

1. Missionary Ambassadors of Christ

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Date: 25 November 2012

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[0 : 01] Well, we're going to turn to our reading this morning, and we're taking a little break from Joseph until the new year. We will come back to him, don't worry. But we're going to, for the next few Sundays, look at Matthew's Gospel, chapter 10.

And as you turn to this, you'll see, or it will become apparent, that Matthew chapter 10 is one of those sections in Matthew's Gospel of teaching.

If you're not familiar with the Gospel, you'll see if you read through it that it's structured around five major teaching sections where Matthew groups together the teaching of the Lord Jesus on a series of different subjects related to what it means that Jesus is the King and what it means that his people are the people of his kingdom.

And having introduced the birth of the King and the early ministry of Jesus, having shown his teaching of the kingdom in what we call the Sermon on the Mount, and his great and mighty works in chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew's Gospel, now in Matthew chapter 10 we come to a section which is focused on what I would call the mission of the kingdom.

And Jesus is teaching here those who are called, as his twelve apostles, teaching them what that mission of the kingdom is and what it will look like and what it will entail for them, first of all, but then also for all those who come after them.

[1 : 39] And so the whole chapter is focused around that one theme. Now we're going to look just at the first part this morning and we'll come back to it over the next two weeks. But we're going to begin reading at Matthew chapter 9 at verse 35, which is a little summary verse of all that has gone before.

Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease and every affliction.

The names of the twelve apostles are these. First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother. James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother. Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew, the tax collector.

[2 : 56] James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus. Simon, the Canaanian, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no time of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay.

Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff. For the laborer deserves his food, and whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart.

As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it's not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave the house or town.

Truly I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. Amen. Amen.

[4 : 22] May God bless to us this his word. Well, would you turn with me to the passage that we read together in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 10.

We're looking particularly at chapter 10, verses 1 to 15 this morning, where Jesus the King briefs his ambassadors all about this mission that claims everything.

I'm sure you'll recall Richard Pratt's words last week about his mother's desire that the extra room that they were building on their family home would not look like an add-on.

And I want to pick up on that thought for these next few significant Sundays as we look at Matthew chapter 10 together. A chapter all about the mission of the kingdom of God, a mission which by its very nature claims everything.

A mission of the kingdom of God is what the whole of world history has always been about.

[5 : 34] From the time of Abraham we were thinking about last week. Indeed, from the time of Adam. That's what Richard was reminding us of last week.

Because the coming of God's King, the Lord Jesus Christ, is what the whole of world history is all about. And Matthew's Gospel is supremely the Gospel of the King.

Chapter 1 begins, doesn't it, telling us about the birth of a king. He's the seed of Abraham, through whom the whole world will be blessed. He's the son of David, who will rule over the whole world as promised.

Chapter 2 of Matthew's Gospel tells us he is born king of the Jews. Herod is not the true king. Jesus is the true ruler at last who will shepherd his people.

Notice that term shepherd that Matthew draws from the prophets. What a shepherd does is rule his people. In chapter 3, John the Baptist begins his ministry, proclaiming, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[6 : 44] In chapter 4, then, we see Jesus, the true human son of God at last. We see him, unlike Adam, resisting all the temptations of the evil one in the desert, and being utterly faithful to God.

And then, after that, Jesus begins his own earthly ministry, his proclamation. In chapter 4, verse 17, repent, he says, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Just turn back with me to chapter 4 of Matthew's Gospel in verse 23. And just look at that with me, will you? These verses summarize the whole of Jesus' earthly ministry.

He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

In other words, he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, and he demonstrated the power of that gospel everywhere he went. Let's flick forward again to chapter 9 and verse 35, where we began our reading.

[7 : 55] I think you'll see that, in fact, it's an identical verse, isn't it? It's another summary. Jesus taught and proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom in every place, and he healed every disease and affliction, not just many, but every.

And you see, those two verses, identical verses, are like brackets, beginning and ending. And they summarize, really, the contents of everything that goes between them.

