

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE WITH HIS AUTHORITY

Mark 6:1-29

Key Verse: 6:7, "Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits."

In the previous passage, Jesus healed a woman from a 12-year bleeding problem when she just touched the edge of Jesus' cloak in faith. Jesus also said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe," and then gave new life to his pre-teen daughter. Today's passage looks much more discouraging on the surface. We see that Jesus' hometown people reject him. Also, we are told of the unjust murder of John the Baptist. Yet in the midst of this bad news, Jesus sends out his Twelve apostles with his power and authority. They would not be welcomed by all, just as Jesus wasn't welcomed by all. Still, God's kingdom was advancing in and through Jesus and his disciples. Let's see and take heart at how God's kingdom advances in the midst of opposition.

I. A Prophet in his hometown (1-6a)

Jesus went to his hometown, Nazareth, a small town, with his disciples. On the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and many who heard him were amazed. They said, "Where did Jesus get these things: this wisdom, and these remarkable miracles we hear he is performing?" "Wait a minute! Isn't he the carpenter? Mary's son? Aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Judas and Simon, and his sisters here in Nazareth?" And they took offense at him.

Why did they take offense at Jesus? Because they couldn't believe a prophet could come out of their small town Nazareth. Especially, they never expected that a prophet would be born from a carpenter dad and a mom who got pregnant before marriage! Isn't it interesting that the world thinks you have to be born into a rich and famous family to make any difference in the world? But if you look at world history, not all great people were born into royalty, privilege and power. This is particularly true of prophets and servants of God.

Moses was born the son of slaves. David was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse, from Bethlehem. How about the twelve apostles of Jesus? None of them were great by human standards. Four of them were ordinary, uneducated fishermen. One was a despised tax collector.

How about servants of God in our times? Billy Graham was born as a country boy who preferred baseball to religion saying, "I detested going to church." But at age 15 he gave his life to Christ. Before dying at age 99 he preached the gospel to over 200 million people in nearly 200 nations. There were times he felt like he was dying. But he didn't say to the Lord, "I'm a preacher, and I've preached to many people." [He] said, "Oh Lord, I'm a sinner, and I still need

Your forgiveness. I still need the cross.” He said, “And I asked the Lord to give me peace in my heart, and He did—a wonderful peace that hasn’t left me.”¹

Sarah Barry was born on a cotton plantation in Mississippi. She grew up as a tomboy and had a horse named Rebel. In time she accepted Christ deeply, became a missionary to Korea and co-founded UBF ministry with Dr. Samuel Lee. In a short biography of her life, Alan Wolff wrote, “I don’t want to lionize missionary Sarah Barry to the extent that our eyes are taken off Jesus. To me, she is actually a 21st century saint. However, often when I talk to her and pray with her, she talks about what a sinner she is and how thankful she is for Jesus’ grace.”² Humble servants of God like Billy Graham or Sarah Barry are not necessarily impressive by worldly standards. Actually, it’s really only people who are positively influenced by them who appreciate and honor them.

So how did Jesus respond when his hometown people took offense at him? Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” Here Jesus acknowledges himself as a prophet, a servant and messenger of God. He also states that a prophet is honored except in his own family and by his own townspeople. This is also often true of those who follow and serve Jesus Christ. Servants of Christ may not make a lot of money or be respected by many people, or even by their own family members. Apostle Paul expressed the sentiment of a faithful servant of Christ well in Galatians 1:10, “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Politicians win votes by pleasing people. But the aim of a Christian is to please Christ, even if it is not popular or winsome in the eyes of the world. May we be faithful followers and servants of Jesus Christ.

Mark ends this section on a disappointing note: “[Jesus] could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.” Isn’t it surprising that even with poor results Jesus still healed a few sick people. Anyway, may we not amaze Jesus by a lack of faith, but rather by our faith and trust in him. To say it another way: If you are going to amaze Jesus, let it be for a good reason, not a bad one.

II. The Apostles participate in the life-giving work of God (6b-13)

After this, Jesus went around teaching from village to village and town to town. Jesus kept spreading the good news of God’s kingdom. There was so much work to be done, and so many people to meet and minister to. However, Jesus’ time was running out. He didn’t have 10 years or even 5 years left. He had to pass on the preaching and healing and ministering to others. So, verse 7 says, “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.” We call this fieldwork or evangelism training. We learn several things here.

¹ <https://memorial.billygraham.org/official-obituary/>, accessed 4/10/21.

² “Sarah Barry Biography: My Grace Is Sufficient For You,” written by Yvonne Timlin & Mark Vucekovich, 2013, UBF Press, p.110.

