

True Discipleship

Matthew 10:1-42

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Dear Congregation of Christ: We've been going through the Gospel of Matthew for a few months now. Chapters 1-4 tell us about Jesus: his miraculous birth by a virgin woman; his ordination by God at his baptism, and his temptation in the wilderness by the devil. In Chapters 5-7, he teaches his disciples about the kingdom of heaven and how they are live as kingdom people. Then in Chapters 8-9, we read about the signs and wonders and miracles that he performed before big crowds.

Now in Chapter 10, we read that he called twelve of his disciples to be the "Twelve," his apostles. The word "apostle" means one who is "sent out," an ambassador or emissary, used in verse 5 where Jesus "sent out" the Twelve. So the Twelve Apostles were ambassadors of Jesus. In Acts 1:22, we read that to be one of the "Twelve," a disciple must have been an eyewitness of the risen Christ. And according to our text, the other requirement was that an Apostle must have been called and appointed by Christ himself.

But it was also the duty of the Twelve to preach and teach Jesus' teachings to make other disciples. Some of these disciples will also be called to preach and teach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven to make other disciples. They too are ambassadors of Christ. And down through the centuries, those who have been chosen by God became disciples of Jesus.

Matthew Chapter 10 is a long chapter which details Jesus' call to his Twelve Apostles to be his special disciples out of all the disciples who followed him. The word "disciple" in Greek is *mathetes*, which means a student or learner. Literally, in today's English, a disciple is a "mathematician."

But Jesus' call to his disciples can be applied to all of us believers. The principles in Matthew Chapter 10 is also a call to us to true discipleship. What is our **calling** to be true disciples? What are the **conditions** to true discipleship? And how does God **provide** for his true disciples?

The Call to Discipleship

In verses 1-4, we read the names of the Twelve Apostles whom Jesus called and sent. They were a diverse group. There were two sets of brothers: Peter and Andrew, James and John who were sons of Zebedee. Two were unnamed disciples of John the Baptizer (John 1:35). Simon the Zealot and possibly Judas Iscariot may have been activists against the Roman oppressors. The four brothers were fishermen, Matthew was a tax collector, but the occupations of the other seven are unknown. Peter was the first called and the most well-known. Peter, James and John were Jesus' inner circle. James the son of Alphaeus is also called James the Lesser to distinguish him from the better-known James. He is also not to be confused with James the brother of Jesus who wrote the Epistle of James, and who was the leader of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Today, the kingdom of Christ is a mixed, diverse group of people from all walks of life, nations, tribes and languages.

The number Twelve recalls the Twelve sons of Jacob whose descendants became the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The Twelve Apostles and their disciples, like the Twelve Tribes of Israel, have now become God's people. They are now children of God and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We see this connection clearly in the description of the foundations and gates of the new heaven and new earth, called the heavenly city of Jerusalem. On its twelve gates are inscribed the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And on its twelve foundations, the names of the Twelve Apostles (Rev 21:12-14). The heavenly city is now made up of *one, not two*, united people of God: Jews and Gentiles.

Paul says that Gentiles who are called to be disciples of Christ are now members of one body, fellow heirs and partakers of God's promises in Christ (Eph 2:5). Think of the Berlin Wall: it separated East Germany from its enemy, West Germany. But in 1989, the wall was torn down, giving birth to one German nation. In the same way, "the dividing wall of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles was torn down by the death and resurrection of Christ, giving birth to one holy nation, one kingdom of God (Eph 2:14).

What was the Apostles' calling? First, Jesus to heal sicknesses and cast out demons (1, 8). Our Lord gave them power and authority to perform signs and wonders and miracles just as he did. They were also to preach and teach the coming of the kingdom and all the words of the Lord (7, 14).

As true disciples of Christ, what is your calling after you received and accepted his call to believe? You are to "*press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 3:14). That goal is heaven itself, which Hebrews 3:1 calls "a heavenly calling." It is also a "*holy calling*" (2 Tim 1:9), in a "*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*" (Eph 4:1; 2 Thess 1:11). Your calling to be disciples is a high and holy calling by our Lord. Peter also exhorts you to "*be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall*" (2 Pet 1:10). When you grow in Christian virtues such as knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (2 Pet 1:5-7), you will have increasing confidence and assurance that God really chose and called you to be saved before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4).

Therefore, "*you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.*" You have been "*called out of darkness into his marvelous light*" in order that "*you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you*" (1 Pet 2:9).

The Sacrificial Conditions of Discipleship

But the Twelve's calling also involves sacrifices. In verses 5-15, why does Jesus restrict the area where the Twelve should go? They were to teach and perform signs and wonders only to "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*" not to the Gentiles and Samaritans. This is because the Jews have heard his teachings and seen his miracles, while Gentiles haven't. Also, the Jewish Apostles still had their prejudices against non-Jews, so they would not have had success in going outside of Jewish towns. It was only after his resurrection that Jesus commanded his Apostles to "*make disciples of the nations*" (Matt 28:19). And then in the Book of Acts, the Twelve spread the gospel from Jerusalem to all Judea, to Samaria, and finally to all the nations.

How then should the Twelve conduct their mission? Jesus gives them several instructions, some of which seem strange and even harsh. First, what will they take with them where they will

be sent? Jesus commands them not take any money or bag or extra tunic or sandals or staff (9-10). The Twelve must have thought, “What? Are we going to be barefooted beggars on the streets? How are we going to eat? What are we going to wear?”