Matthew chapter 5, 6, and 7, what we call the Sermon on the Mount, shows us Jesus teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. And if you read chapter 8 and 9, you'll see that it's a whole series of stories showing us Jesus healing every single kind of disease and affliction, even those caused by demons.

And that was Jesus' ministry and mission, proclaiming and demonstrating the power of his kingdom breaking into the world. And now then, at Matthew chapter 10, Jesus turns to his disciples and his followers.

And he says to them, this is what I'm all about. This is my mission on earth. And this is what you also are going to be all about in your mission on earth.

[9 : 12] You're going to share in my mission, says Jesus. Now, he's already taught his followers what they're called to be. They're called to be ambassadors, ambassadors of his glorious kingly rule in the world.

They're to be salt and light, do you remember, shining his glory out to the very ends of the earth. And now, he is giving his royal briefing to these ambassadors about how they're going to carry out this mission in the world.

They're to join in with his great cause. Look at verse 7 of chapter 10. Proclaim as you go, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And what we're seeing really in these verses in Matthew 10 is something of a foretaste of the great commission that comes at the end of Matthew's gospel. But Matthew records for us here Jesus' personal briefing of his own apostles about what real apostolic mission is, what it means, and what it entails, so that we can have that and know that for ourselves.

And what it shows us is that this mission can never, ever simply be just an add-on to the calling of Christian disciples.

[10:29] It can never be just an add-on to the reason for the church's existence. It is the whole of the church's very purpose and existence on earth. This mission claims everything.

It claimed all of Jesus' earthly life, and it will likewise claim all the earthly life of his true disciples, the ambassadors of his kingly rule.

An ambassador faithfully proclaims and expresses the views, the thoughts, even the feelings and the emotions of their sovereign.

And Matthew shows us here at the end of chapter 9, shows us very clearly an insight, a window into Jesus' own heart and mind. Look at verses 36 to 38.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, Well, true disciples, as true ambassadors, will also see with the eyes of Jesus their sovereign.

[11:44] They will share his compassion for lost sheep. And they'll sense with the heart of Jesus. They'll sense the urgency and the opportunity. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

And therefore, they will share with the Lord of the harvest, as verse 38 says, praying for God to send out laborers, and also being prepared to be sent out themselves.

Kind of an answer to their own prayers, if you like. One of the things we have to learn in the Christian life, isn't it? We have to be aware of what we pray for, because the Lord might turn to us and say, Well, you're part of the answer to your prayers.

And that's what's true here. The supreme response of compassion for the people of this world, according to Jesus, notice, is something rather strange, isn't it?

What does Jesus tell his disciples to pray and to be prepared for? Well, it's there in verse 7, as we've read. The proclamation of the kingdom of God.

[12:49] According to Jesus, a church which is truly compassionate for the people of this world, will be a church that has the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom at its very heart.

It'll be the center. It'll be the driving force for everything. Notice that for Jesus, compassion here is not feeding the hungry. It's not healing the sick, even.

It's not just helping the poor. All of these are important. All of these he did. But not supremely important for Jesus. What is it that is desperately needed today in our city, in our nation, in our world?

Well, just what was needed in Jesus' day. The proclamation of the kingdom of God to a lost and helpless world, to a people who have no shepherd.

That is, who have no knowledge of their true king and ruler. That's the truth about many, many people walking up and down the street outside today.

[13:51] They have no shepherd, no clue about who is the rightful ruler of their life. Many others, it's perhaps even worse. They have evil shepherds like the people of Israel had in Jesus' day.

A church, but with no real gospel and no real hope. Therefore, nothing worse than demonic. And that is why this chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel has so much to teach us today.

It's the second major block of teaching in the gospel. You can tell that it's all taken together because, again, we have brackets around it. Matthew leaves these marker posts to show us exactly what he's doing.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 10. Jesus called to him his 12 disciples. And he began to teach them. If you look at chapter 11, verse 1, you'll see that it's rounded off.

When Jesus had finished instructing his 12 disciples, he went on from there. So everything in between is all about Jesus' instruction of his disciples, his apostles, about mission.