In the first place, Jesus sent them. Jesus first called his Twelve to him, and then Jesus sent them. In the military, marching orders come from the commander in chief. No one in the military gets to pick where they want to go or what they want to do. The Israelites were trained in the wilderness to follow God's presence. They followed the cloud of God's Presence, encamping or leaving whenever God did. As Christians, we must listen to Jesus and follow his word and Spirit day by day. This means denying our own feelings and ideas that are contrary to his word and Spirit, in a spirit of surrender and obedience as soldiers of Christ and children of God.

In the second place, Jesus also sent them out two by two. Why two by two? Couldn't they do more work if they went out individually? They went out two by two because Jesus said so, and they obeyed Jesus without question or argument. Actually Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 gives us a good reason to work with someone: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." We all need coworkers in God's work to help each other, support each other, encourage each other and build each other up. Actually, Christians are all part of the body of Christ. We belong to each other and we need each other. Whoever thinks they don't belong to anyone or they don't need anyone is only fooling themselves and setting themselves up for a fall.

In the third place, Jesus gave them authority over impure spirits. This is very important. Our power to preach the gospel or to heal the sick or to drive out demons does not come from ourselves, or even from other Christians, as inspiring as that may be. The authority to do anything of lasting fruit comes from Jesus and the authority of his name. When an ambassador is sent, they represent the power and authority that sent them. The same is true of Christians. We preach, we heal, we drive out demons, we minister to others effectively, only in the name of Jesus, with his power and authority. If he does not give it, we do not use it. If he does not send us, we do not go. Our trust, our strength, our confidence, our victory must be in and through Jesus Christ and Him alone.

Actually that should be obvious. We don't have any victory over sin or death or the devil in our own strength or determination. Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Our victory and success only comes when we depend on Jesus humbly in prayer: "Your kingdom come; your will be done."

Where did David's victory over Goliath come from? Was it from his experience as a shepherd boy? No. He said to Goliath, "I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty...whom you have defied" (1Sa 17:45). Like the psalmist, we must say, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Ps 20:7). Again, Psalm 121:1-2 says, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

We have at least 3 more things to learn from Jesus' marching orders in verses 8-11.

Firstly, depend on God. It's important to know that Jesus was sending them out short term, perhaps for a few days, maybe a week or two, or a month at most. Verses 8-9 tell us, "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 shirt.'" So how were they to survive if they brought no suitcase or lunch bag or credit card? They were to believe that God would provide for them. But God was not going to feed them with meat and bread from ravens, like he did the prophet Elijah (1Ki 17:6). They were to depend on God, and so must we. This doesn't mean we shouldn't prepare for mission work. Rather, it means we should not put confidence in our preparations or education or our finances in doing the Lord's work.

Secondly, find supporters. Jesus said in verse 10, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town." This meant they were to find willing supporters for their message and ministry. This was how God would provide for them, not miraculously, but through people, for "the worker is worth his keep" (Mt 10:10). Obviously, to enter a house they would first have to be accepted and welcomed, after making their purpose clear that they were on a mission from God. Good examples are Lydia from Philippi who supported Paul's ministry (Ac 16:14-15) or the wealthy family of Shunem who made a guest room for the prophet Elisha (2Ki 4:8-10).

Thirdly, move on when rejected. Jesus said in verse 11, "And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." Jesus prepared them for rejection. They would be rejected by some. When rejected, they were not to sulk in self pity, nor were they to call down fire from heaven to destroy those who rejected them. They were simply to leave and shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against them. This was a solemn warning of God's judgment to come against those who reject the message of God. We also must be clear that judgment will come to all who reject the gospel message of God's salvation in Christ.

So what happened when the apostles went out? Verses 12-13 tell us the results. "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." When they trusted and obeyed Jesus and went out in his name, with his authority, preaching that people should repent and turn to God, many evil spirits came out of people. Also, many sick people were healed when they anointed them with oil. They participated in the life-giving work of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus wants us to bring the message of repentance and salvation, deliverance and healing to a lost, sinsick and dying world.

III. The Martyrdom of righteous and holy John the Baptist (14-29)

Jesus and his disciples were doing the wonderful, healing, saving, life-transforming work of God. Many people acknowledged this as the work of a prophet of God. But not everyone accepted and recognized it as good news. King Herod thought it was bad news. He was haunted by his murder of John the Baptist, and so he thought John had come back to life. The author then tells how Herod had killed John.

