

Matthew 10: Jesus *and* His Disciples



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Lev. 25:8–54, Matthew 10, John 10:10.*

Memory Text: “So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (*Matthew 10:31, NIV*).

Key Thought: Jesus, the world’s greatest Teacher, gave His disciples instructions before sending them out to witness. What principles can we take from His words for ourselves today?

Jesus knew that an important part of His task was to train a group of His followers to continue His mission. So now, after touring Galilee—preaching, teaching, and healing—He knew it was time to send out His 12 disciples on their first assignment. They were to receive their first practical experience.

The disciples had received a highly specialized education from the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. They had seen in Jesus—in living action—the principles on which the universe is founded. They had seen the ultimate model of how human beings should live.

The disciples had been with Jesus for only a year or so. But they had walked and talked with the One who was, Himself, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14:6*). The time had finally come to put into practice what they had learned. Before Jesus sent out the disciples, He gave them special instruction.

This week we will explore the highlights from Jesus’ words to His disciples as they embarked on their mission.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.*

The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near

Read Matthew 10:7. What does it mean that the “kingdom of heaven” is near? What is your understanding of the “kingdom of heaven”?

A kingdom is the territory under the authority of a king. God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, includes not only geographical territory but spiritual, as well. At one point Jesus even said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (*Luke 17:21*).

What does it mean that the “kingdom of God” is within us? How are we to understand this idea?

Before Jesus and His disciples began their ministry, John the Baptist began preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near (*Matt. 3:2*). The New Testament clearly sees Jesus as Israel’s promised King, fulfilling all the hopes and predictions of the Old Testament (*see Luke 1:32, 33*). But the people were expecting a political king who would establish a political rule over specific geographical territory and free them from the Romans.

The kingdom that Jesus preached about was far different. It was not going to come when the Romans were overthrown. The kingdom of heaven was now. Now people could see Jesus, hear His words, and learn the principles on which salvation and heaven are based. Now they could learn to follow His example of how to live. Now they could see how the principles of God’s government operate in real life. Now they could choose to become part of that kingdom. Now they could have the promises of the Holy Spirit, of victory over sin, of hope for eternal life.

In what ways are you now enjoying and benefiting from the privileges of living in the “kingdom of God”? What opportunities and promises are you not yet fully taking advantage of?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Matthew 10:31*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: The essentials of witnessing.

Feel: A desire to witness.

Do: Develop a plan of action for personal witnessing.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. The “Kingdom of God” (*Luke 1:76*)

Here are some statements from well-known sources. How do these concepts of “kingdom” relate to what Jesus was talking about?

- Martin Luther King: “I have seen the promised land.”
- John the Baptist: “The kingdom of God is at hand” (*Mark 1:15*).
- The “Kingdom Age”—the rule of God on earth defined as control of all social institutions (a contemporary Pentecostal viewpoint).

II. Witnessing Instructions (*Matthew 10*)

A As a witnessing methodology, what does “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” mean (*Matt. 10:16*)?

B Monday’s lesson states that based on Matthew 10:8 these first disciples had “powers” we don’t have. How are we to understand that? Did these powers stop with the original disciples?

III. Whom to Witness to? (*Matt. 10:5, 6; 28:19*)

A How can you correlate these three verses that seem to contradict each other?

B What is a “cultural sensitivity,” and why is it important? (See Tuesday’s lesson.)

▶ **Summary:** The original disciples received witnessing instructions based on timeless principles. They work just as well today when properly understood and applied.

Missionary Instructions

In Matthew 10, Jesus commissions the Twelve to go out and do missionary work. Read over the chapter and then answer the following questions:

What does Jesus mean by telling the disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (*vs. 16*)? How can we apply these words to ourselves today?

Read Matthew 10:2–4. What is the one thing that all of Jesus' disciples had in common? What does that tell us about the need always to keep cultural sensitivities before us as we seek to work in various cultures?

What special powers did the disciples have? How can we, without those powers, still minister and witness to the world?

What kind of reception did Jesus prepare His followers to receive? What lessons can we take from those words for ourselves?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Say to your class:

Imagine: Jesus comes to where you work (at the office, assembly line, shop, classroom, barn, or company vehicle).

He says, “I’m here to invite you to follow Me and be one of My disciples.”

“What, exactly, does that mean?” you ask.

He answers, “It means I want you to help Me build up My kingdom.”

“What about my family, my job, my other responsibilities?” you want to know.

“I didn’t say anything about leaving town,” He says with a smile. “You can still live at home, keep your job, and take care of your family; I just want you to be more deliberate about recognizing opportunities to build up My kingdom.”

Ask your class:

Does it ever seem as though you don’t have what it takes to be among Christ’s inner circle? That those who leave home and family to follow Jesus are somehow more dedicated than those who choose to stay behind to tend their family and work responsibilities?

