

Go!

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Preacher: Rev Gordon Kennedy

[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.

! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern.! Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sorry for that badly timed interruption. Quite a few years ago an Australian friend of ours called Luke was on his world travels and as they do lots of Australians they go off for a year or so and travel the world.

And he called into Edinburgh as part of his travels and came to stay with us. He went all over the place looking at different things and so we didn't always know where he was or if he was staying or anything, staying the night.

But one day when he was with us he came and told us that he was going to, he wanted to climb Ben Nevis. And he said he was going to get a bus to Fort William, climb Ben Nevis and come back by tea time.

[1 : 21] So we told him that maybe this might take a little bit more time than just a day to get there, climb it and get back again, but maybe he should plan to stay the night in Fort William.

So we agreed to that and set off. And when he did come back a couple of days later, he told us that he'd started his climb in the afternoon when he got to Fort William, got very lost and ended up spending the night sleeping outside under a tarp that he found near a bothy.

And then the next morning finished the climb and then came back to Edinburgh. I don't know if you've ever watched a show called Highland Cops, which is on BBC iPlayer.

And this follows the Northern Division of Police Scotland. Very interesting show. But every week on that show, almost, there's someone lost in the mountains somewhere up in Scotland, in the north of Scotland.

And Mountain Rescue, the police, coast guards and all that spend days and days looking for them. A lot of these poor people are very experienced and well-equipped climbers and walkers, but some of them, like our friend Luke, are neither.

[2 : 34] And Luke started his climb with no equipment or map or any idea of how long it would take him to get to the summit of Ben Nevis. His preparation was poor and his knowledge was zero.

Thankfully, he made it and actually now lives in Blairgowrie with his family. Now, if we are setting out on a journey, we want to make sure, as much as possible, that we have the things we need.

And this is doubly true if we're going somewhere that we've never been to before. Good preparation can save a lot of trouble. The passage we've read this morning, how Jesus sends the disciples out on a journey, that he will not be going on with them.

His instructions for their preparation might seem a bit strange to us because they mainly consist of what not to take, only what they should say and what they should do.

And we're going to think about why that might be as we look through the passage this morning. The key word for us in this passage is go. It's the first word Jesus says to the disciples, and in fact, within the first two verses, he says it twice.

[3 : 45] This word sets us up for the rest of the things Jesus says to the disciples because none of the rest of the things will happen if we do not follow this first instruction to go.

These twelve Jesus sent out instructing them, go nowhere among the Gentiles, enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

In these sentences, Jesus is telling them, first of all, we are not to go, that is, to the Gentiles or the non-Jewish people, and second of all, to only go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that is, only Jewish people.

Now that can seem a bit strange to us at first because we know that Jesus was sent to save the whole world, yet the time for the gospel to go to the non-Jewish people was after the resurrection.

Israel had received the promises about the Messiah, and it was to Israel that Jesus came. They were to be the light to the nations, but first they had to be made into that through Jesus' ministry.

[5 : 00] Then we see in places like Acts 9, when Saul was met on the road to Damascus by the risen Lord Jesus and given his commission to the Gentiles. And in Acts 10, when Peter has his vision on the roof of the house, he's staying in and then sent to Cornelius and other Gentiles and prayed with them to receive the Holy Spirit and baptised them.

But in this part of the gospel story, Jesus wants his disciples to go ahead of him into the villages of Galilee and tell them, as we see in verse 7, that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

He's told them where to go and who to speak to, and now he's telling them what to say. Now we've talked a little bit about being prepared, but I wonder how you would respond if I was to ask you this morning how your preparations for Christmas 2025 are going.

After all, there are only 340 shopping days to go. Now you rightly look at me as if I was mad. In fact, a few of you did. And almost certainly, you've not made any preparations for next Christmas on the 19th of January of this year.

You have lots of other things happening, of course, before that. And most of all, it's nowhere near Christmas. Or to put it another way, Christmas is not at hand. The coming of the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus said, started with Jesus himself.

[6 : 28] He was able to say that the kingdom of heaven was at hand because he was the one who initiated it. He wanted the disciples to go to all these towns and villages and tell them the long-awaited promise had been fulfilled in this rabbi from Nazareth called Jesus, and that time had come to put their trust in him.

That was a very exciting message for the disciples to carry because no one else had ever heard anything like this before. No one like Jesus had ever walked the earth before, and here was their chance to meet him and listen to him and follow him.

In the past few years, I've been reading a few biographies of Robert the Bruce. This is a very impressive equestrian statue at Bannockburn. I'm sure a lot of you have seen it.

