

Matthew 10:11-23 – “Know Before You Go”

We’re looking at this section in Matthew where Jesus is sending out the twelve disciples, and they’re referred to as apostles in Matthew 10:2 because they are being commissioned and empowered to take the message of Jesus to their surroundings.

And remember, this is a time where the ministry of Jesus is taking a noticeable shift. The opposition that He is going to face is going to increase and lead to the very reason Jesus ultimately came – to die for our sins. So as the opposition increases, Jesus begins to prepare His disciples to be a big part of the gospel going forth.

Last week we saw that this first mission Jesus was sending the 12 on was to be a faith building mission. They were to take no money; they weren’t to take extra baggage and extra clothes (this would have been a hard one for me. I’m notorious for over packing). They were to learn that their provision would come along the way as they stepped out in faith and trust of God’s care.

- Now remember, this is not our marching orders always and forever. Luke 22 reminds us that Jesus told His disciples to be prepared with these things because that was a different phase of ministry that would happen in Jesus’ absence.
- Nevertheless, there will be times God asks us to step out in faith and trust Him. We may not see how everything is going to come together, but God already has it all put together. And He wants us to simply see the blessing of walking by faith and seeing His provision fall into place.

Now as we’ll see as we go through this section, Jesus is calling them to trust God for a number of things because the mission is not always going to be easy.

When we look into various vacation packages or hotels there’s often a “know before you go” section that fills you in on what you need to be prepared for your trip. This is essentially what Jesus is doing with His disciples. And He’s not holding anything back. He’s putting it all on the table.

1. Conduct of the Messenger – 10:11-15

10:11 - *Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.*

Before they were to go out, they were to do a little homework before just booking a room at the Motel 6 in a particular village. They were to begin to get a sense what the people are like, and what the spiritual climate is like.

They were to find lodging with those who were worthy (***inquire who in it is worthy...***). What made one worthy, what were they to look for?

- This would have been those that had their hearts opened to the message of Jesus and as a result would have opened their homes to His messengers.

When you find a place like this, stay there until you leave that area.

- In other words, as you go about your mission and meet other people, don't be trying to get better accommodations or join with people you think are going to feed you better.
- "The messengers of Christ must never give the impression that they court people for the sake of material things, and that their movements are dictated by the demands of their own comfort."¹
- So, once you've found a place that will take you in and who will be a support to you, remain there as a matter of courtesy. Don't move about from home to home trying to upgrade your conditions.

10:12-13 - *And when you go into a household, greet it. ¹³ If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

These verses fill in a little more the ideas of what verse 11 spoke of. When one of the apostles were welcomed into a household, they were to greet it. Be warm and welcoming yourself in other words. Don't just ask where your room is and then go hide out in there the whole time.

The idea behind greeting someone was to do so joyfully.

- Isn't this the kind of conduct that should be becoming of Christians. We should leave people better off than they were before we came.
- Christians need to be winsome and not leave people wincing after we've been with them.

Now, if the house that welcomes you is worthy, let your peace be on it. This is the idea of the Hebrew *shalom*, meaning to make prosperous and blessed. Be a blessing and enrich their lives.

¹ Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Third Ed., p. 427). Saint Andrew Press.

But if that home is not worthy and they want nothing to do with you or the good news, then go. Don't stick around to try and keep the peace, let that peace return to you (which will be the natural byproduct of leaving that residence). They're going to miss out on the enrichment that your life in Christ would bring them.

Now keep in mind, these were instructions given specifically for the disciples at this time. This is not the way we are to conduct ourselves in the sense that we don't just look for **worthy** recipients. We share the gospel with all people. And the gospel we preach is different than what they were commissioned to share. They preached the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We preach the gospel of Jesus Christ – crucified for your sin but risen again for your eternal life with Him. Believe on Him!

- Though there are spiritual principles to learn from in this passage, these instructions are not to be followed verbatim as it's intended for the twelve.

10:14 - *And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.*

This was a common practice in this day. Before coming into Jerusalem, Jews would take their sandals off and shake the dust from them in case they had walked through a Gentile area. They didn't want to bring Gentile dirt into the holy city of Jerusalem. This was an act of separation.

In the same way, the apostles would be separating themselves from those who didn't want anything to do with Jesus.

- This would have been a hard thing for these Jewish communities to see because it would have been an indictment on them of their polluted and pagan position. The same thing they had done to others outside the fold of God.

And those that reject Jesus bring judgment on themselves. That's what the next verse states...

10:15 - *Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!*

Sodom and Gomorrah stands as the picture of immorality and wickedness. Nobody really questioned the judgment they received. Yet Jesus says something very strong here, their judgment will pale in comparison to the judgment coming upon the cities that reject these apostles and more so, reject Jesus.

“This is a doctrine fearfully overlooked, and one that deserves serious consideration. Men are apt to forget that it does not require great open sins to be sinned in order to ruin a soul forever. They have only to go on hearing without believing, listening without repenting, going to church without going to Christ, and by and by they will find themselves in hell! We will all be judged according to our light; we will have to give account of our use of religious privileges: to hear of the “great salvation” (Hebrews 2:3) and yet neglect it, is one of the worst sins man can commit (John 16:9).”²

This is ultimately what God is calling us to, to believe in His Son who provides life. Don't reject such an incredible gift, your very life is hinging on that decision.

