

The Kingdom draws near

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Date: 05 May 2019

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[0 : 00] The way in which Jesus goes about the commissioning of these twelve.! He calls them, he gave them authority, he gives them instructions.! And he gives them very straight commands.

! Do not go this way, go rather, do not take. So, the process of commissioning is not one of suggestion.

It's not one of let's have a meeting and decide how best to go about it. What about this work? The Lord Jesus, who has been doing all the work till now, with the disciples watching, having his example, he doesn't at this point say, well, I'm glad you're here because you've now seen, and you've seen how it's all gone.

What do you think we should do to expand this work? That actually is the way that many, many things will be done today, wouldn't it?

Let's say, let's just have a consensus on this, because you've got various talents you can bring to the peace. Some of you are fishermen. Perhaps you can tell us a bit, perhaps you've got better insight into what it means to be a sort of an artisan fisherman.

[1 : 21] Matthew, you're a tax collector. You're going to have a particular way of getting alongside people who handle money, really value your opinion on this. How is this message to be broadly spread?

No, it's not like that at all, is it? Lord Jesus speaks with utter authority, and he doesn't expect his disciples to come up with bright ideas, but rather to do exactly what he says.

He called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority, to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. They don't have authority, do they? The only authority that they have or ever will have comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a daunting thing it is for them to be facing this moment. How glad they might have been just to have sat back and to seen the Lord Jesus continuing to do what he was doing in chapters 8 and 9. And now he's throwing them into the deep end. There isn't a dry run here. They don't role play with each other. In fact, he warns them in chapter 10 that what they're going into is going to prove extremely hard and difficult.

[3 : 10] It will not be a smooth ride. So how remarkable it is that he both gives authority and he has such confidence that they will be able to be okay in that situation.

They'll be okay because the Holy Spirit of God will hold them up. And what a great work that they're being asked to do.

Don't go to the Gentiles or any town of the Samaritans.

Go round to the lost sheep of Israel. Wow, it's massive. It's so broad, isn't it? You kind of wonder at the strategy of it.

Where was he at this time? We don't exactly know. But let's say he was near somewhere like Capernaum. I said, well, you take the east end of Capernaum.

[4 : 13] You two go there and you two go off to the west end of Capernaum. So on. But none of that seems to be spelled out in any of this here. They're just given this enormous task.

And this is where they are required to use their thought and to be able to work effectively. extraordinary confidence of Jesus in his apostles' awareness of what needed to be done and how to go about it because they'd seen him at work.

And the one thing that was very evident about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ was that each day and every day in response to his prayers to his heavenly father, he moves exactly where his father wants him to be.

He says what his father wants him to say. And he's born along by the Holy Spirit. It's a wonderful thing to see, isn't it? So that we can say with utter confidence that the Lord Jesus was someone

who understood the word of the Father and did it perfectly.

He knew the promptings of the Holy Spirit so well. And I'm sure the disciples had seen this over a matter of months now and they must have been astonished as well in saying, yes, he spoke to that lady then and then this happened and then that happened and all these wonderful things were, they could see the connections and they realised that the hand of God was on this.

[5 : 52] Jesus is saying to them as you've seen it happen in my ministry so it is to happen in your ministry as well.

It's not to be different. It has the same hallmark of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. His promptings and his ways. They needed specific briefing as well.

There were certain things that Jesus was very clear about at this particular time. There were some do's and don'ts. There were some barriers. They were not to go to the Gentiles at this point in time. This wasn't yet the time for the Gentiles. Although Jesus had already dealt with Gentile people. It was by exception rather than the rule. It was by anticipation rather than the main focus of what needed to be happening at this time.

And I'm quite struck by the fact that he sends out the twelve. These are now apostles.

[7 : 10] I think it's fairly clear. It doesn't say this in this passage. We see it in the Luke passage about the 72 going out in pairs and there seems to be a biblical principle in ministry being undertaken in pairs rather than individually.

There's wisdom in that. And it's interesting that the names of the twelve apostles are paired off in that way. So was that the case that Simon and his brother Andrew went out together?

