

September 6, 2026
Pursuing the Kingdom: Sent into the Harvest
Matthew 10:1-15
Vernon Advent Christian Church

There is a moment in every situation whether at work, at home, or even in the church when talking about doing something has to eventually give way to actually getting the job done. As the old saying goes, "Talk is cheap." You can sit around a table and make plans, develop strategies and talk about how important the work is. But eventually someone has to stand up, walk out the door and actually get the work done.

That is exactly where we find ourselves at the beginning of Matthew 10. If you remember, at the end of ch. 9, Jesus looked at the crowds and said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." And He told His disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers.

And there's an important transition going on here. You see up to this point, Jesus is the One that has been doing the ministry. He has been traveling through the cities and villages, teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction. He sees the crowds and has compassion on them. Then He tells His disciples to pray for laborers. And, now in chapter 10, Jesus answers their prayers by taking those very disciples and sending them out into the harvest. In other words, the people who were praying for laborers become the laborers.

Now, that ought to get our attention because it tells us something about pursuing the kingdom of God. Following Jesus is not simply about receiving from Him. It is also about being sent out. We come to Christ by faith, but then Christ sends us out with the same gospel message that was given to us. We experience His grace, and then we become the instruments through which His grace reaches others.

And so, in our passage today, the disciples are about to discover that pursuing the kingdom means going where Jesus sends them, saying what Jesus gives them to say, depending upon what Jesus provides and trusting Jesus with the results. So let's turn our attention to Matthew 10. If you're able, please stand with me as I read the word of God.
[Read Passage]

Now, ch. 10 starts right where we left off last week with Jesus calling His twelve disciples and giving them authority. The number twelve is significant because it intentionally recalls the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus is symbolically establishing a renewed people of God around Himself. These twelve men are going to become foundational witnesses to His kingdom.

There are four different lists of the twelve disciples in the New Testament. Here in Matthew 10:2-4, and also in Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:13-16 and Acts 1:13. And in these lists, Peter is always listed first and Judas is always last. And all the lists are ordered in such a way that suggests that they were arranged in three groups of four, each with a leader. John MacArthur makes this point in his book, "12 Ordinary Men."

But the list of names is fascinating because these men are anything but identical. Simon Peter is there, along with his brother Andrew. We also see James and John the sons

of Zebedee. Sibling rivalry any one? Also named are Matthew the tax collector and the author of this book is also named and Simon the Zealot.

And let's just think about that combination for a moment. Matthew was a despised tax collector who worked with the Romans to heavily tax his fellow Jews. Simon the Zealot, on the other hand, was associated with a movement that wanted to overthrow the Romans and actively sought out ways to do so by assassinations and small uprisings. And so, one man worked within the Roman system. Another wanted to overthrow it. And Jesus calls them both. That is what Jesus does. But the important thing to remember is Matthew didn't remain a tax collector and Simon didn't remain a zealot. They had both been transformed by the radical grace of Jesus.

You see, the world tends to divide people according to political positions, economic status, education, personality, background, and social identity. But Jesus creates a new community centered on Himself. The church isn't a gathering of people who naturally agree about everything. The church is a gathering of people who have been brought together by the grace of Christ, not who we once were and becoming more and more like Jesus together.

And perhaps one of the first lessons we need to hear is this. Jesus doesn't call perfect people, He calls available people. If Jesus only used perfect people, none of the disciples would have been chosen and neither would any of us. Think about the people God used throughout Scripture. Moses had excuses. David, his failures. Jeremiah felt that he was too young and inadequate. Peter denied Jesus. Paul persecuted the church. Yet God worked through all of them. And so, the issue is not whether you are impressive enough for God. The issue is whether you are willing to trust the One who called you and are you willing to give up trying to build your own kingdom and follow Him and His.

