

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

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.”

The purpose of Jesus' calling the Twelve disciples was that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons (3:14-15). The Twelve had been with Jesus and learned who he was and what he was doing. Through many practical events, Jesus had planted faith in God in their hearts. Now it was time for them to go out and put into practice what they had learned. Jesus' disciples were young and untested, but Jesus had hope that they would do what he had been doing. He wanted to raise them as spiritual generals. He would work with them and empower them and use them to challenge the evil of the world with the gospel. Learning and practice are both necessary. Being with Jesus and being sent out are both essential. When we do both, we can grow as healthy Christians. Jesus does not want us to remain as spectators, but to be effective servants for his kingdom purpose.

Jesus' sending out the Twelve is the central event in this passage. It is placed between Jesus' rejection by his hometown people, and the narrative about the beheading of John the Baptist. These events tell us that the environment Jesus worked in was unfavorable. The world of our time is very much like that of Jesus' time in its unbelief and wickedness. Sometimes we wonder what we can do when confronting the evil of this generation. Our gospel ministry seems small, insignificant and ineffective in comparison. But today's passage shows us that Jesus' spirit was undaunted and he advanced the gospel relentlessly, pushing back the darkness of the world. Let's learn Jesus' undaunted spirit and advance the gospel in our times.

First, Jesus was rejected by his hometown people (1-6a). From the time Jesus began his messianic ministry, he had no chance to visit his hometown. Now the opportunity had come. He went to his hometown accompanied by his disciples (1). This refers to Nazareth, where Jesus had grown up. We human beings are usually sentimental about our hometowns. We long to return and see relatives and friends and revisit familiar places. As a human being, Jesus must have had the same desire. But Jesus' point was to preach

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the gospel to them. So when the Sabbath came Jesus began to teach in the synagogue and many who heard him were amazed at his words (2a). They recognized that divine wisdom and power were at work through Jesus. They knew that Jesus had never been to a rabbinical school. So they asked, **“Where did this man get these things? What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are the remarkable miracles he is performing?”** (2b) Jesus’ words were not his own words, they came from God (Jn 7:16). Jesus’ miracles testified that God was working through him (Jn 5:36). They should have recognized that Jesus came from God. But it was hard for them. They had a strong familiarity with Jesus’ human side. So they said, **“Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him”** (3). Jesus is fully man and fully God. We need to see both sides of Jesus. The problem of Jesus’ hometown people was that they saw only Jesus’ human side. When they did so, they denied Jesus’ divinity. They saw Jesus merely as a working class man. They disparaged him for being “Mary’s son,” alluding to an illegitimate birth.

Why did they take offense at Jesus? It was simply due to their pride, prejudice and jealousy. This reminds us of the novel, “Pride and Prejudice,” by Jane Austen. Elizabeth Bennett and Fitzwilliam Darcy were introduced to each other. But Darcy’s pride as a social elite, and Elizabeth’s prejudice based on rumors, soured their relationship. In the end Darcy overcame his pride and Elizabeth her prejudice and they lived happily ever after. Pride and prejudice are great barriers in human relationships. We have a tendency to see second gens as eternal children. We never forget their mischievous acts of the past, even after they become renowned professionals. With such a mindset, we cannot really respect them, and they are offended. We should overcome the pride and prejudice in our hearts to have a right relationship with others. This applies to Jesus as well. When the hometown people saw Jesus from a human point of view, they were blinded to who he really was. They forfeited the blessing of his ministry. Let’s see Jesus as fully God and fully man, and see all things from God’s point of view.

How did Jesus respond to their offense? Jesus said to them, **“A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home”** (4). Jesus was not hurt by their rejection. Rather, he understood it in light of the sinful tendency of people to dishonor prophets in

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their hometowns. The author Mark comments that he could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them (5). Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith (6a). Jesus really wanted to bless his hometown people. But when they did not have faith, he could not do miracles. Jesus was very sorry. Jesus always blessed those who came to him by faith, including a man with leprosy, a woman with a bleeding problem and others. But when people had no faith, Jesus did not bless them—even his hometown people. We should know that we cannot draw God's blessing through merely human relationships, but only by faith in Jesus.