[15:00] A mission that claims everything. Well, we're going to look at verses 1 to 15, particularly this morning, where Jesus is briefing his ambassadors for that mission.

But perhaps the key verse for the whole chapter comes in verse 16. Do you see? Behold, says Jesus, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

It's rather a surprise, isn't it, that the answer for lost sheep is to send out sheep. Ambassadors of the king's rule are not what you might expect.

They're not a power group. They're not people marked by spin or subterfuge or even diplomatic language. Rather, he says, you are to be as innocent as doves.

That is, you're emissaries of peace with God. You're to be straight, sincere, transparent. And yet not soft, do you notice.

[16:06] Also wise as serpents, says Jesus. You're to be shrewd and realistic and prudent people. Why is that? Well, because the reality is that in this world's eyes, and indeed in this world's terms, they were weak and powerless, even foolish.

Who ever heard of sending out sheep into a pack of wolves? It's just not what you do, is it? But that's what Jesus says he is doing with his people.

And the reality is, Jesus is telling his followers that they will face a very hostile environment for their message. They're to be salt and light in a rotten world and in a dark world.

That's why they're needed. If you remember back to Matthew chapter 5, Jesus said, Sometimes, yes, people will see your deeds and give praise to your Father in heaven. But at the same time, he said, Many will see your deeds and hear your words, and they will revile you and persecute you and slander you on my account.

Because the ambassador receives the reaction on behalf of his sovereign. He is so closely identified with him that he receives the views of the people he is speaking to of, that sovereign.

[17:27] Look at verse 40. Whoever receives you, says Jesus, receives me and him who sent me. And the real truth is that the world, for the most part, scorns and hates God who sent us.

And therefore, it's scorned and rejected the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what faces also the emissaries, the ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every true disciple. Every true disciple will be like Jesus who was led like a lamb to the slaughter. That was God's power at work for salvation in this world, extraordinary as it may seem.

Well, just so, says Jesus. You will be like lambs sent out among wolves. You will be weak and frail and you will seem very foolish to this world.

But God uses the weak things of this world to shame the strong. God uses the foolish things in this world's eyes to shame the wise.

[18:38] The gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing, a gospel of a crucified Savior. And so, it's going to seem like that for weak and feeble and foolish gospel messengers.

And it may seem like that to you very often, says Jesus. But it's going to be like Jesus, like disciples. That's the heart of the message all the way through this long chapter of Matthew 10. It's all about identification of the ambassadors of the kingdom with the king himself, with our master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at verse 25.

It's enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and for the servant like his master. Look at the second half of the verse. They've called the master of the house Beelzebul, the devil. How much more those of his household.

They despise and ill-treat one. They'll despise and ill-treat the other. So, we'll have the same treatment in the world as Jesus had.

[19:46] And yet also the same power in the world because heaven's power is at work in the world, always in this way.

We'll always face opposition. But it will always be the power of God at work through what seems to be nothing but human frailty. And that is why, friends, the followers of Jesus need great wisdom, need great realism about what it means to be part of this gospel mission.

That's why Jesus, that's why he briefs his apostles, his ambassadors so wisely and so thoroughly here. So, how are the ambassadors of Jesus, including us today, how are we to be wise and realistic ambassadors?

Let's look at four things by way of summary that Jesus teaches us in these first 15 verses of Matthew's gospel. First of all, we need wisdom and realism about the plan and the progress of God's mission to the world.

We must understand that our mission today is directed by the gospel's unfolding story. And our place in that unfolding story.

[21:09] Just as Jesus' words to his disciples here were related to their place in the unfolding story of his kingdom. Unless we grasp that, we're going to get very, very confused indeed.

Often, you see, today we are too eager to open our Bibles and to apply the message directly to us. In a sense, it's a good instinct because it is written for us. But we must remember that the Bible was not written directly to us.