So, Jesus calls ordinary people to participate in extraordinary kingdom work. But notice something else. He doesn't simply call them, He equips them. Matthew says Jesus gave them authority. That means Jesus never sends His followers into the mission field saying, "Good luck. I hope you can figure this out." He gives them what they need for the assignment He has given them.

Now, that doesn't mean ministry will always be easy. It doesn't mean we will always feel confident. It doesn't even mean we will never be afraid. It means that our adequacy ultimately comes from Christ. Paul would later make this point beautifully in 2 Cor. 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency (or our adequacy) is from God."

And that is good news. Because if the success of the kingdom depended upon our abilities, we would have every reason to be afraid. But the kingdom belongs to Jesus and we are simply His servants.

So Jesus calls ordinary people and gives them authority. But now He gives them a specific assignment. And as we look at vs. 5-8, we discover that Jesus sends His people with a message that cannot be separated from His mission.

Matthew says in vs. 5, "These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them..." First, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans..." This is the pattern of the gospel, it is for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16). Later, the gospel would go to both the Samaritans and the Gentiles, and ultimately to the whole world, but it

had to begin with the lost sheep of the house of Israel. There was certainly enough work to do among the lost sheep of the house of Israel to keep the twelve busy until God directly commanded them to expand their ministry following Pentecost and the birth of the Church.

Now, that word “sent” is important. The word “apostle” means “sent one” and carries the idea of someone who is sent as a representative. The disciples are not going out on their own mission. They are going on a mission that Jesus has given to them and that distinction matters.

We live in a world where people are encouraged to build their own brand, establish their own platform, develop their own message and promote their own identity. But being a follower of Jesus isn't about building our own kingdom. It's about representing His kingdom.

And Jesus not only tells them where to go but He also gives them the message they are to share. In vs. 7 He says, “And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” That is to be their message. Notice that Jesus doesn't tell them to invent something new. He tells them to preach what He has already proclaimed.

And the message is about the kingdom, the fact that God's reign has broken into human history through Jesus. The King has arrived and the people need to respond with repentance. That was the message of John the Baptist in ch. 3 leading up to the introduction of Jesus and His baptism. And that was the message of Jesus Himself, beginning in ch. 4, and continuing on up to this point. And now that message has been passed onto His disciples by the authority of Jesus.

And brothers and sisters, the church today has been given that same message. We aren't called to create a gospel that is more comfortable for our culture. We are called to faithfully proclaim the gospel we have received. We can change our methods. We can change our music. We can change the way we communicate. We can even use different technology. But we cannot change the message.

People still need to hear that Jesus Christ is Lord, that humanity is separated from God because of sin, that Christ died for our sins, that He rose again and that forgiveness and eternal life are found only through faith in Him. That is the message of the gospel the world desperately needs to hear.

And notice that the message is to be accompanied by miracles. In vs. 8, Jesus says to the disciples, go and “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, [and] cast out demons...” These miracles authenticated their ministry as representatives of Christ and demonstrated the arrival of God's kingdom. Don't get it twisted. The miracles were never meant to replace the message. But they pointed toward the truth of the message.

When Jesus healed people He wasn't simply trying to make sick people feel better. He was demonstrating that God's reign was breaking into a world damaged by sin. Every healing was a glimpse of the restoration that God's kingdom will ultimately bring, a day coming soon when there will be no more crying, pain or death. Every demon cast out was a glimpse of the defeat of Satan. Every person raised from the dead was a glimpse of the resurrection. The miracles pointed beyond themselves and to the King Himself.

So, now the disciples have their mission and their message. But then Jesus teaches them something equally important, and that is how they are to carry that message. And His instructions are surprisingly challenging.

Jesus says beginning at the end vs. 8, "You received without paying; give without pay." He then goes on to tell them not to acquire gold, silver, or copper, not to take a bag, not to take extra clothing, and not to take extra provisions for the journey.

Why? Because Jesus is teaching them dependence. He is telling them, in effect, "You are going to have to trust me." Now, we need to recognize that this was a specific command for this particular mission, but the principle behind it remains important.