Jesus' rejection by his hometown people foreshadows his ultimate rejection. In fact, Jesus was despised and rejected by mankind, including all of us, because of our sins (Isa 53:3). This is why he became a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Finally, Jesus was tried, condemned and crucified for our sins on the cross. He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities (Isa 53:5). But his rejection was not the end. God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place and made him our Savior and Lord. When we follow Jesus, we also must go through rejection and suffering. When we live a godly life and reach out to others with the gospel, we will surely be misunderstood and rejected. Yet this is our opportunity to participate in the suffering of Jesus. As we do, we can really know Jesus and grow to be like him.

Second, Jesus raises the Twelve as gospel workers (6b-29). When Jesus was rejected by his hometown people, he did not become upset and argue with them. Nor did he fall into discouragement and delay his ministry. Rather, Jesus went around teaching from village to village (6b). Moreover, Jesus also began to send his disciples out, according to his time schedule. Jesus had already set a good example. Now he wanted them to follow his example. Let's read verse 7. **“Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.”** Before sending them out, Jesus first called the Twelve to him. They had been hanging around Jesus for some time. Why did they need to be called to him at this moment? Before being sent into the world, they needed intimate time with Jesus. Jesus shared his heart with them. He had chosen and loved each of them personally. Jesus shared his hope and vision for them. Jesus shared his power and wisdom with them. Jesus gave them everything they needed to go out and do what he had been doing. We, too, need intimate fellowship with Jesus before

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doing his work. We need to listen to Jesus' words and know his heart. We need to receive his wisdom and power. Jesus is the one who sends us out. When Jesus sends us, we are not ordinary people; we are ambassadors of Christ. We are sent out, not to advertise ourselves or our organization, but to share the good news of Jesus our King with others.

Jesus sent them out two by two. Why did Jesus send them out two by two, not one by one? It seems that they could reach more villages if they went out individually. But each one's personal faith was not strong enough to withstand opposition and temptation. They needed encouragement from each other. **"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...though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"** (Ecc 4:9-10, 12). Though one is weak, two are strong. The first week of class, Jesus' disciples at UIC went out two by two to share the gospel with students. Although each one is weak, when they went out two by two, they became strong and courageous. They shared the gospel with 71 people through "the Bridge Diagram," and 31 people decided to begin one-to-one Bible study. God blesses those who work together in Jesus' name. Jesus promised, **"If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven"** (Mt 18:19). Instead of competing with others, blaming others and discouraging them, if we work together for the glory of God, God will surely bless us. When Jesus sent them out, he gave them authority over impure spirits. This means that when they spoke with faith in Jesus, demons fled. A little boy confronted a fierce lion in the jungle. Remembering his father's training he overcame fear and said to the lion, "Lion, run away!" Then the lion turned and fled. It was not really because of the boy, but because his strong father was standing behind him. In the same way, when we confront demons in Jesus' name, it is not us they fear, but Jesus. Seeing Jesus behind us, they flee.

In verses 8-11 Jesus gave instructions to his disciples, not as legalistic rules, but to teach principles (Lk 22:36a). It was to train young disciples to grow to maturity as independent gospel workers. Let's consider the principles. First of all, Jesus taught them to depend on God alone. This was their first mission journey without Jesus. So we can guess that they were very excited. At the same time, they were nervous. It was tempting for them to try to prepare everything they would need in detail for a perfect mission journey

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experience. They might have thought about bringing soap and shampoo, a towel, shaving instruments, batteries, chargers, adapters, enough clothes, extra socks, packages of ramen noodles, instant coffee and a pot for boiling water, spending money, emergency contact information, passports, visas and other documents. Jesus knew what they were thinking. So he told them, **“Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt”** (8-9). Jesus wanted them to stop thinking about all the things they might need and trust God. They needed only to depend on God. God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). At the European Conference I met John and Grace Martin. They went to the United Kingdom as missionaries, taking nothing for the journey. God blessed John with a job as an architect in Westchester. They began to attend the local branch of the Church of England, met the Vicar, and shared their life testimonies with him. After prayer, the Vicar looked favorably on their suggestion to develop a student ministry at the University of Winchester. He agreed to train them for a period of time and afterward to endorse their ministry. Then they will have the freedom to share Jesus and make disciples among students there. This happened when they just depended on God for everything.