Consider This: Can we fully be Christ’s disciples without leaving everything to follow Him? If so, how? Be specific.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

I. The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near *(Review Matt. 5:3–10 with your class.)*

When Jesus gave His disciples the message, “ ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (*Matt. 10:7, NIV*), He had in mind a kingdom different from what most of us are familiar with. If anything, He had in mind an “upside down kingdom,” where the poor are more blessed than the rich; where the meek are more honored than the powerful; where the persecuted are to be admired more than persecutors (*see Matt. 5:3–12*). What other aspects of Christ’s kingdom are radically different from the common values of today?

C O N T I N U E D 

Gentiles and Jews

Read Matthew 10:5, 6. How are we to understand these words in light of His later commission to witness to all the world?

As He sent out His disciples, Jesus clearly told them to go only to the Israelites, not the Gentiles. Looking back from our perspective, we might deem this unfair. Why should the good news go only to the Jewish people? Why should everyone else be ignored, at least at that time?

The answer, it seems, stems from cultural sensitivities. Jesus did not want the disciples to jeopardize their mission. As Ellen G. White writes, “If they had first preached the gospel to these, they would have lost their influence among the Jews who were first to hear the message of God.”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 19, 1892. She also suggests that it would have involved them in controversy with the Pharisees, and this would have discouraged the disciples in their work.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 18, 1900.

In our mission today, there will always be certain cultural practices to which we must be sensitive. These practices may be misguided. They may be wrong. They might be exceedingly offensive to us. But to ignore these practices is to weaken the power of our witness.

Read John 10:10. What is Jesus saying here that can help us as we meet people with harmful cultures and traditions?

As followers of Christ, we need to be very sensitive to the cultures that we are working in. The last thing we need is to portray a sense of arrogance and superiority. If we have something better, if we can point others to a more abundant life, let our message and lifestyle testify to it.

If someone were to look at your Christian lifestyle, what would they see that would make it appealing? What kind of message does your lifestyle send to others?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Which kingdom principles are Christians known for in your community? Or are they simply just part of the regular community, in that their lives are no different from everyone else's?

Gallup once took a poll in the United States that showed professed Christians aren't a whole lot different from their nonbelieving neighbors when it comes to basic moral values. What horrible message should this send to us as those who claim to be followers of Christ?

II. Serving in Christ's Name (Review Matt. 10:1–10 with your class.)

Two significant words appear in the first two verses of Matthew 10: *disciples* and *apostles*. Although these two words both appear in connection with the Twelve, there is an important difference between the two.

The word *disciple* refers to learners or students; those who put themselves under the guidance or discipline of their master and live by that individual's philosophy.

The word *apostle* (literally, one who is sent) refers to those who have all the authority of the person who sent them. In the vernacular, it could refer to a slave who had the authority to sign a master's name to a legal document. For the perspective of Jesus' followers, it means that His apostles had all His authority to "drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Matt. 10:1, NIV).


Christ's apostles thus became His agents in establishing the power and authority of His kingdom. Technically, an apostle served only one generation: an apostle could not, strictly speaking, invite another person to be an apostle of the master; that prerogative belonged solely to the master.

Consider This: In today's church are there some who are *disciples* and some who are *apostles*? Do we have any authority aside from that which Christ has granted us? How is that authority granted?

III. Snakes and Doves (Review Matt. 10:16–20 with your class.)

In the age of sound bites and pull-quotes, the idea of being quoted out of context is a real possibility (just ask any politician or public personality). How important is it, then, for Christians to speak carefully and diplomatically?

Consider This: While we can't possibly be prepared for every situation we may face each and every day, we can be confident that we won't

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A Holistic Ministry

Read Matthew 10:7, 8. Besides preaching the gospel, what else was involved in the disciples' mission?

Jesus' commission to His disciples was not concerned with just the spiritual aspect of life. The disciples were to teach and preach, but they were also to care for people's physical needs. Sure, in the end, the ultimate goal for everyone is salvation and eternal life, but that does not mean we need to ignore the pain and suffering we find all around us.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, He read from the book of Isaiah and made the words His own (*see Luke 4:18, 19*). Not only is He going to help the poor, the blind, the oppressed, and the imprisoned; He also is going to proclaim " 'the year of the Lord's favor' " (*vs. 19, NIV*). Jesus here refers to the jubilee year (*Lev. 25:8–54*), where every 50 years the ownership of land returned to the original owners.

Skim Leviticus 25:8–54. What seems to be the main moral concern there? What principle is the Lord conveying to His people?

As Ellen White says, "a safeguard was afforded against the extremes either of wealth or of poverty."—*Education*, p. 43. In the jubilee year, all slaves were also to be freed, and all debts were to be canceled.

Jesus instructs His disciples to have a balanced ministry. Certainly, they were to prepare people for the kingdom of heaven. But they were also to remember that, in an important sense, the kingdom was already with them. And that meant they were to have concern for people's total needs—including physical and social. By ministering to folks' needs now, we can open them up to the reality and promise of eternal life.

How do you treat those less fortunate than you? When is the last time you did something for someone purely out of selfless compassion and concern?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

have to speak or act alone. What comfort can we gain from Jesus' promise: " 'It will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you' " (*Matt. 10:20, NIV*)?

