Jesus. So carrying our cross means to obey God's mission for our life. A cross is heavy. Carrying it can be very difficult and sometimes it feels like dropping it and living without it would be easier. However, Jesus said that whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it. It means that those who follow Jesus faithfully to the end will get a great reward. It is a life with God in this world and in the paradise to come!

Look at verse 42. "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Jesus' disciples should be compassionate toward the needy. In this world, there are many people who lack even basic food and drink. Many have no homes and suffer from diseases. Especially in the hard economy, there are several people even in Oita who need basic support. Although we don't have much, when we give freely what we have, we show the merciful love of God and can win others for Christ.

In today's passage, we learned many things about what it means to be Jesus' disciple. Jesus' disciples learn from Jesus. They obey Jesus. They live like Jesus and do the same things Jesus did. May God help us to overcome fear and be obedient disciples of Jesus who live by faith.