No, Jesus is not making them penniless, homeless beggars. The word translated “provide” (KJV) is better as “get” (NIV) or “acquire” (ESV). So, they must not provide for themselves by acquiring more things, like an extra tunic, before they go. They must take along what they already have, but not buy extra resources, because they were going on short mission trips to Jewish towns only. They must trust the Lord for their provisions, just as Israel trusted in God for provisions during their 40 years in the wilderness. This is why in Mark 6:8-9, Jesus allows them to take a staff and wear sandals.

Second, how should they react if their teaching is rejected? In each town, there will be those who would receive the gospel, and those would reject it. The Twelve should stay in the homes of those who become new disciples. These new disciples would provide for their needs. But what if they went into a town where no one received the gospel? Jesus tells them, “*shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town*” (14). What does this mean? In ancient Jewish tradition, this is a symbol of rejection and judgment. When a Jew travels through a Gentile or Samaritan land, he shakes off the dirt from his shoes and clothes because they considered Gentiles as unclean.

When this happens, Jesus tells the Twelve that Judgment Day will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those Jews who reject the gospel (15). Does this mean that these Jews committed greater sins than Sodom and Gomorrah? No, but they will face more terrible judgment because they heard the gospel and rejected it, while pagans never heard. These unbelieving Jews were more accountable. Since the Twelve went from town to town, village to village, they had limited time to preach the gospel. Once they were rejected in a village, they promptly moved on to the next village. There was no point in tarrying in a “dry land.”

This is true even today. Those who have heard the gospel and reject it will face harsher judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah. Think of all those millions of Americans who have heard the true gospel preached on radio and TV and have read about it in magazines and books. All those abortionists, homosexuals, violent antifa and their supporters who reject God’s Word and the true gospel will face terrible judgment. Make sure that you say yes to the gospel today, because there may not be tomorrow, “*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts*” (Heb 4:7).

Third, in verses 16-24, Jesus instructs the Twelve to persevere through persecution and rejection. He sends them as sheep among wolves who will send them to the courts and rulers to be punished severely. Even their own families and friends will reject and betray them to the authorities. They will be hated because they bear the name of the Lord. Because Jesus was hated and persecuted, they will also suffer the same, because a disciple is like his teacher. Jesus came not to bring peace, but enmity, because the gospel divides the sheep and the wolves, even within families (34-39). He himself was rejected by his own family, so he knew that his disciples would suffer in the same way.

This is why Jesus warns the disciples about their life’s priorities. The gospel and obeying him – not family or possessions – is their first priority. True discipleship includes sacrifices (36-39).

God's Provisions for Discipleship

But Jesus also gives the Twelve several promises. First, he would provide for his disciples' physical needs. When they go into a town, he would provide new disciples who would welcome them into their homes and give them food and drink and a restful shelter from their day's work.

When Evelyn and I were considering joining Wycliffe Bible Translators, we had many questions. How are we going to raise support? Where will our children go to school? Can we adjust living in a poor, third-world country? But God provided for our needs. Our children went to a Christian missionary school. And God gave us a spirit of compassion to go and help in translating the Bible into the language of disciples in other nations. Do you trust that God will provide for your needs and give you comfort and peace in this trust? God says, "Live by faith." This is why Jesus assures the Twelve that if God provides for sparrows, he will surely provide for them, *"even the hairs of your head are all numbered"* (30-32).

Second, the Holy Spirit himself will speak through them (19-20). They should not worry about what to say to the people, and to the authorities when they are delivered to be punished. In John 14:26, Jesus promised them, *"the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."* As he has inspired the Apostles to write the New Testament books, he inspired them also to speak his words. So, when you have a conversation with family or friends about the gospel, do not worry that words will fail you, because the Spirit himself will guide your mouth.

Third, Jesus promises a reward to those who endure and persevere to the end (22). What is the reward? It is the crown of eternal life in heaven (Rev 2:10). It is the acknowledgment before his Father in heaven that you belong to the kingdom of heaven (33) because you received the gospel with joy and with "a cup of cold water" for his weary ambassadors (42).

Beloved friends: In everything, Jesus is the example to the Twelve and to all of us who are his disciples in being ambassadors for Christ. His perfectly holy and righteous character and his life of pure sacrifice is our ideal, though we cannot attain such in this life.

Jesus first preached the gospel of the kingdom of God to his own people Israel, and then to the Gentiles and Samaritans. He performed miracles to validate his authority and divinity. He trusted in his Father for his provisions through those who would receive his gospel. He was as cunning as a serpent in his mission, speaking without fear in the Spirit, but still as humble and innocent as a dove. He was betrayed and suffered, but he persevered to the end. For all these things, the Father rewarded him with his own people as an inheritance, and exaltation in heaven and on earth as the Name above all names, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

All of us who are his true disciples are to imitate him. We are to be ambassadors of Christ whatever we do wherever God has placed us. We are to trust him for all our needs, for he will never forsake or leave us. We are to be both wise and humble in our witness to him, trusting in the Spirit. We are to persevere through all the hate and persecution. For all these things, when he returns, he will give us our reward: our own heavenly inheritance.