► **STEP 3—Practice**

Thought Questions:

1 While we may not have literally followed Jesus down the dusty lanes of Galilee, we are His disciples every bit as were the Twelve. In what ways does that realization change the way you see yourself? Your congregation?

2 Jesus' promise is that as we cooperate with Him in spreading the gospel, He will be with us " 'to the very end of the age' " (*Matt. 28:20, NIV*). What tangible results do you expect from that promise?


Application Question:

Jesus' great commission (*Matt. 28:18–20*) has local as well as global implications. While we can support the taking of the gospel to the entire world, Christ's commission won't be completed until it's completed in our own communities, as well. How might God be calling you—as individuals and as a group—to take the gospel to your community?

Witnessing

We are God's agents for sharing the principles of His kingdom with our community. What aspects of His kingdom principles would you share with the following:

- a single parent?
- a teenager?
- a business person?
- a scientist?
- an immigrant?

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Do Not Be Afraid of Them

Much of Jesus' address to His disciples is devoted to advice on how to deal with problems they will encounter. The message they proclaim, although it is about love and right living, will encounter opposition in certain places. In fact, said Jesus, they should be prepared for persecution.

Read Matthew 10:22 and Hebrews 10:35, 36. What is the crucial message to us in these texts?

Jesus' reference to perseverance is in the context of persecution. The apostle Paul says, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (*Rom. 5:3, 4, NIV*). Likewise, James writes, "The testing of your faith develops perseverance" (*James 1:3, NIV*).

In what ways can difficult times test your faith? How can you strengthen your spiritual life so that you will persevere in your faith through these times?

Jesus tells His disciples that they should not fear the difficult circumstances they will encounter. They will be brought before governors and kings to be His witnesses.

"'But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it,'" He says (*Matt. 10:19, NIV*). He promises that God will speak through them and give them the words to speak.

The book of Acts provides plenty of examples of what Jesus warned about. Peter and Paul and many others were taken constantly before the authorities to give an account of their actions. Each time they spoke boldly of their faith. Jesus reassures the disciples that God cares even for sparrows and that He has numbered "'the very hairs of your head. . . . So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows'" (*Matt. 10:30, 31, NIV*).

Read Matthew 10:38, 39. What is Jesus promising us? What is He not promising us? What comfort can you draw for yourself from these words?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Why must we present the truth “differently” to different people? How can we do this without compromising it?

Consider This: Just as advertisers have target audiences and focus their messages to reach them, so should Christians be careful about how they tailor their message to their listeners. One size does not fit all.

► STEP 4—Apply

“‘A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master,’” said Jesus (*Matt. 10:24, NIV*). What, exactly, do people sign up for when they become one of Jesus’ disciples? Why did you decide to follow Jesus?

Consider This: Jesus was a rebel, a renegade, a maverick according to some. The values He came to establish were completely out of phase with those of the religious practitioners of His day. That’s why He eventually ended up crucified, humiliated between two thieves.

Reflect on Jesus’ story and consider these present-day options. If Jesus had only two hours to visit your community, would He spend it:

- with adults or with children?
- with the pastor or with someone struggling with temptation?
- at prayer meeting or at a sports bar?
- with the “A” students or with the dropouts?
- with the Pathfinders or the gang members?

The question we all have to ask ourselves is, What does it mean to be a disciple now, in this place? Not, What does my church expect? Or, What does my family expect? But, How can I most effectively and creatively live as one of Jesus’ disciples?

Invite a class member to close with prayer, asking God to guide each class member in being sensitive to ministry opportunities open to Jesus’ modern disciples.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth. They will do all in their power to aid the great adversary in making it as hard as possible for the servants of Christ, just as the people did with Christ when He was upon the earth. They will scourge with the tongue of slander and falsehood. They will criticize, and turn against the servant of God the very efforts he is leading them to make. They will, with their evil surmisings, see fraud and dishonesty where all is right and where perfect integrity exists. They lay selfish motives to the charge of God’s servants, when He Himself is leading them, and when they would give even their lives if God required, if by so doing they could advance His cause.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 234.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In what ways does our mission field today differ from the one Jesus’ disciples went into? What are the similarities?
- 2 As a class, talk about what it means to be living in the “kingdom of heaven” now. What, if anything, do we have to show for it; that is, if someone were to look at us as a whole, what would they see that is different than what they would see in any other voluntary organization working together for a common cause?
- 3 How involved are you and your local church in evangelism, in witnessing? How are you working to relieve the suffering of those around you? How can your local church do better in that area? Why is that aspect of our work so crucial? Why, though, is ministering to the physical needs of those around us not enough? At the same time, what happens when we emphasize preaching and ignore the social dimension of the gospel?

Summary: The greatest Teacher the world has ever seen took time to give specific instructions to His disciples before He sent them out into their mission field. The principles He outlined to them are timeless, and we must not ignore them today.