2. Challenge for the Messenger – 10:16-23

10:16 - “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

Jesus is very honest with His apostles of what they can expect as they go about preaching the kingdom of heaven. They can expect to feel like prey among predators. They're going to have big targets on their back. They're not always going to be welcomed in with open arms and received favorably.

These apostles need to be wise and they need to be vigilant knowing the kind of danger that awaits them.

- They're not sheep getting sent among other sheep. They're going to be sent to people that will be irritated, bothered, and offended by this message. And their response is not just going to be ignore the message, it will be to attack the messenger.

Under that sort of opposition, they will need to **be wise as serpents and harmless as doves**. What does that look like?

- To be wise as serpents meant to be prudent and shrewd. Be aware that you'll be in enemy territory, so act wisely! Don't be a dumb sheep that walks up to a wolf asking, ‘Umm, you're not going to eat me are you?’
- But in your shrewdness and prudence you're not to be cunning or deceptive. This is what's implied with being harmless as doves. It means they are to be innocent. They're not to be like the cunning serpent in the garden relying on trickery and deception.

² Ryle, J. C. (1993). *Matthew* (pp. 72–73). Crossway Books.

- Be wise and be careful to avoid conflict, but be innocent and harmless as a dove when they do come. Don't be the instigator of these conflicts.

10:17-18 - *But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.*

These difficulties they will face will come from people in positions of authority. Both religious and civil. Those that should be coming to their aid and preserving peace will be the ones carrying out the attacks against them.

- There's no account of this happening to the apostles on this initial mission, but we know this is what they faced after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The book of Acts details many incidences where the apostles were brought before governors and kings.
- And these moments are not times to cause us to think that God is losing in the battle between good and evil. God actually allows these things. Why? Because opposition brings opportunity. The apostles are going to have an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to those that could have the greatest influence.
- We see this in the life of Paul through the book of Acts. In fact, Jesus let him know right at his conversion that this would be a role he would carry out: **Acts 9:15–16**, *"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."*
- Every suffering, opposition, and persecution is an opportunity to be used for the Lord's glory.

10:19-20 - *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; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

Here's some comfort for us in an otherwise very uncomfortable scenario. In times of persecution, you will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to endure. You may not have planned out what you're going to say but trust the Holy Spirit to speak through you and give you the strength to stand up under scrutiny.

When you read about some of the martyrs and the way they were able to face heavy persecution as such a witness of the grace of God, it inspires you. We often wonder if we would ever be able to do that. You may think, *I don't have it in*

me!’ But that’s ok, God’s not dependent on what’s in you, He will rather fill you with His Spirit and will equip you to stand for Him and speak what He leads you to speak.

What a great way to live – living dependent on the Spirit to lead us and use us.

10:21-22 - “Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Not only will we face opposition and persecution from governing authorities, we will also experience this from personal relationships, even our closest family. Following Jesus will result in division. Family members will turn on you. But don’t take this personally. Their opposition and hatred will stem from their hatred of Jesus. But the question begs to be asked, ‘Do you love Jesus more than these? Do you love Jesus more than life itself?’

Only Jesus can offer and provide life for us.

We love to be loved. We love to be accepted. But have you counted the cost of what living for Jesus will be like? You’ll be hated **by all!** It’s not always going to be a life of comfort. But we don’t go through any of this in vain! There’s a reward waiting. **He who endures to the end will be saved.**

- Now this is not implying that it’s your enduring that saves you. Salvation is a free gift, it’s not a result of a work we must do. So, this is not about surviving to be saved, rather this endurance proves you are saved.
- This verse is also in Matthew 24:13 where it speaks of the faithful remnant of Jews in the Tribulation who do not waiver in their faith in Jesus during persecution.
- Tribulation is temporary, so endure. You can endure because you know you’ll eventually come out the other side, which for the believer is a win win!

10:23 - When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

We’re not required to beat people into submission. If they are totally against you, move on. There’s lots of ground to cover.

Don’t let persecution bring you down or doubt the mission. It’s been the staple of the church from the beginning and it’s persecution that ultimately caused the gospel to spread in an even greater way.

- In fact, it's been said that the church is always at its strongest when persecution is at its greatest.
- And the church is always at its weakest when its safety and comfort are at its greatest.

The Lord has always sovereignly used persecution in the past to accomplish His purposes and He will continue to allow it and use it in the times we live to further His purposes.

If the early church experienced it, why should we be exempt? In fact, we should expect it all the more as the world increases in its hatred of Jesus and all things Christian.

But don't lose heart, *"be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor 15:58).

If Jesus received this sort of treatment, should we as followers of Jesus not expect the same? This is what Jesus will address next when He says *a disciple is not above his teacher* (vs. 24).

Tradition tells us what happened to the twelve disciples:

- Only one, the Apostle **John**, died of natural causes. And that was only after the Emperor Domitian tried to boil him in boiling oil. God miraculously delivered him.
- **Peter** was crucified in Rome on an upside down cross.
- **James** was beheaded in Jerusalem.
- **Andrew** was crucified in Greece on a cross in the shape of an "X".
- **Philip** was hanged in Asia Minor.
- **Bartholomew** or Nathaniel was skinned alive and beheaded in Armenia.
- **Matthew** was slain with a sword in Ethiopia.
- **Thomas** was impaled with a lance while he was preaching in India.
- The other **James** was thrown from the Jewish Temple and stoned to death.
- **Thaddaeus** was shot with arrows in Mesopotamia.
- And **Simon** the Zealot was attacked by a mob near the Persian Gulf.