If we look at verse 8, for example, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. Many people will read those words and say, well, that must be what Jesus is telling us to do today. But often you'll find that they don't really want to remember the second part of the verse. You receive without paying, give without pay. You'll find today that those who are most taken up with some of these spectacular aspects of mission are also extremely concerned for the intake of money to their churches and particularly to their own bank balances.

On the other hand, sometimes people read verse 9, acquire no gold, no silver, no copper, no bag for your journey, no tunics or sandals or staff.

[22 : 23] And they say, well, that way of absolute poverty must be our way following Jesus. And do the same. But if we're going to read this passage like that, what do we make of verse 6?

Go nowhere to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but go only to the lost sheep of a house of Israel. Does that mean that our mission today can only be to Jews and not to Gentiles or the whole of the rest of the world?

Now, you see the problem. The very important principle here, isn't it, to remember, that our Bible did not just fall out of heaven as a message to me or to you.

We don't just open it up as though it was written directly to us today. It wasn't. Yes, every part of it is for us, for you and for me, but none of it is written directly to you or to me.

We've got to see the big picture of Matthew's gospel and see to whom Jesus is speaking and in what situation they're in. What is Matthew telling us in these verses? Well, verses 1 to 6 here clearly show us that Jesus is doing something unique.

[23 : 37] He is inaugurating his new covenant people, his church. A seismic shift in the whole history of the world is taking place.

The true Israel, the Israel of God, the people of God, is being redefined around the Messiah, around the Lord Jesus himself.

That's why there's such emphasis here on the 12 disciples. Verse 1, he called to him his 12 disciples. Verse 2, he calls them his 12 apostles.

Verse 5 tells us it's these 12 that Jesus sent out. Chapter 11, verse 1 tells us he finished instructing these 12.

These 12 are the ones he was teaching directly here, not anybody else and certainly not us. Now, we must recognize that. Otherwise, it's going to be like reading something that was written for somebody else and applying it to us.

[24 : 40] If I go into the kitchen and I see my wife's diary is lying open on the table with a big arrow pointing to it, I know that she wants me to read it.

And if I look in the diary and it says, Dentist at 2 o'clock. Well, if I assume, oh my goodness, I've got the dentist at 2 o'clock, I must go along there. I could be in for an awful lot of pain and discomfort. When in fact, it's not me who's going to the dentist at 2 o'clock, but it's her. And she's pointed that there and left it for me so that I know where she is. And don't wonder why she's not in the house. But I have to read it knowing that that's what it's about, not thinking it's written directly to me. Now that's what it's like if we read the scriptures in the wrong way. This is not written directly to us. It's written to Jesus' 12 apostles. Nevertheless, as we read this chapter, we must also note in the context that Jesus is also clearly speaking with wider concerns in view.

[25 : 42] Jesus often in his teaching mingles. Mingles teaching about current things with his apostles and disciples and mixes that with what he teaches about the future.

And Matthew clearly is grouping together in this chapter all Jesus teaching about mission in one place. So clearly he sees it as very important, not only for those apostles, but for those who are going to read Matthew's gospel, including us.

When you get to verse 16 and further on, you clearly see that Jesus is talking about later mission. In verse 18 he mentions mission to the Gentiles. When you read from verse 26 to the end, you see that he's clearly looking at the whole future of the church's mission in the world.

And of course, as we come to this passage, we also must read it in the light of everything that we know. We have the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel. We have the epistles of the New Testament.

So what I'm saying is we need to read the Bible intelligently, not superficially. If we just read it superficially, it does lay us open to legitimate criticism.

[26 : 56] There are some people who are well-meaning and evangelical in faith, but they read the Bible in a very simplistic way as though it was all written directly to us. And that's rightly criticized.

It's really just as bad as the extreme liberal view which reads the Bible and assumes that nothing here is really of any relevance for us today. No, we just grasp the big picture of God's unfolding plan of salvation, the plan and the progress of that mission as it unfolds through the scriptures from beginning to end.

And here in Matthew chapter 10, we are in history still before the death and the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus. We are not yet in the period of the New Testament church that we live in today.

And unless we see that, we're going to misunderstand this and misapply it to us today. When Jesus says, follow me to Peter, when he says, follow me to you and to me, it doesn't quite mean exactly the same thing, does it?