And as you go through that list you think how were these ones going to get along? Here's Thomas the one we find out who is a bit doubtful and rather pessimistic alongside Matthew the tax collector. They hadn't known each other for very long. They weren't exactly sort of paired off in a social media sense. But again the Lord Jesus perfectly knew what he was doing and the arrangement that he'd made and just as he'd individually chosen the twelve so he was well aware of the way they needed to work together as a unit.

So they're following orders. They're following his example. He's called them and he's instructed them and they are to be dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

[8 : 42] And there are these surprises only Jews not Gentiles Matthew 10 verses 5 and 6 these 12 Jesus sent out with the following instructions do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of Samaritans go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

I think we can say this is this is just part of Jesus campaign a final wooing and winning of God's covenant people which had really been happening over centuries was now reaching an enormous climax the one who'd been revealed through the prophets God who'd been wooing and winning his covenant people and finding them to be very rebellious forgetful Isaiah 5 verses 1 to 4 Isaiah who lived 600 years before Christ I will sing for the one

I love a song about his vineyard my loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside he dug it up and cleared it of stones planted it with the choicest vines he built a watch tower in it and cut out a winepress as well and he looked for a crop of good grapes it yielded only bad fruit now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah judge between me and my vineyard what more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it when I looked for good grapes why did it yield only bad it's a very sad lament isn't it this this picture the almighty and perfect God has done everything necessary to cause an extremely fruitful vineyard but perversely there's only bad fruit

God has been repeatedly merciful gracious omnipotent providing every opportunity has been provided for his covenant people the one he loves so deeply and yet perversely there's only bad fruit it's a repeated theme isn't it throughout the Bible a sobering reminder it is for us to recognise that the Lord Jesus Christ is looking for fruit in us this isn't history this is also present reality we don't bear fruit we're cast away it continues to be the acid test throughout the whole of the Bible God's people are the bear fruit the Israelites are coming to a very critical moment in their history after the coming of the many prophets and so forth

God sends his own son looking for fruit the son comes in the flesh he walks amongst his own people he came to his own but his own received him not and he does all the things that Messiah was predicted to do the kingdom is here they will never have a greater opportunity a greater nearness to the realities of Messiah blessing and the coming of Jesus to his own people in the flesh touchable so near so close they could hear him they could see him and the offer is still being made it's his final wooing and winning of

[13 : 34] God's covenant people it's very significant isn't it that although on the horizon there's a light for the Gentiles Jesus ministry here is focusing on the final wooing and winning of God's covenant people Matthew 23 37 and here is Jesus towards the end of his ministry on earth oh Jerusalem Jerusalem you who kill the prophets stone those sent to you how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing great sadness isn't it you see the that heart of compassion is still there in the Lord

Jesus still concerned for his people sorrowful over their unwillingness much of the Lord Jesus sorrow over us when we find ourselves to be unwilling drifting from him what an unhappy place to be especially with the thought that Jesus primary response to the unwillingness of his people is one of compassion one of deep sorrow he died on the cross for us why should we be unwilling he's paid with his life blood that's the most powerful motive for all of us to be turning back to the Lord if we're not in that right place tonight to remember what he's done for us take no provisions that's surprising as well isn't it seems rather modest or unduly restrictive why wouldn't you take an extra tunic does rain that sensible provision well I think it's more to be making a point on this particular occasion and the Lord Jesus is reminding them that in the detail as well as in the big picture they are to depend on God depending on God in this ministry that they're about they're to depend on

God not just for the words to speak not just for the understanding of where to go but even in the detail sometimes depending on God in detail helps us to depend on God in the big but also he says for the worker is worth his keep you notice that it's in verse 10 for the worker is worth his keep it was a proper expectation that Messiah's people would welcome and encourage Messiah's workers so here's an interesting test isn't it that those who come as ambassadors for the Messiah should be welcomed by those who are

Messiah's people the worker is worth his keep essential ingredients of the mission firstly the Messiah is here exclamation mark the Messiah is here the kingdom of heaven is near Matthew 10 verse 7 as you go preach this message the kingdom of heaven is near it's near how near can the kingdom of heaven come and as we've just described the fact of the Messiah he's come down from heaven and is in human flesh and he's there amongst you and he's there with his words and his promises and his works the kingdom of heaven is near Messiah and the marks of Messiah are undertaken they didn't just go and preach although one has to say that that is a marvellous thing for people to be able to hear truth but he did commission them in this particular way verse 8 10 verse 8 heal the sick raise the dead cleanse those who have leprosy drive out demons

