

Matthew 10 – The Sermon on Mission

Read vv1-4.

Notice that they are called "disciples" and "apostles".

What do you know about the 12 apostles? What sets them apart from the rest of Jesus' disciples?

Read vv5-42

Themes

In broad terms, what is the passage about?

- Evangelism (preaching the gospel)
- Delegation (Jesus passing on his power/authority to do miracles)
- Rejection and Persecution (How should we expect people to respond to the message, and what should be the counter-response to rejection or abuse)
- Responsibility (God will deal those who reject the gospel. The apostles can have a clear conscience and move on).
- Reassurance (Persecution brings fear, but God promises to be with the disciples, to endorse them, and the deal with those who reject them. If they choose Christ, they are making the worthy choice)

Tricky bits.

Which bits are confusing, unclear, or difficult?

- V22 "The one who endures to the end will be saved"
Is this implying to us that if we give in under the persecution, that God will not forgive our sins or give us a place in heaven? We might read this as "work-based" salvation, that seems contrary to the "faith-based" salvation we read about elsewhere.
 - Three words need careful consideration in the context of the passage and scripture. What does it mean to "endure"? What is "the end"? And what does it mean to be "saved"?

- V26-27 "for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops."

What does this mean?

- On its own, v27 sounds like "whatever Christ has taught us privately concerning the gospel should be made known to the world", but in the context, v26 sounds more like "Whoever mistreats or rejects you will be exposed in the day of judgement". Are verses 26 and 27 talking about two different things, or have misunderstood one or both of them?
- V28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."
As before, should this cause disciples to fear being cast into hell?
- V41 "The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward... "
Does this also imply a works-based salvation where people are rewarded with heaven because they did good to someone?

The critical question

One massive question of interpretation looms over the whole sermon. Are these instructions relevant only the immediate historical mission of the 12 disciples? Or should we take these instructions as relevant to the mission of the whole church in our own day?

- Compare the instruction to only speak to Israel (the Jews) in vv5-6 with the later command to go to all nations (28:19-20).
- Consider that the persecution in vv17-18, 21-22 is extreme, and is not something we see in the gospels against the disciples. We do see this unfolding after the day of Pentecost throughout the history of the church in many places. Note also that gentiles are again mentioned (v18) despite the previous section limiting the mission to the Jews.
- Note the climactic (we might say apocalyptic) character of the words "until the Son of Man comes" (for background to the expression "son of Man", read Daniel 7:13-14). Does this language fit with a historical fulfillment in the life of Jesus as he travelled over Israel. Do we have poetic license to see the expression "gone through all the towns of Israel" as a description of an ongoing mission in our day to the Jews scattered around the world? Or does it anticipate a time in the future when the gospel will again be preached over the towns and cities in the land of Israel just before Christ comes?

A Dispensational Interpretation

This latter view is a part of a school of Christian thought called "dispensationalism". Dispensationalism includes a broad range of teachings that stem from one approach to bible interpretation. But for now, it is enough to know that dispensationalism interprets and synthesises certain passages of scripture to mean that the national entity of Israel, though currently set aside, will one day resume its place in the centre of God's mission. The reestablishment of a Jewish state in the 20th century has been seen as a vindication of such hope.

This interpretation goes on to say that there will be a period of 7 years of "tribulation" (trouble) for Israel before Christ himself comes to save them (This comes from Daniel and Revelation, among other places). This could help us make sense of the phrase "the one who endures to the end will be saved", describing physical salvation from the persecution that they have had to endure at that time.

The Structure and Outline

V5-15 The immediate context. The twelve sent out and their mission stated.

- Go to the Jews only
- Proclaim the gospel of the kingdom
- Demonstrate the power of the kingdom
- Charge nothing
- Take no provisions
- Make use of hospitality
- Move on from rejection

V16-42 Future outlook. The mission of the church anticipated.

The context shifts. Mission to the Jews is still in view ("synagogues", "towns of Israel"), but the mission anticipated is far larger in scope ("governors and kings... and the Gentiles"), fiercer in persecution ("flog", "put to death", "hated by all men"); and more final in its climax ("endures to the end", "before the Son of Man comes")

V16-25 Expect Persecution

- Know your enemy and be ready
- Beware of being dragged before judges
- The Spirit will help your defence ("do not be anxious")
- Expect hatred even from family
- Keep moving on

- Expect no better treatment than your master

V26-33 Reassurance Given.

- Nothing is hidden to God
- Make known the teachings of Christ
- Consider the soul over the body
- Consider God's care for the sparrow

V34-42 Two responses to Jesus and his disciples

- Note the shift from the disciples to "whoever"
- Christ is our only advocate with the Father
- Christ must come first
- Receive Christ's messengers as Christ.

Key verses

V16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

This is a great verse to summarise how Christians in all ages should approach the world with the gospel. Not naively, and not with conceit. But with pure motive while cautious of danger and shrewd in strategy.

V39 "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

To receive Christ and his message will undoubtedly bring sacrifice in relation to the world. But knowing him is worth it, if we maintain a true and eternal perspective on our life, and our death.