

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve
Mark 6:1-29
Key Verse: 6:7

“Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.”

The world in which Jesus lived looked dark. There were many unbelieving people, and the political rulers were slaves of Satan. What did Jesus do? Jesus sent his disciples out with power to drive out demons. In this way, Jesus challenged the darkness of the world. This passage reveals Jesus’ spirit to advance the kingdom of God, and Jesus’ wisdom to raise and send out disciples. Our time looks dark also. Let’s learn from Jesus how to challenge this world by faith in God.

I. Faith is a decision to believe (1-6a).

Jesus had been in Capernaum. In a few days, Jesus had revealed that he is the Lord of nature, Lord of the spiritual world, the Lord who heals chronic disease, and the Lord of life. Then Jesus left the vicinity of Capernaum and went to his hometown of Nazareth, about 20 miles to the southwest. When the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. Jesus’ message had power and authority. When people heard him, they were amazed, and said many amens. Then they should have obeyed his teaching. Instead, they asked, “Where did this man get these things?” They called him “the carpenter,” despising him as a common laborer. They called him “Mary’s son,” referring to the circumstances of his birth: It must have been well known that Mary was pregnant before marriage. They pointed out that Jesus’ brothers and sisters were ordinary people just like them. They concluded that Jesus was presumptuous for preaching to them and they took offense at him.

What a contrast they make to those who just believed. Jairus just believed in Jesus’ word and fought against fear. Then he experienced the power of Jesus to raise his daughter to life. A bleeding woman touched Jesus with faith and was healed of her chronic disease. The hometown people had enough evidence to conclude that Jesus was God’s servant and to believe his message. But they discredited him and did not believe. Mark says that Jesus could not do any miracles there. The sick remained sick, and the demon-possessed remained as they were. These people missed Jesus’ blessing. Believing in Jesus is a decision. Some people believe without much evidence. Other people do not believe in the face of overwhelming evidence. In the end, each person decides whether to believe in Jesus or not.

In his book, “The Case for Faith,” Lee Strobel compares two persons: Dr. Billy Graham and Chuck Templeton. Both were evangelists in the 1940’s. They preached the gospel boldly and creatively. As time went by, however, Chuck began to have doubts based on his reason. He could not reconcile the love of God with the suffering he saw in the world. Chuck shared his doubts with Dr. Graham and encouraged him to open his mind to these “reasonable doubts.” Dr. Graham struggled. In God’s providence, a godly older woman, Henrietta Mears, encouraged him to just believe the Bible as the word of God. At last, Dr. Graham made a decision to just believe. His doubts disappeared and the Holy Spirit came into his heart. He began to preach with great conviction and power. It was the beginning of a fruitful ministry as an evangelist to the world. Chuck never made such a decision to believe. Some time later he saw an African woman on a magazine cover. She was holding her dead child in her arms. Chuck reasoned that a loving God would not have let the child die. He felt that he could not believe. So he became an agnostic. Recently, he confessed with tears that “he misses Jesus.” Faith requires a decision. We must decide to believe in Jesus. Those who do so are blessed. Those who do not will not be blessed.

How we see the work of God is very important. God works through people who have weaknesses. If we want to dig for someone’s weakness we can always find something. Even Jesus, who is perfect, was despised based on his human background! However, if we acknowledge what God is doing, even through imperfect human beings, we will be blessed. Dr. Joseph Schafer’s original Bible teacher was a Korean missionary with an English problem. Sometimes Joe couldn’t really understand what was being taught. Sometimes Joe was showered with spittle by his excited Bible teacher. But Joe realized that the Spirit of God was working. So he decided to learn faith, accepting the spittle as a kind of baptism. If he had focused on the communication problem or cultural differences, he might have despised his Bible teacher. Then he would have missed God’s blessing through him. Instead, he acknowledged God and accepted God’s word. Then he found the love of God in Jesus and clear life direction. He has become an exemplary professor shepherd and house church leader for America and the world. Those who acknowledge the work of God will be blessed abundantly.