For one thing, I don't think Jesus is calling you and me to spend three years physically walking around Palestine, around Galilee and Jerusalem. But of course, the principle is the same.

[28 : 12] He's calling Peter, as he's calling, he's calling us to wholehearted discipleship. So here we are still at this stage of the inauguration, the breaking in of Jesus' kingdom.

And it's part of the events of the great inbreaking of the kingdom, which is unique by definition in the history of the world. And that's what explains verse 6.

Because Jesus' mission was, as Israel's Messiah, to the lost sheep of Israel. He says that plainly later on in Matthew 15, verse 24.

I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. And that's why at this stage, Jesus' and the apostles' mission is only to Israel. It's not yet to the world beyond.

And that accounts also, by the way, for Paul's strategy in the Acts of the Apostles, when he went first, always to the synagogue of the Jews. And only after he was thrown out, went to the Gentiles. So we need care in reading and applying a passage like this to ourselves.

[29 : 16] We are at a different stage in the unfolding plan of God's salvation. Now we need to grasp that, and that will help us with the next point.

We need also wisdom and realism about the proclamation and the power in gospel mission. Verses 7 to 8.

Proclaim as you go, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. We need to understand that although we are not living at the same time as the apostles and in the same place here, that our method, nevertheless, is driven by the gospel's abiding power.

Mission, according to Jesus, is the proclamation of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. And it is a message that is authenticated by the power of God.

It's a message that is authenticated so as to show that it is not by man, but by God alone that these things are happening. Just as Jesus went about proclaiming the kingdom in word and in deed, healing and casting out demons, so here, the twelve apostles are commanded to do exactly the same, exactly the same.

[30 : 38] and these signs in verse 8 are revelatory signs and that's why they're to do them. They're not primarily taken up just with matters of kindness, although they are, but rather what they are doing is announcing the kingdom of God arriving in language that every single person in that day would understand with absolute clarity.

Because it's language that shows that everything that the prophets promised was now taking place. Now that is the case, it's very clear from Jesus' words to the disciples of John the Baptist in the next chapter in chapter 11 in verse 4.

If you just look at that you'll see when John was in prison he sent his disciples to Jesus to say, are you really the Messiah that we've been looking for or should we look for somebody else?

And what does Jesus say? Matthew 11 verse 4, go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them.

What he's saying is everything that you've read in the prophets about precisely these things is happening right before you in my ministry. This is obviously that. The kingdom kingdom has come

and Jesus is the Messiah King.

[32 : 11] You see, all of this is part of the unique and momentous events in history of the kingdom breaking into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. It's showing us what will one day be permanent when Jesus' personal presence on this earth is permanent and forever when he comes to reign.

But it's not a permanent promise for the followers of Jesus of what they are to expect when Jesus is physically absent from them.

That's made clear again later on in Matthew's gospel chapter 17 when the disciples found they couldn't cast out certain demons. Jesus himself back in Matthew 9 tells it absolutely plainly when he says a day will come when the bridegroom will no longer be with you and then there will not be the rejoicing and the joy and everything that you're seeing now.

There will be mourning and weeping and longing for his coming back. The events surrounding Jesus' life and ministry his death and his resurrection and the apostolic mission and the completion of the revelation of God to us in Christ these events are unique.

There are once and for all happening in history that cannot by definition be repeated. And unless we see that friends we also will find ourselves getting into all sorts of disasters.

[33 : 38] We'll have all sorts of wrong expectations from Jesus of what we might expect today in terms of the miraculous and so on. We will think that all of these things are guaranteed and if it doesn't happen well somehow God is not true to his word or somehow it's our fault because we don't have enough faith.

countless countless people have become so disillusioned because of wrong thinking about these things. Of course God can do what he pleases.

Of course I believe there are extraordinary miraculous things that still happen in the world today. I think particularly for example in places of frontier mission.

but Jesus is not teaching us today that we are to expect things to be just for us in exactly the same way as they were in this unique time of Christ and his apostles on earth.