Why did Jesus allow them to take a staff? Both Matthew and Luke say that Jesus did not allow the staff (Mt 10:10; Lk 9:3). There are two kinds of staffs. One is a walking staff and the other is a weapon, like a handgun. Jesus allows a walking staff, like Mother Barry’s stick. But Jesus doesn’t want us to take weapons into the mission field. This means that we depend on God alone for our protection. Jesus also said not to take an extra shirt. This refers to a garment that could be used as a blanket in the cold night. Jesus wanted them to trust in God to provide lodging each night. Jesus trained them to depend on God and trust God for their security and provisions.

The first principle Jesus taught is to depend on God alone. The second principle is to have a genuine love relationship with people who accept the gospel and welcome them. Jesus said in verse 10, **“Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.”** They should not move around to seek better service or tastier food and more convenient lodging. Jesus wanted them to focus on having deep fellowship with one household. In this way the gospel could take deep root in one house, and that household could become a blessing to the community.

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The third principle is to maintain a clear identity as Christ's ambassadors. 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.”** When the disciples were not welcomed or their message was ignored, it was easy for them to be hurt and discouraged. They could have doubted their qualification and the significance of their message, thinking: “What is wrong with me? Is my gospel message powerless and irrelevant?” If they fall into this way of thinking, it is hard to keep on preaching the gospel. They need to maintain a clear identity as Christ's ambassadors. When people reject them, they are rejecting Christ. These people will be responsible for their response. Let's maintain a clear identity as Christ's ambassadors. **“We are Christ's ambassadors!”** (2 Cor 5:20)

Verses 12-13 tell us what the disciples did. First, they preached that people should repent (12). This is a summary of the message that Jesus preached, wherever he went, which was: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (1:15) Why do people need to repent? To repent is to turn away from the world and toward God; it is to turn away from oneself and toward Christ. Every human being needs to repent. It is because **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Ro 3:23). The consequences of sin are not just misery in this world, but eternal condemnation without hope. We cannot escape this destiny by doing charity work or through special achievements. The only way God has given is to repent and believe in Jesus who died for our sins and rose again. Anyone who sincerely turns to Jesus for mercy, like the robber on the cross, can receive forgiveness and eternal life. So the message of repentance is not burdensome; it is the message of salvation and life; it is the message of hope and love and peace. The disciples delivered the message of repentance without compromise. Though they were young, there was a great work of God through them. The disciples also drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them (13). They shepherded needy people one by one as Jesus did. When they simply obeyed what Jesus told them to do, the power of God worked mightily through them.

Verses 14-16 tell us of the great impact of the disciples' evangelistic journey. Jesus became very popular. Some were saying, **“John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at**

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work in him.’ Others said, ‘He is Elijah.’ And still others claimed, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago’” (14b-15). When John was beheaded by the evil act of Herod, people were terrified at the gross injustice. But through the gospel ministry of Jesus’ disciples, they experienced that God was living and working among them. God had not abandoned them, but was healing and restoring them. Through this they could have a sense of victory and hope for God’s reign with perfect justice. The message of the gospel reached Herod’s ears. But to him, it was not good news; it was a message of judgment. It aroused his guilt for the crime of beheading John. Every night he saw headless John in his dreams and was terrified. Though the disciples’ ministry seemed small, it shook the whole nation.

Verses 17-29 recall how John was beheaded. Herod had taken his brother, Philip’s wife. John rebuked them. Because of this, he was beheaded by Herod, who was manipulated by Herodias. This reveals that the people of Jesus’ times were adulterous, murderous, and wicked. Still, Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the gospel. Jesus wanted them to challenge and overcome the evil world with the gospel. After Jesus was raised from the dead, he sent his disciples into the whole world to go and make disciples of all nations. This same Jesus is sending his people into the world today. He does not want us to be daunted by the evil of the world, but to push back the darkness with the power of the gospel and change the course of history on our campuses and in the world. Let’s pray that we may be sent out into the world with Jesus’ vision and hope.