II. Jesus sends out the twelve (6b-7).

As we have seen, Jesus was in a continual spiritual conflict. How did Jesus respond? Jesus initiated an evangelistic campaign that was greater than anything he had done until that time. There is a saying, "The best defense is a good offense." Jesus went on the offensive. Verse 6b reads, "Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village." Not only did Jesus himself teach, but he also sent out his disciples. Look at verse 7. "Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits." Jesus looks like a commanding general who attacks his enemy on the battlefield. The spirit of Jesus is to advance, advance, always advance. We learn several things from Jesus who sent out the Twelve.

First, Jesus had a vision to spread the gospel through his disciples. Jesus loved his disciples as his own family members. They were all very dear to him and he wanted to be with them always. However, the purpose of their calling was not merely to hang around with Jesus. It was to spread the kingdom of God to Israel, and later to the world. To attain this vision, Jesus helped them step by step. Until now, Jesus had shown them his divine character and example of serving through life together. It was an observation period. Now they were entering the practical training period. They would go out and do what they had seen Jesus doing. Jesus constantly made progress in fulfilling his vision.

Jesus teaches us not to be habitual or to merely seek church welfare. Bible students must grow to become Bible teachers. We should help them step by step to go out and evangelize. We should go fishing on the campuses, send short term missionaries, and pioneer new chapters. Yesterday my daughter Sarah left for the University of Florida on a summer internship. I gave her Matthew 28:18-20 and prayed for her to have independent faith, to raise one disciple, and to be a blessing to Tampa ministry. It is part of her growing process to be a medical missionary in the future. Earlier this year, God enabled us to send out 20 members to IIT under the spiritual leadership of Bob Henkins. Their number has increased to over 30, and at one Friday meeting 19 students participated. Bob has grown as a messenger and his coworkers have all matured in faith. At the same time, God blessed the Chicago Sunday worship service. The 20 who were sent out were replaced immediately. Then another 20 new attendants came for good measure. God blesses us when we work for his vision step by step.

Second, Jesus sent his young disciples by faith. Jesus' disciples were spiritually young. They had been with him for only a short time. They were often fearful. They did not yet know how to pray. Still, Jesus sent them out for a short-term mission. Jesus did so by faith in God Almighty who was with them to protect them and use them. We need this kind of faith to send young people out into the mission field, even for a short-term mission. They may be young spiritually, but we must see them with the eyes of faith, as Jesus does. This is graduation season. Some graduates who have been with us during their student days will go to various places for further study or to begin their careers. We must send them with faith that God will be with them and use them. Who knows? They may become missionaries in the future.

Third, Jesus gave them authority over evil spirits. The only thing Jesus gave them was authority over evil spirits. Jesus displayed this authority throughout his ministry. Once, Jesus preached in a synagogue in Capernaum. An evil spirit caused a man to react strongly against Jesus. Then Jesus said, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. In Gerasa, Jesus met a man possessed by a legion of demons. Jesus said, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" The evil spirit was exposed, shaken and subdued. Then, after Jesus restored the man's identity and purpose by asking, "What is your name?" all the demons in the man came out and went into a herd of pigs. As we know, demons do not move by the power of money, or by the threat of nuclear bombs. But at one word of Jesus, demons are driven out by force. This is the authority of Jesus. Jesus gave this authority to his disciples. The disciples did not earn it or deserve it, it was given to them freely by Jesus. This was all they needed for a successful evangelistic campaign. Jesus still gives his disciples power to drive out demons in his name.

In light of Mark's gospel, Jesus' authority was not given permanently. We see in chapter 9 that the apostles failed to drive out a demon from a boy. Then Jesus taught them that they needed to pray. Gospel workers must come to Jesus and receive his authority every time they go out for evangelistic work. For each Bible study, message, conference, or special event, we must come to Jesus in prayer to receive his authority. We don't need many things. We need one thing: we need Jesus' authority to drive out evil spirits.