Not until he comes again which is why we long for that day. But nevertheless the principle of the power of God at work in his mission remains the same.

[34 : 48] Christ does always authenticate the proclamation of his kingdom with divine power and he promises to go on doing so. Jesus does work miracles today and every day.

Not so much miracles of historic revelation because we now have the fullness of the revelation of the gospel in the scriptures. But he is constantly working miracles of personal revelation unto salvation.

We live don't we in the age of worldwide rescue. We live in the days of this great harvest and God is working miracles of transformation and of salvation calling the dead to life all around this world for eternity and he is doing it through the proclamation of his gospel and that is exactly what Jesus promised.

Do you remember back in John chapter 5 when he heals the man by the pool he says you will see greater works than these. What does he mean? The voice of the son of God calling the dead to life through your proclamation of the gospel.

That's why if you look through chapter 10 here you'll see that all the way through there is huge emphasis on the words the words that his disciples will speak. Verse 14 is all about receiving the apostolic words.

[36 : 16] verse 19 and 20 you're called up before synagogues and rulers it's all about your words what you will speak. Look at verse 20 it's the spirit of your father who will be speaking through you.

That is the real miracle that Jesus wants his followers to be excited about. The God who speaks darkness and nothingness into creation. The God who speaks the dead into life he speaks through you and through your proclamation of this gospel.

He authenticates with his power and calls people into eternal life. And that is always true whether here in the days of the apostles or today in our day.

That however weak and feeble they might have looked however weak and feeble we might feel the power of God is promised when his gospel is proclaimed.

It's the power of God for salvation to all who will believe. And we need to understand that and know that in our proclamation his power will be at work to authenticate that message.

[37 : 37] Third though in this passage Jesus tells us that we need to have wisdom and realism about priorities and provision for gospel mission.

We need to understand that our giving of everything is determined by the gospel's urgent responsibilities. Again, we're clearly not dealing in these verses with literal commands that remain in the same form forever.

Look at the second half of verse 8. You receive without paying, give without pay, acquire no gold or silver or copper, no bag, no tunics or sandals or staff, for the laborer deserves his food.

He's not saying that the command in this form remains exactly like that forever, that no one in gospel work is ever to provide for themselves extra clothes or take any money or anything like that. You'll need to read later on in Luke 22 to see that Jesus says, I once told you to do that, but now we're moving on. It's time to take a bag, for the journey. But the principle that Jesus enunciates here remains absolutely clear and abiding.

[38 : 49] What he's saying is that real kingdom mission is about self-giving and never about self-gain. Giving, not acquiring, spending and being spent for the gospel.

See, the gospel, he says, is all about grace. It's all about what God has given freely to us. And so there can be no place, no place in gospel mission for seeking gain for ourselves.

There can be no place for these ostentatious TV evangelists and so on, the prosperity gospel proponents who are talking about prosperity, but mainly acquiring prosperity for themselves. I read just the other day that one such person has just received a \$13 million advance for their latest book on how to have the perfect fulfilled life today.

But Jesus says that is not what the mission of my kingdom is about. It's about self-giving. And only with that attitude can we possibly put first things first.

[39 : 57] And real kingdom mission, he says, is about simplicity. Verse 10. Don't worry about the provision for your ministry.

Leave these things to God. The urgency of the gospel mission demands the kind of simplicity and single-mindedness with regards to earthly needs and desires that we can just focus ourselves entirely on the kingdom.

There's nothing wrong with these possessions. There's nothing wrong with having spare pairs of shoes and a bit of money in your pocket and your bank account and these things. But Jesus is simply saying, you can't be taken up with these things if you're going to be taken up with my mission.

Leave these things to the Lord. Read Matthew 6. We're not to be anxious about life and our needs. God provides these things. He knows we need them. But of course, the way he provides these ought to be through the Lord's people.

Look at verse 10. You shouldn't have to worry about this, he says, because the laborer deserves his food. Jesus is not saying that gospel ministry is a call to asceticism.