[19 : 24] I don't think they've given any less authority or breadth of works than Jesus himself has already demonstrated in the previous sections of the gospel it's a strong isn't it so they're going up amongst these rebellious people they're warned about the reaction but they're going to heal the sick they're going to raise the dead they're going to cleanse those who have leprosy they're going to drive out demons these are the works of the Messiah and they're commissioned to be able to in this particular case to have authority to do exactly that I cannot think that Jesus just idly gave them that opportunity as it were but it was to be a very significant part of the mission that they were undertaking they were apostles they were given a special authority to do the things that

Jesus as the head of the apostles was commissioning them to do so that was also an essential ingredient of the mission it should be evident that when Simon and his brother Andrew went out they were involved in healing the sick and raising the dead and cleansing those who have leprosy and driving out demons and here's a thought extraordinary isn't it Simon the zealot and Judas Iscariot are also commissioned to do this amazing amazing and all is to be freely given freely you have received freely give what might that be about there's sort of a hint of what could be at stake here is that passage in

Acts where we read of that guy who saw the miracles that were being undertaken wanted to give money wanted to pay that he might have that gift as well well the Christian gospel has never been about money and the moment it becomes about money it's lost an essential ingredient Jesus was not paid to come to earth he freely gave himself to a life on this earth and death upon a cross it was never about money it was never about status and authority it was always about freeness grace lavishness without money or without price and when the Christian message gets infected by the idea that these things can be bought or valued and something really bad has happened it's never about that

I'm thinking now what our standing orders are what can we learn from these these few words which is true for us today we can say Messiah is here the kingdom of heaven is near it was near when Jesus was upon earth it is very very near now that he is in heavenly places and has sent his holy spirit into this world the kingdom of heaven was near geographically in those days wherever Jesus was and as he spreads it out a little bit further by his twelve apostles the kingdom of heaven is near throughout this whole world now by the giving of the holy spirit such abundance that's a delightful thing for us to know isn't it wherever we go in this world the kingdom of heaven is near and it is a today message the gospel is never about yesterday or tomorrow but it is about today there was an urgency in the message that was given to these twelve which is to say the kingdom of heaven is near meaning there's something to be done there's a response to be made and the response needs to be done now and that same sense of present urgency is exactly where we are and what we need to be about so that every day for us is a kingdom of heaven is near day and for us to live in a close relationship with the

Lord Jesus Christ so that we are ready and able to testify to him at every opportunity because the opportunities will come every day and we want to glorify him every day don't we want to see his kingdom extended every day so we we're not to wait till next year when it might be more convenient but today if we hear his voice that's the day whether you're at work at home on holiday it's today we are ambassadors given the king's message to proclaim that's exactly how these twelve found themselves ambassadors to proclaim the message of Jesus and this is what

[25 : 53] Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 19 and 20 and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation we are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us we implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God we don't have any message of our own do we nothing worthwhile we can bring to the peace the only message which is worthwhile and the only message which is valid for us to bring is the message of the ambassador the ambassador has got a written brief hasn't he he's got letters from the king he's saying the king has said I want you to say this I want you to say this so we have an unchanging message and as was given to those twelve so was given to us he has committed to us the message of reconciliation we are therefore

Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us be reconciled to God Paul was very clear about this wasn't he he never took ownership of the message as if it was somehow his message saying well Peter's had it in a certain way and this is my way no it's Christ's message bring Christ's message whoever is the speaker it has to be Christ's message and we judge the validity of that message on the basis of how it corresponds to the truth of God's word reliance on God they were told to depend on God and we can surely say this about everything that we need to be about apart from me you can do nothing says Jesus in John 15 verse 5 what a sobering thought that is how much energy goes into doing the best we can we know every preacher would verify this we would do so much better if we could spend more time on our knees in prayer and pray for the felt sense of the

