

The Disciples Were Told to Proclaim: the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

Matthew 10:1-23

Matthew 10:1-18 - *“And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. ² Now 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; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.*

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead,^[a] cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹ Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, ¹⁰ nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

¹¹ “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. ¹² 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. 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. 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! ¹⁶ “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁹ 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.

²¹ “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. 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.”

Background Notes

Matthew presents Jesus as the King, and the Gospel of Matthew is known as the Gospel of the King and His Kingdom. In Matthew 10, the King instructed His disciples to go out and preach: *“And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (v7).* The disciples were given power to heal the sick and do miracles. They were told to “travel light” - not to take extra money or clothes. Those who received their message of the Kingdom would provide these things for them.

The disciples were called “disciples” (v1) and “apostles” (v2). A disciple is “one who is taught,” and an apostle is “one who is sent forth with a message.” The Lord had taught the disciples, and now He was sending them out with the message of the Kingdom.

The list of the twelve disciples given here is also given in Mark 3 and Luke 6. Comparing these lists and other Scriptures, we see that Bartholomew was probably the same person as Nathaniel, and Lebbaeus *or* Thaddaeus was the same as the “other Judas” – not Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord, but Judas, the son of James (Luke 6). Simon the Canaanite is not Simon Peter, but is the same as Simon the Zealot. Before he became a disciple, this Simon probably belonged to the party of the Zealots, who wanted to use force to overthrow the Roman occupation of Israel.

Notice that the disciples were instructed to preach their message **only** to the Jews - not to Gentiles and not to Samaritans. *“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* Why did the Lord tell His disciples not to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans? Answer: Because **“the Gospel of the Kingdom”** was being proclaimed at this time only to Israel. This was not the Gospel of Christ that we as Christians proclaim today. The Gospel we proclaim today is the gospel of the Great Commission, and it is for everyone, not just for the Jews. But the Great Commission, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone...” was not given until after our Lord’s death and resurrection. Well, that leaves some questions, doesn’t it?

Doctrinal Points

1. The **“Gospel of the Kingdom”** was preached before the resurrection of Christ.

When John the Baptist came on the scene, his message was, *“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”* (Matthew 1:2). The Lord Jesus began His public ministry and His message was the same. Matthew 4:17: *“...Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”*

Matthew 9:35 says that the Lord continued to preach this “Gospel of the Kingdom” throughout His ministry: *“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”* Here in Matthew 10 we see that the program of the King had not changed. The disciples were instructed to preach the “Gospel of the Kingdom”: *“And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”*

This Gospel (or good news) of the Kingdom of heaven was the offer of the Messianic Kingdom that was promised and prophesied to the Jewish nation in the Old Testament Scriptures. This kingdom would be set up here on earth, and the Messiah, a descendant of David, would come from heaven to sit on David’s throne. Well, now the King had come, and the offer of His Kingdom was being made. It was at hand!

This Gospel of the Kingdom was preached **before the Lord was rejected by the nation of Israel**. That's why it was to be preached only to the Jews. If the Jewish people would receive the King and His offer of the Kingdom, then blessing would go out through Israel to the Samaritans and to the Gentile nations.

But the Jewish people rejected the King and His offer of the Kingdom. In fact, our Lord indicated that most of the Jewish people would not receive the disciples and their message of the Gospel of the Kingdom. He said that they were being sent out as *"sheep in the midst of wolves"* (v16). They would suffer persecution at the hands of their fellow Jews (v17), but they were to keep moving on to different cities proclaiming this Gospel of the Kingdom. They were to bring a greeting of peace to the households that received them, but they were to separate from those who rejected them and their message – even shaking the dust off their feet, a symbol of separation.

It was a very serious sin to reject the Gospel of the Kingdom: *"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!"* (v15). The disciples were to be *"as wise as serpents and harmless as doves."* They were to be wise in their proclamation of this Gospel of the Kingdom, and not become contentious or argumentative. The "Gospel of the Kingdom" was preached before the resurrection of Christ.

2. The "Gospel of the Kingdom" will be preached after the "rapture" of the Church.

"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; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. "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. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 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." (v19-21).

In these verses we see a further description of the persecution that the followers of Christ would suffer for His sake - even betrayal in families where only some members would receive the message. This certainly has an application for Christians today. However, in verses 22-23 the Lord was actually referring to the time of His second coming. *"You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 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."*

In this prophetic passage of Scripture we move in a few verses from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ, because the King and His Kingdom were rejected by Israel when it was offered to them. As a result of this rejection, the Church, composed of believers from all nations, was brought into being. However, the Bible teaches that after the Church leaves earth at the time of the "rapture," the Gospel of the Kingdom will once again be proclaimed.

The gospel will be preached during the tribulation period that will follow the Church's departure, and many people in the nation of Israel at that time will turn to believe in their Messiah – the same Messiah who was once rejected by Israel at His first coming. These Jewish people will believe the good news about the coming Kingdom that the Lord will set up on earth. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom that the 144,000 Jewish evangelists will preach at that time.

At that time many Jews and Gentiles will believe this Gospel of the Kingdom (Revelation 7). Believers of the tribulation period will be persecuted and some of them will be martyred because of their faith, but some will endure to the end and enter into the earthly kingdom of our Lord. The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached after the "rapture" of the Church.

Practical Application

Prepare your Bible studies and sermons!

Where do we see that practical application? We draw it from verse 19: *"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; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."*

I know some Christians who have pulled this verse **way** out of the context of this chapter! These people mistakenly use verse 19 as justification for not preparing for Bible studies and sermons. They say that when the time to teach or preach comes, the Lord will tell them what to say! This interpretation is very **bad hermeneutics!** The context of this verse has to do with times of persecution! It's a promise of help when you are under attack for the faith, and you don't have time to prepare what you're going to say.

This verse can certainly be applied to many situations today in which we don't have time to prepare a talk or sermon. Sometimes I've been called on to teach unexpectedly, and had no time to prepare. At those times, the Lord has given me something to teach from His Word. But when the Lord gives us time to prepare, then **we should prepare!** We should make time to prepare Bible studies and sermons.

So don't pull verse 19 out of its context! **Prepare** your Bible studies and sermons!