[41 : 11] Rather, he's saying it is a call for gospel workers to be able to prioritize their work without fear or concern because God's people see and value the work of mission and therefore support it properly.

It's two-sided, you see, what Jesus is saying here. Yes, for the Christian missionary, which is every one of us, but perhaps especially for those who are set aside and sent to mission.

For the Christian missionary, materialism and mission cannot mix. Very sad when you see that happening. But for the church as a whole, he's saying, we all have a responsibility to enable mission to happen so that the missionaries can have a priority on the work without distraction, without worrying constantly about their resources.

That means we have a responsibility to provide properly for the mission of Christ's church. The laborer deserves his food. He's not conflicting there with what he says in verse 8 about not having pay.

He's not talking here about any sort of extravagant reward. He's talking about adequate keep, maintenance. That's why Paul applies this same verse in 1 Timothy 5, verse 18, and applies it to wages.

[42 : 24] The laborer deserves his wages. He deserves his keep. Now that's very practically important, isn't it, in the Christian church. Sometimes people talk about living by faith.

Well, if missionaries have to live by faith, not knowing where their salary is going to come from, not knowing if they're going to be paid and be able to put bread on the table at the end of the month, if

what we're seeing is living by faith is only them living by their faith, then that is not what Jesus is teaching here.

He's saying they must live by faith because the church lives by its responsibilities to provide bread. Missionaries can't live by faith if the church lives by disobedience. It's quite wrong, according to Jesus, if gospel workers should find themselves in penury.

How can they possibly labor if they're worried sick about where the next meal is going to come from? So we have practical things to think about there. It also impinges, doesn't it, on how we think about resourcing our church's mission.

Jesus is saying the church must provide for mission. We don't sit around and say, well, can we afford this? It must be done. The priorities of our budgets must be determined by the urgency of the need of the gospel.

[43 : 45] We've got to take that seriously, haven't we? It's not our comfort that takes the priority. It's the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to think what we're doing with our own personal budgets.

We need to think what we do with the church's budget. We need to prioritize provision for this outgoing gospel ministry all the time.

Fourth and finally, though, I want you to think about these last verses, 11 to 15, because these are very important indeed. Who can we work alongside and who can't we work alongside in the ministry of the gospel?

Jesus says here that our ministry and our fellowship must be dictated by the gospel's own clear discrimination.

In other words, there's to be a transparency in gospel work. We are to be as innocent as doves, but there is to be no naivety in gospel ministry. He's saying in these verses, if you read them, that we're not to be isolationists.

[44 : 55] There's no place for solo mission. There's no place for lone rangers. We are to join with the king's people wherever we find them. We are to find worthy people, he says, and join with them in fellowship and in mission together.

Look at verse 11. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. Join with them, he says, in mission. Who are these worthy people?

He's not talking here about worthiness as some kind of moral quality. He's certainly not saying only these people that are like us in every way and who we warm to and delight in. He's simply saying, as verse 14 makes clear, he's simply saying worthy people are those who welcome the message of the true gospel and therefore welcome the messengers of the true gospel.

And it is the gospel itself that distinguishes the possibilities for fellowship in gospel mission. And that is so, so vital for us to grasp.

Because the gospel itself divides men and women. Verses 13 and 14 make that absolutely clear. Some will welcome the apostolic gospel and there will be peace between you and them.

[46 : 12] And others, Jesus says, will reject it and there can be no peace. Because true gospel unity will occur when the gospel message is clear and transparent and open.

But of necessity you cannot have that gospel clarity without inevitably excluding others and being excluded by others because they do not like it and do not want it.

that is why the ecumenical movement that strives to have visible unity among all who profess Christian faith is so utterly naive. Today it's become the multi-faith movement that wants to have unity between all people of faith, whatever that might be.

But friends, Jesus calls his followers not to be sentimental like that, but to be realistic. You cannot unite with those who disbelieve and disregard the gospel unless the focus for your unity is not gospel proclamation, but something quite different.