We are often tempted to trust what we can see. We trust our bank account, our education, our experience, our connections and our plans. And there's nothing inherently wrong with having resources. The problem comes when these resources become our security.

Jesus is teaching His disciples that the mission that He has given to them cannot ultimately depend upon human means or effort. If God sends you, God will provide what you need to accomplish what He has called you to do. Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China, once famously said, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply."

And that's a powerful truth. It doesn't mean we should be irresponsible or careless. It means we should never confuse our resources with THE source. Your paycheck is not your ultimate source. And your abilities are not your ultimate source. God is. And when Jesus sends His disciples into the harvest, He wants them to learn that dependence. You see, there's a difference between using our resources and trusting our resources. We should use what God provides, of course. But we are not to trust in them. We are to trust in the God who provides them.

But dependence on God doesn't mean the mission will always be welcomed. And Jesus prepares His disciples for that reality next. He goes on to tell them how to respond when people receive the message and how to respond when they reject it.

In vs. 11, Jesus tells the disciples to enter a town and if they find someone worthy who will welcome them, then enter that house and greet it. If the household is worthy, their peace will rest upon it. If not, they are to withdraw that peace.

Here, the word "worthy" comes from the Greek word *axios*, which refers, in this case, to "someone of good character and repute, who is trustworthy...and sympathetic to the evangelistic cause." (Hermeneutics Stack Exchange) So, when Jesus tells the disciples to search for a "worthy" person in a town to stay with, He means someone who is open and ready to welcome them and their message. And isn't that great, when we meet someone and they are open to hearing about the gospel.

But then Jesus says something striking, "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...for it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town." This is Jesus teaching His disciples that faithfulness does not require total acceptance.

And that's important because we often measure success incorrectly. We think, "If someone accepts the message, I must be doing something right." But Jesus never promised that everyone would accept the good news. In fact, He specifically prepares His disciples for rejection. Some will listen but others will reject them and oppose them.

The disciples are not responsible for controlling the response. They are responsible for faithfully delivering the message. And that's freeing. Because if you think your job is to make everyone believe, you will carry a burden God never gave you. Our job is to be faithful.

Think about a farmer during planting season. The farmer can prepare the soil. He can plant the seeds. He can water. He can cultivate. But ultimately, he cannot force the seed to grow. In the same way, we proclaim the gospel. We love people. We answer questions. We pray. We invite. We serve. But only God can change the heart of a person.

That means rejection doesn't necessarily mean failure. Sometimes you can share the gospel faithfully and someone says no. Sometimes you can invite someone to church and they decline the invitation. Sometimes you can explain your faith and someone mocks you for it. Don't confuse rejection with failure. Faithfulness is what's deemed success in the kingdom. Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." And that's our role. Plant, water and then trust God. The only failure on our part would be the failure to plant in the first place. For, unplanted seeds never grow. So we need to be faithful in share the gospel and planting the seeds of faith.

Now, notice that Jesus tells them to shake the dust from their feet. Culturally, this was a symbolic act of judgment, communicating that the messengers had faithfully delivered their message and that the responsibility now rested with those who rejected it.

And Jesus takes rejection seriously. The gospel is an invitation, but it is also a summons from the King. There is grace in the gospel, yes, but there is also accountability. Every person must ultimately respond to Jesus. Every person must accept Jesus and His salvation or reject Him and their eternity hangs in the place. That is why we should never treat sharing the gospel casually. When we tell someone about Christ, we aren't simply offering another opinion. We are pointing them to Jesus, the only One who can save them from an eternal Hell, separated from God.

Well, Jesus has now given His disciples the mission and its message, how to depend on Him and how to respond when people accept or reject the message. But there is one final principle running through all of these instructions. And that is that the mission is urgent.

Jesus tells the disciples to proclaim that the kingdom is "at hand." There is urgency here. The King has come and people need to know. Think back to Matthew 9. Jesus looked at the crowds and saw sheep without a shepherd. Then He said the harvest was plentiful. Now the laborers are being sent.