Holy Spirit of God every congregation would do so well to be in such reliance on the Holy Spirit of God to understand and obey the message that is being delivered it doesn't change we have to rely upon God that dropped off the bottom of the page it has dropped off the bottom of my page as well expect opposition from multiple quarters we'll see that in the latter part of Matthew chapter 10 extraordinary thought to us isn't it that people coming in the authority of Jesus Christ the King people coming demonstrating the works of the Messiah get such rude treatment well Jesus says expect it expect it it's going to happen it's better for us to be expectant of it rather than taken by surprise even though it does take us by surprise and we are disappointed especially when it comes from our own families which is exactly what Jesus says later on families are divided by the gospel and that's very disappointing and upsetting but Jesus says you have to allow for this this will happen and what about the Jew I've made the point that this is this is Jesus this is Jesus final campaign of wooing and winning his people going to the very end going to the 11th hour as it were and we know that he warned them that there would come a time of terrible reckoning the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was a mark and a symbol destruction of all the old order of things is this still a place for the Jew at all well I think we should listen very carefully to the apostle Paul I'm not ashamed of the gospel because the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes first for the Jew then for the Gentile and you know that though he was called to be a light for the Gentiles he was also very careful to recognise that when he went into any situation he

should bring that gospel first to the Jewish people go into the synagogue first and try to exploit that opportunity to the best as of when the door closes and you can move on to the Gentiles and of course he had a very rich ministry amongst the Gentiles but he also had a good ministry amongst the Jews there were Jewish people who were converted under the apostle Paul and I think you need to take very seriously because some people might say yes but he actually lived before AD 70 so maybe this was just the dregs of the last embers of the covenant people but the gifts and calling of God are without repentance

[32 : 02] God God loves the Jewish people God loves the Jewish people do you realise that or do you just lump them together with everyone else I don't think God does that even now he does make a distinction and Romans 12 helps us listen to this Romans 11 isn't it thank you very much the remnant of Israel is this passage it's worth not skipping over Romans 11 verse 25 says this I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery brothers so that you may not be conceited he's talking essentially to

Gentile believers now Israel Jewish people has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved as it is written the deliverer will come from Zion he will turn godlessness away from Jacob and this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins as far as the gospel is concerned they're enemies on your account as far as election is concerned they are loved on account of the patriarchs for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable just you were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their that's the Jewish people's disobedience so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you for God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all there's an extremely powerful logic and chronology about this it runs something like this initially the gospel has come to God's people they were to be a light to the Gentiles they failed miserably in that respect and indeed they failed in terms of their allegiance to their own covenant God as we see as we have seen they were exiled they come back to their land but they still fail and so they come into a place where there's almost a hardening of their hearts it's part of God's judgment isn't it and then to their great surprise and resentment almost God's blessings are now spread upon these heathen nations which is us the Jews who were so proud of the temple system the law they'd been given the arrangements that they'd been offered by God that was theirs that was their privilege they squandered all that and now they see the rest of the world enjoying these blessings

Paul indicates in other places that's going to make them jealous going to make them jealous their hearts are hard but God still loves them and he still has a saving purpose for the Jewish people please don't think in terms of land nationalism Zionism any of that please do think of God's attitude towards the hearts of Jewish people there is an expectation given prophetically throughout the Bible and spelled out in this particular passage which is that there will be an ing gathering of Jewish people therefore it is right for us it is right for us to actually have concern for Jewish people and if we don't find them readily on our doorstep in the way that Paul did then even as a church we should be concerned to know about the work of Jewish mission to see how that goes to pray for that as well well they are a scattered people and they're actually Jews in every community as well and wouldn't it be lovely to see Jewish people coming into the church here here in the gospel of Jesus Christ and being converted what a domino effect that might have and it's also indicated that when there is that in gathering of the Jewish people there will be almost a reviving of God's work amongst the Gentiles as well there's something extraordinary explosive overwhelming that causes

[37 : 59] Paul to say at the end of all this for God has bound all men over disobedience initially the Gentiles then the Jews so that he may have mercy on them all he will have a wonderful way of displaying his mercy oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the Lord who has been his counselor who has ever given to God that God should repay him for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever amen what a wonderful gospel how appropriate it is for every kind of person there's no one that God has written off despite their bad behavior no one is excluded today if you hear his voice turn to him in repentance and faith that's the message that's the hope and the reality is that if you turn to the

Lord he will become the Lord and Saviour of you let's have our closing song and then we can go into our prayer groups those those those