

The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

Session 10 – Wednesday June 3, 2020

Chapter 10 begins the second of Matthew's five teaching blocks. As with the Sermon on the Mount, it is chiefly directed to Jesus' disciples. But this time, we understand more instinctively that it is directed to the community of disciples, which is the Church.

Jesus' authority has been revealed in the past four chapters, in His teaching, at which the crowds are astonished, *because He taught as one having authority, and not as the Pharisees*; and in His deeds, where Jesus' authority over nature, demons, diseases has been revealed. Authority is a key idea for Matthew. It is found in the last verse of the gospel where Jesus' own authority is given directly to His disciples along with His promise to be with them always, *even unto the end of the ages*.

In the healing narratives we found Matthew connecting the healings with the Suffering Servant, that is with Christ's Passion and death. Jesus' authority is connected with His conquest of sin and death. The authority given to the disciples is not immediately connected with Christ's Passion, but, as we shall see, that connection is made.

Jesus calls the disciples to Himself, and then He sends them out. This calling and sending is the on-going pattern of the life of the Church. And it is in direct response to what Jesus observed at the end of Chapter 9. *They are like sheep without a shepherd*. So, Jesus sends out the disciples to *the lost sheep of Israel*. We are the means by which Jesus addresses the spiritual needs of the nation.

At first, the mission is explicitly said to be to Israel, and excludes the Gentiles. This is surprising, as Jesus' own mission was initiated with

reference to the Messianic mission to *those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death*, which includes both Jew and Gentile. This limitation is of short duration as the mission to the Gentiles is included in subsequent commissionings. Matthew's intention seems to locate the disciples' mission directly with Israel's covenant relationship with God, similar to the direct connection between the Mosaic Law and the call to righteousness. Nothing is being over-turned by the proclamation of the kingdom, only the fulfilment of the promise.

There is, no doubt, an intentional underscoring of this idea in the calling of 12 disciples, reflecting the 12 Tribes of Israel. It also ties together the mission of the disciples with the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage of 12 years – the healing of the nation.

V5 This is the only time in Matthew's gospel that the term *Apostle* is used. *Apostle = sent*. The word Matthew uses for *instruction* is used again at the feeding of the 4,000 15:35.

V7 The primary mission is to *preach the nearness of the kingdom of heaven*. They are to heal in the very same way that Jesus has healed.

V9 They are to *acquire* no gold or silver. Mark and Luke both say, *take* no money. This can mean the same thing, but it might be that Matthew is emphasizing what he says about *giving freely as you have received freely*. It is also a practical working out of the idea that we are not to think of ourselves as being self-sufficient – we require grace from God and others. *First look for the kingdom of heaven, and all your other needs will be supplied*, is what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount.

V13 *let your peace come upon it*

Blessed be the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God 5:9, is worked out here in the disciples ministry in Jesus' authority. This idea is raised again at the end of this section.

We are reminded also of the injunction to not *cast pearls before swine*. There will be people who will not respond positively to the gospel of Christ. The disciples are to *shake off the dust* from their feet. Perhaps we are to think of the dust from which we are formed, and to which we will return, if we do not receive the good news of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven.

V15 There is to be a day of reckoning – a day of judgement. This is surprisingly harsh-sounding. But even here, I think Matthew intends us to hear good news.

Q How might we hear good news in the statement *it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town* ?

A We think God's judgement against Sodom and Gomorrah has already happened, and indeed it has in some sense. Those towns were destroyed. But that, evidently, is not the final judgment. There is the possibility of mercy in the kingdom of heaven.

V16 *I send you out as sheep amidst wolves*

This is an important statement. Jesus has sent them out to be shepherds to the lost sheep – but they are not to forget themselves to be sheep themselves, needing shepherding.

Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. It is the same word as in Genesis 3:1.

V17 It is not an easy commission. Jesus does not say *if* they deliver you up, but *when*. Trials and temptations belong to our identity as the children of God.

V19

Q What does v19 remind you of?

A Sermon on the Mount 6:25-34 *Don't be anxious about anything.*
Matthew is going to be bringing this passage to mind frequently.

V20 the *Spirit of the Father* is a phrase unique to Matthew, and the only time he uses it. The Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism. Matthew is saying that the disciples share directly in the relationship between Jesus and His Father. This is a point Matthew will be re-iterating frequently.

V21 *brother will deliver up brother...* perhaps we are to think of Cain and Abel. Fratricide is one of the things that flows in the immediate aftermath of the Fall of Adam and Eve.

All hardship is for Christ's sake. Persecution and suffering is not good in itself – only in relation to Christ's suffering and death. Conversely, suffering is not necessarily proof you are doing Christ's work.

V23 The disciples have been told to be *wise as the serpent* and that wisdom is to be worked out in knowing when to flee persecution. There are times that is the right thing to do. This idea is raised again in the final chapters of the gospel ^{23:34; 24:16}.

Over all of these sayings we have in mind the Beatitudes: *Blessed are those who suffer for my sake.* Blessedness, is the condition of the people in God's kingdom.

Vv24f The disciple is not *above the teacher* it is enough to be *like* the Master. The fundamental sin of the world is the disciple thinking himself above the Master, or Adam and Eve judging good what God has judged not good for them.

Jesus identifies Himself as Master of the House. *They* refer to the Pharisees, who previously identified Jesus with Bezebul, who was one of the gods of Canaan, whose name means *Lord of the flies* 2 Kg 1:2.

Vv26f

Allusions to Sermon on the Mount continue. These verses remind us of Jesus telling His disciples *You are the light of the world*, and that lights are put on stands in order to give light to the whole house.

Vv 29ff These verses recall to mind, once again, the *do not be anxious* teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus assured the disciples they are of greater value than the birds. One gets the sense that Matthew's audience knew about persecution and needs to hear repeatedly the assurance that God both knows their needs and will meet them.

V34 This is a very difficult saying and needs to be heard on different levels. On the one hand there is a hyperbolic, or poetic character to it, which speaks a truth that needs to be heard. Witnessing to Christ is not an option, and people's souls are revealed when they encounter Jesus. The icon of Matthew's gospel is the man – he holds up a mirror so we can see ourselves, who we truly are.

On the other hand, it is a statement that reminds us of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, in which Jesus articulated that His primary mission was not to turn stones into bread, to meet human need for earthly satisfaction. His chief mission is to bring into existence the kingdom of heaven, where true peace is found – the restoration of Eden, where peace with God, peace between humans, and peace with the world exists.

Ultimately, this harsh verse must be heard in connection with the Beatitudes, in which Jesus declares that the *peacemakers* are the children of God. It is one thing for Jesus to say He has not come to bring peace, but it is another matter for the disciples, the sheep sent out among wolves, to say so. The wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the doves is required for righteousness to prevail, and the kingdom of heaven proclaimed.