Fourth, Jesus sent them two by two. When Jesus sent the Twelve, he sent them two by two. God's work is not done by one person in a spectacular way. God's work is done through coworkers who share the suffering and give God the glory. When a husband and wife pray together with one prayer topic, there is a work of God in the family. Where two fellowship members come together and pray, there is a work of God in the fellowship. However, if each person insists on his privacy and personal rights and freedom, the work of God is greatly hindered. We must learn to cowork in Jesus to be fruitful.

III. Jesus' instructions and the advance of God's kingdom (8-29).

Some people think that as servants of Jesus, we must live totally by inspiration and do freely whatever we feel is right at the time. This is not true. Servants of Jesus must follow Jesus' instructions. Just as good cooks follow the recipe to make a delicious meal, Jesus' servants must follow his instructions to have a successful ministry. Let's see what Jesus' instructions are.

First, depend on God alone. Look at verses 8-9. "These were his instructions: 'Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.'" God's work is not done by money or an organization. God's work is done by the Spirit of God through those who depend on God. When UBF ministry began in Korea, students were very poor. Many church leaders told Dr. Lee and Mother Barry and Dr. John Jun that they could not do mission work because they had no money. But God's servants believed that Jesus could do mission work through them without money. They depended on God alone, by faith. Now we see that more than 1,500 missionaries have gone out to over 80 nations of the world through UBF ministry. To be fruitful gospel workers, we must depend on God, and God alone.

Second, stay in one place. Look at verse 10. "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town." Jesus' disciples should not move around seeking better accommodations or better people to live with. When God leads them to a house, they must stay there and make friends with that person or family. They must commit themselves in one place until the gospel is planted there. Then the seed of the kingdom will grow and bear fruit in that community for seasons to come.

Third, shake the dust off your feet. Look at verse 11. "And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." The disciples are Jesus' ambassadors. The message they bring is Jesus' message of salvation to people. The disciples must honor Jesus with their preaching, regardless of the response. At the same time, the disciples must respect the right of people in the mission field to make their own decision about the message. Jesus' disciples should not cajole people to believe or change their message to make it palatable. They must deliver Jesus' message as it is and let people respond. People who do not welcome them or listen to them are rejecting Jesus. So the disciples should not take rejection personally. Those who reject Christ have no other way of salvation from God. The disciples must shake the dust off their feet to warn them and move on to share the message with others.

Let's see what happened. Look at verses 12-13. "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." The disciples preached the same message that Jesus and John the Baptist had been preaching: that people should repent. It was not easy to deliver this message. John had been beheaded for this. How could the disciples, who had been so fearful do this? They were inspired by Jesus' courageous faith. In preaching, they did not just say, "You repent, and you repent." They preached that people should repent, including themselves, their listeners and King Herod as well. God is holy and righteous and will judge sin. At the same time, God loves us and has reached out to us in Christ. God wants to forgive our sins and change us in the inner being to be holy children of God. When we simply turn to God for help, he will give us grace to live a new life. The disciples' simple message of repentance and forgiveness was accompanied by God's power. Demons ran away from them and many sick people were healed. There was a great work of God throughout that region.

In verses 14-29 we find the story of King Herod beheading John the Baptist. This teaches us that a king without the truth is nothing more than a slave of sin and a source of bad influence. It also teaches us that a woman who has no fear of God and no respect for her husband can ruin a family and a kingdom. It further shows us that the world of the time was very dark. The king's palace was like an x-rated movie theater with scenes of adultery, murder and

exploited children. Most of all this story shows us that the work of God through the disciples shook the stronghold of Satan. In spite of all opposition, the kingdom of God was advancing, overcoming the evil of the world.

Let's decide to just believe in Jesus. Let's challenge the dark world with faith in God Almighty. Let's practice the wisdom of Jesus who raised and sent his disciples to advance the kingdom of God.