When we see people the way Jesus sees them, we won't be content to leave them without the gospel. We won't simply complain about the culture or talk about how bad things are. We'll ask, "What can I do to point people to Jesus?" There is a difference between complaining about darkness and carrying a light into the darkness. And the church has been called to carry that light, the light of Christ.

Maybe God has placed you exactly where you are for that purpose. Brothers and sisters, your workplace is your mission field. Your neighbors are your mission field. Your family is your mission field. The people you encounter at the grocery store, the gym, the coffee shop, or the ball field are all part of the harvest God has placed around you.

You may think your daily routine is ordinary. But there is nothing ordinary about being a follower of Jesus living on mission. Every day presents opportunities. The question

is whether we recognize them or not. And whether we are willing to live our lives on mission for God and His kingdom or whether we will continue to live our own lives for our own selfish gain. Brothers and sisters, may we repent and confess how woefully short we have fallen in this area of sharing the gospel and commit ourselves to pursuing God's kingdom first and not our own for the time is running short.

So, how do we apply this passage practically to our lives? First, we need to remember that, as believers, we are being sent out as representatives of Jesus. If you belong to Christ, you have been called to a mission. To do otherwise is to be disobedient. You aren't simply living for your career, your comfort, your family or your retirement. Those things matter, but they are not the ultimate purpose of your life. You belong to the King. And the King is sending us out with the message of salvation.

Second, it's important to know the message of salvation. You cannot proclaim what you don't know yourself. Know the gospel. Know what Jesus has done. Know how to explain the hope you have in Him. You don't need to be a theologian, but you should be able to tell someone why you trust Jesus.

Third, depend upon God. Don't wait until you feel completely qualified. Don't wait until you have every answer. Don't wait until you have the perfect opportunity. Because that day will never come. Trust God with what you have. Remember the disciples. They were just 12 ordinary men, but they were sent out with the authority of Jesus.

Lastly, the time is now. There's urgency to the message. There is coming a day when the Lord Jesus will come again to gather His people into the fully consummated kingdom. And when that day comes, it will be too late for those who have rejected His offer of salvation. Again, we can't force anyone to believe. But we can faithfully share the good news of the gospel and trust God with the results.

Matthew 10 begins with twelve ordinary people being called by Jesus and sent into the harvest. They didn't know everything. They weren't perfect. They didn't have unlimited resources. But they had something more important. They had Jesus. And He was enough.

Perhaps today you need to hear the words of Jesus differently. Maybe you've been thinking, "Someone else can do that." "Someone else can share the gospel." "Someone else can serve." "Someone else can teach." "Someone else can reach my neighbor."

But Jesus looks at His disciples and says, "Go." The harvest is still plentiful. The world is still filled with people who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. There are still people who need hope. There are still people who need forgiveness. There are still people who need to hear that Jesus saves. And, so, Jesus is still sending out His people.

So as we continue pursuing the kingdom of God, let us not simply pursue the blessings of the King. Let us pursue the mission of the King. Let us go where He sends us. Let us say what He has given us to say. Let us depend upon what He provides. Let us love the people He puts in our path. And let us leave the results in His hands. Because ultimately, this isn't our mission. It is His. We are simply the laborers. The harvest belongs to Him. The message belongs to Him. The authority belongs to Him. And the glory belongs to Him. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for Lord's Table.

Heavenly Father, thank You for calling us to be part of Your kingdom and for entrusting us with the good news of the gospel. Thank You that You don't call perfect people, but ordinary people whom You equip and empower for Your purposes.

Give us the compassion of Jesus for those who are lost and hurting. Give us courage to share the gospel and faith to trust You with the results. Keep us from depending upon our own strength and teach us to depend completely upon You.

May we pursue Your kingdom not simply by following Jesus for what He can give us, but by following Him wherever He sends us. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.