Herod imprisoned John since John had rebuked him for taking his brother Philip's wife. John was not afraid to call sin what it is, even if he had to rebuke a high official for his obvious sin. John's rebuke made not only Herod look bad, but also the woman he had taken, Herodias. She nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she couldn't since Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. Matthew's gospel tells us that Herod was afraid of the people who held John to be a prophet (Mt 14:5). Herod was a powerful ruler. But he lived in fear, because he lived in sin and rebellion against God.

On Herod's birthday, Herodias found her opportunity to kill John. The daughter of Herodias danced and impressed Herod and his dinner guests. Then Herod made a foolish oath, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you...up to half my kingdom." Of course, he expected the girl to ask for jewelry or fancy clothing or riches. But, prompted by her wicked mother she said, "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." It was something Herod never expected, nor was Herod delighted to do it. But to keep his word and save face before his dinner guests, he sent an executioner to do it. John's head was presented on a platter to the girl, who gave it to her mother. And so John the Baptist was killed by wicked, ungodly people in authority. They used their authority to steal and kill and destroy. That's the devil's authority. But Jesus' authority is used to heal and deliver and save from the powers of sin and death and the devil.

In this passage, we see that Jesus and his disciples were surrounded by unbelief and wickedness. Yet the work of God was advancing through Jesus and his disciples—works of healing, salvation, deliverance and new life. The world has to this day been inundated with unbelief and wickedness. Every human being will have to face God's judgment seat one day, whether they think they will or not. Many don't care, thinking this life is all there is, and that we are merely animals in the evolutionary chain. They deny the evidences of God all around them. Others, like Herod, are pricked in their consciences by their evil deeds. They know there is such a thing as holiness and righteousness and God. Some have heard the gospel but reject it. Still, many have not heard a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's where you and I come in, brothers and sisters. We who have heard and believed the gospel are eternally grateful to God and to those who have preached it and have sincerely followed Jesus Christ. People need the Lord. People need to hear the good news of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ.

At his last crusade in 2005 in New York at the age of 86, Billy Graham said, "I have one message: that Jesus Christ came, he died on a cross, he rose again, and he asked us to repent of our sins and receive him by faith as Lord and Savior, and if we do, we have forgiveness of all of our sins."³

³ <https://memorial.billygraham.org/official-obituary/>, accessed 4/10/21.

Jesus has commissioned the followers of Jesus Christ, who have received his grace and mercy, to go to a lost, sinsick, hopeless and dying world with the message of salvation, hope and eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. There will be opposition from unbelieving and wicked people. But he has promised to work with us and through us to bring salvation and new life to all who repent of their sins and receive Him by faith.

Personally I was encouraged to hear that CBF Leaders who are just 11 people, had 44 attendees to their Easter conference. That's an average of 3 guests per leader. My wife Maria and I have a standing appointment to go to Northwestern's campus and invite students once a week. In 9 weeks we got 22 students' names and emails. But none of them had come, until last week. Finally, one came with his girlfriend to our Easter event. It was such an encouragement! That's definitely no reason to be complacent. It's not enough to bring people to church. Jesus wants followers who will go out in his name to a lost and dying world? How about you? Were you able to bring a family member or friend to the conference, or to Bible study or church recently? Have you shared the good news of Jesus Christ with anyone lately?

In a short booklet titled "Born to Reproduce," Navigators founder Dawson Trotman tells the story of 29 missionary candidates. They were graduates of universities or seminaries. He asked them, "How many persons do you know by name today who were won to Christ by you and who are living for Him?" The majority had to admit that they were ready to cross an ocean and learn a foreign language, but they had not won their first soul who was going on with Jesus Christ. He asked them, "How do you expect...you will be able to do there what you have not done here?"⁴ He also tells the story of a disciple who couldn't raise any committed disciple. He told the man to pray that God would give him a man with a heart who was serious and earnest about seeking God. And it happened and much fruit came from it in time.

I believe it was Dwight Moody who once made a personal decision to share the gospel with at least one person every day. One day he got into bed and then realized he had not shared the gospel with anyone. So he put his clothes back on, went out and found one person and led that person to a new life in Christ.

Friends, we must start where we are, right here, right now, in your neighborhood, at your work place, in your zoom classroom. Are you praying for the people around you whom you know need Jesus? Will you pray to find even one person this week whom you can share the gospel of Jesus with by your words and actions? Are you ready to share the gospel if God gives you one person each day to share it with, like Dwight Moody did? If you have received the gospel, you are privileged and obligated to pass it on to others. May our Lord send us to the lost, confused, and hopeless in his name with his authority and the life-changing gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ "Born to Reproduce," Dawson Trotman, Navpress, 2008, pp.18-19.