

The Lord Sends His Disciples on Short-Term Missions

Mark 6:7-13

Mark 6:7-13 – *“And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. ⁸ He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts — ⁹ but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics.*

¹⁰ Also He said to them, “In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. ¹¹ And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!”

¹² So they went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.”

Background Notes

The power to cast out demons and to bring healing was confirmation that the message the disciples were preaching was certainly from God (v7). Notice that the Lord Jesus conferred this power upon them. The Lord Jesus was not only able to cast out demons and heal, but He was able to confer that power on His disciples as well. Only God can do that! It seems that Judas also had the power to do these things, even though his heart was not right. It should remind us that a person who is involved in this kind of ministry is not automatically a godly person. Many people get deceived and sidetracked here.

There are some slight differences between Mark 6:8 and the parallel passages in Matthew 10 and Luke 9, with regard to what they were to take and not to take. However, when we take into account the fact that the instructions were spoken in Aramaic, and then translated and written up in Greek by three different authors (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the slight differences disappear. Basically, the Lord was saying “Travel light!”

The Lord told the disciples to stay at one place (v10) so they could get settled and concentrate on the ministry, and not be tempted to keep moving around to places where they thought room and board would be better. That’s good advice for preachers on the road today. Last week I was speaking at a conference, and I’m so glad I had one place to stay, where I could concentrate on preparing for the ministry rather than thinking about finding better accommodations! So it’s good advice today.

To show their separation from the ungodly Gentiles, Jews of that time would shake the dust from their sandals. In this case, the symbolism is carried over, and it became a symbol of separation from ungodly Jews who would not receive the message (v11). God would reject them because they had rejected the announcement that the kingdom was at hand.

The oil they used to anoint the sick (v13) would have been olive oil. Oil here may also be symbolic of the Holy Spirit. In the Lord's time, oil was used for medicinal purposes. In Luke 10:34, the "Good Samaritan" poured oil on the wounds of the injured man. In Mark 6, even when miraculous power was available for healing, the normal medicinal use of oil was employed. That should be a lesson for us. We can and should make use of medicine or surgery today, while at the same time looking to God for healing. All healing is from God, and many times God uses the normal means of medicine to heal.

Doctrinal Points

1. God will not force anyone to become a believer.

The disciples were responsible to preach the message of the kingdom: "*The kingdom is at hand.*" They did not have the responsibility to force the people to believe. Those who responded and repented did so of their own free will. Those who didn't were given a warning of judgment, and the disciples were to leave, shaking the dust off their feet.

Today, in the same way, we have a responsibility to preach the gospel and warn people of the judgment to come if they will not believe. However, we don't have the responsibility to make people believe. We can't! We are not told to "twist their arms" and force people to believe. It's a free offer. People may respond or they may reject. It's a matter of their will. God will not force anyone to become a believer.

2. The Lord Jesus did not preach or practice the "Prosperity Gospel."

What's the Prosperity Gospel? It's the "name it and claim it" kind of "Christianity" – you name and claim what you want, and the Lord will give it to you if you have enough faith. It's the idea that God wants all His people to be wealthy. After all (their preachers say), if you're a child of the King, you should be living like a king. Recently I actually heard a TV prosperity preacher say that if the Lord were living today, He would be driving a Rolls Royce and wearing designer clothes. That's **not** what the Bible teaches!

Here we see the Lord instructing His disciples not to take a lot of stuff with them. They were to "travel light." They were to be streamlined. The instructions that the Lord gave here were for that special mission, at that particular time. But even when the Lord gave new instructions in Luke 22, and changed the instructions somewhat, the disciples were still to "travel light"! There was no hint of a "Prosperity" type of lifestyle.

In the New Testament Epistles, where we have specific instructions for the Church, no prosperity gospel was taught. There is no "name it and claim it" teaching, or "God wants you to be wealthy" or "Something's wrong in your life if you're not wealthy" or "If you're a child of the King you should be living like a king"!

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians for practicing the Prosperity Gospel! The Corinthians were living as if they were kings, and Paul said, "You're way off target!" Of himself and those on the team, the apostle said, "*To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless*" (v11). But in that context he says, "*But you, you're reigning as kings, and the time for reigning is not now.*" So there's no prosperity gospel taught here. In fact, Paul said, "*I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you*" (v14). He was warning them that they had the **wrong view!** They were off target. "*Therefore I urge you to imitate me*" (v16). The apostle urged the Corinthian believers to imitate him - and we know what Paul's lifestyle was like!

And that is the word of God to us as well. When Paul said "imitate me," he didn't mean that we have to go hungry, to try to be homeless, to try to get beaten for the sake of Christ. What he was saying is that the **prosperity approach to Christian living is not biblical.** The "travel light, be streamlined" approach is more biblical. The gospel should never attract anyone because of prosperity here on earth. The Lord Jesus did not preach or practice the Prosperity Gospel.

Practical Applications

1. Let's aim to "travel light."

When I lead tours to the Holy Land, I always tell the people, "Travel light"! Don't take too many clothes! Everybody always packs too much, even when I tell them not to - and they're always sorry they did, lugging around big suitcases when they don't have to.

This illustration can really be applied to our lives as Christians. Most of us have too much stuff. We need to be more streamlined. The more we have, the more it consumes our time and attention. You've got to take care of all that stuff! We can be more streamlined, and worry less, because the Lord has promised to meet our basic needs. Matthew 6:33 says, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.*" "All these things" are our basic needs. Aim to "travel light."

This application can be applied to our lives and lifestyle in general, and it can also be applied to any area of Christian ministry in which we're involved. If the ministry expands, try to stay streamlined, or the logistics and administrative work will smother you and lessen your effectiveness. Growing Christians Ministries is expanding - but we're trying to follow this principle: "Stay streamlined! Travel light!"

2. The buddy system works well in ministry.

You know what the buddy system is, right? Camps use the buddy system when the children go swimming - swimmers team up in pairs, and periodically the lifeguards calls on the buddies to hold hands - to make sure both buddies are OK.

Well, the Lord was using the buddy system in Mark 6. He sent the disciples out in pairs - two by two - and I'm sure the Lord knew exactly which two to put together! He knew their personalities, strengths and weaknesses and so forth.

Why did He send them out that way? Certainly one reason was to confirm the work. The Old Testament Law says, "In the mouths of two witnesses, a matter is confirmed."

But there were other reasons why the Lord sent them out two by two, and you can see how that applies to us today. Two disciples traveling together would provide mutual support and encouragement. This would especially be needed when their message was rejected. With two, there would be strength in message. With two, there would be accountability. You tend to be more responsible and less vulnerable to temptation if somebody's right beside you, checking up on you.

I wonder how many failures in ministry could have been avoided if this principle had been practiced more often - if more Christian servants practiced the buddy system. In Mark 6 it was men who were sent out in pairs, but this principle could apply just as well to a husband and wife team. A good husband-wife team in the ministry is an important form of the buddy system. This type of team can accomplish much, as every thriving church knows. The buddy system works well in the ministry.

If you're in need of encouragement right now in your area of Christian service, try the buddy system. Find a buddy who will pray for you and encourage you! If you're directing a Christian ministry or Christian service project, why not consider following the buddy system? It mutually encourages and strengthens the team.

The buddy system works well in ministry.