Some kind of institutional unity that sacrifices the gospel itself for the sake of that unity. But the whole focus of Jesus' kingdom mission here is gospel proclamation, the true apostolic gospel of Jesus.

[47 : 34] That's why verse 14 is the deciding factor. Just look at it again. The crucial deciding factor is the words of Jesus' apostles. If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet.

People today in the church so commonly are saying things like this. Let's not quibble about words, about doctrine. But according to Jesus, that is precisely what matters above everything else.

And notice what status Jesus gives to the words of his apostles here. It's so important in a day when people are saying, oh, we don't want to listen to Paul, we don't want to listen to the apostles, let's go right back to Jesus.

According to Jesus, that is not what we are to do. It is those who heed you and listen to your words, he says to his apostles. Acceptance of the apostles' words now, verse 13, is what gives the verdict worthy.

Rejection of the apostles' words now is what verse 13 tells us gives the verdict condemned. That's the meaning of shaking off the dust of your feet, your condemning.

[48 : 57] And the same verdict, says Jesus in verse 15, will be made on the day of judgment. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that time.

You reject the words of the apostolic gospel today and it will be worse on the day of judgment for you and for Sodom and Gomorrah.

So, submission to the teachings of the apostles of Christ in his scriptures are not optional. They are, according to Jesus, the deciding factor in all things.

So, according to Jesus, we can't be naive and foolish in our partnerships and the people that we're allied closely with in this crucial gospel work, can we? the gospel, the apostolic gospel, in all of its demands is itself the great discriminator.

And it's just so clear, isn't it, according to what Jesus himself here says. We are not to be slow, says Jesus, to embrace true gospel people, however different we might be from them on peripheral matters, cultural matters, insignificant matters, like church government and baptism and things like that.

[50 : 20] But the way that that wonderful unity will happen is not by relentlessly trying to seek that unity, but by resolutely pursuing true gospel mission.

And we will find ourselves naturally drawn together with all of those who love the gospel message and love its work, of course. We mustn't be slow to embrace gospel people.

people. But equally, says Jesus, and this is the necessary negative that he gives us here, equally we must not be slow to distance ourselves from those who reject the gospel.

We cannot have a pretense of peace with those who reject the apostolic word. We can't have a glossing over of differences as though they were just a trivial matter.

No, rather, says Jesus, we are to emphasize that difference by being clear and open about what the true apostolic gospel really is, the words of Christ and of his apostles in all the scriptures.

[51 : 27] Now, that may seem harsh, but friends, that's because we live an age of softness and sentimentality. But the urgency of the gospel demands this clarity, according to Jesus.

And the stakes are absolutely the highest they could ever be because Jesus is clear in verse 15, a day of judgment is coming. And we are in a rescue mission of eternal significance, and that day is the day that should be in our eye and in our vision all the time in everything that we do.

And that must dictate our thinking in everything that we do. So, we are no longer living in the days of the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

We live in the days when we long for his personal return, that all of the joy of his personal presence and the flourishing of the desert and the raising of the sick and the resurrection of the dead becomes a permanent reality.

We long for that day. And therefore, our calling is to speed its coming. And we too are sent out, not just now, to Israel, but to the whole world.

[52 : 48] And it is a hostile world. So we need wisdom and realism. But we can have confidence as Jesus. It is the mission of the king, the great king, and we go in his name.

And he has promised, promised, to be with us always, even to the end of the world. He is in charge of the plan.

He gives the power. He will give all the provision that we need. And he will give and guide us into all the partnerships that we need so that we can make the proclamation of his kingdom our absolute priority in life.

as we live our lives together. May God indeed give us wisdom and clarity as we seek to follow him.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that, like your first apostles, we also have been called to be ambassadors of your eternal, unshakable kingdom.

help us. Truly, we pray, to have the wisdom and the shrewdness of serpents, as well as the innocence and the peace of doves, as we go out among sheep to save the lost sheep, but conscious also of the many wolves.

[54 : 17] Help us, Lord. Stand with us. guard us and guide us. And may we, in our day, bring glory to Christ's name. For Jesus' sake.

Amen.