I first started reading about Robert the Bruce with an author called Nigel Tranter. I don't know if anyone's heard of Nigel Tranter. Very good guy. But he's got the most positive possible interpretation of anything anyone in Scottish history ever did.

Nigel likes to take the positive view. And incidentally, I only heard this recently, that he wrote his books walking about the beach near Aberlady writing on a notepad as he walked.

[7 : 49] He never sat at a desk. What a strange way to write things. But there you go. He did write some good books. But I moved on from Nigel to other maybe more balanced viewpoints, not quite so rosy.

And I really enjoyed learning all about the life of Robert the Bruce and all he did to become king and what he did after he became king. But the one thing I do know is that everything I read about him is history.

It happened a long time ago, 711 years since Bannockburn. And when we read the Gospels, we're also reading history. Pardon me just for one second.

Sorry. So when we read the Gospels, we're also reading history, things that happened many long years ago. But we don't want to make the mistake of reading everything like it was only a historical document.

Because we know the Bible describes itself as being a living word. What that means for us is that we should read these words as if they were being spoken to us today. So when the disciples, so when Jesus told the disciples to go and tell people that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, we can read it as Jesus saying to us, go and tell people that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[9 : 09] I'll try and make it. We said earlier that no one like Jesus had ever walked the earth before. And that's true now as it was then.

In the 2,000 or so years since Jesus was born and lived, no one like him has ever been known. The excitement of being able to know him and follow him is as fresh today as it ever was.

That's what Jesus means by the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The people can know him and know the Father in a way they were never able to until then. At hand is a real relationship with God and a new life lived together with him which we were all created to have.

This is what we have and this is the mission Jesus sent his disciples on and it's the mission he sent us on as well. I wonder what difference thinking this way would have to us now of how we went and how we went about our daily lives.

I wonder how it would change how we talk to people and how we prayed and how we served if we thought of the kingdom of heaven as being at hand. If we compare it again to how we prepare for Christmas we know that we'll take deliberate steps to make sure Christmas day goes as we hope it does.

[10 : 26] But certainly we know that Christmas day will not happen that way without some prior thinking and working by us. And we've thought a bit about preparation and now we come to this part in the passage where Jesus tells his disciples how they should prepare.

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You receive without paying, give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey or two tunics, nor sandals or a staff for the labourer deserves his food.

There's really two different instructions here or preparations here and one is a lot easier to follow than the other. If we take just verses 9 and 10 and it's not so difficult, don't take money, no backpack or suitcase, no changes of clothes or shoes and no stick to lean on as you travel.

It would probably be inconvenient and the disciples might have been a bit surprised but these were not difficult to follow. And Jesus tells them the reason for these instructions at the end of verse 10.

The labourer deserves his food. Jesus was expecting their needs for food and clothing to be met by the people they encountered. They would go into the towns and villages and the words they shared that they had received from Jesus would be welcomed, not by everyone as we will soon see, but by enough people that their needs would be met.

[11 : 57] It almost seems like a throwaway comment by Jesus at the end of this list of instructions but it was a word from Jesus that amounted to a promise because it was Jesus who had uttered these words.

Don't burden yourself with all that stuff. All you need will be provided. And the disciples' thoughts might have turned to Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount just a few chapters earlier in Matthew where he said, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

Now it can be easy for us to think that there are a lot of things we need to do or get or learn before we can tell others about Jesus and sometimes that's true. In this situation Jesus is telling his disciples that all they need is the words he gave them and the rest will be provided.

At the same time and the same will sometimes be true for us but equally there might be times when a period of preparation and learning will be beneficial.

Jesus is not setting out a one-size-fits-all method of mission here. Different circumstances will call for different means. If we strike up a conversation with someone on the bus and start to talk about Jesus we don't first go away and re-read a book on evangelism just to make sure we know exactly what to say.

[13 : 21] The most we will do is a please help me Jesus prayer and head in our head and then carry on chatting. But equally reading a book that shares some ideas on how to talk to others about Jesus is a good idea because it can give us confidence and ideas.

Talking to Christian friends about the opportunities we've had and how we feel we went is also very helpful because we can be encouraged and uplifted and we can pray for each other.

So verses 9 and 10 were practical instructions but the really scary stuff came in verse 8. Heal the sick raise the dead cleanse lepers cast out demons.

So while you're out there do what is not possible for you to do. They've seen people healed and also though it's not recorded in Matthew and Luke we read about Jesus raising a young man from the dead so the disciples will have seen Jesus doing that.

They'll also have seen Jesus driving demons from people. How could these 12 ordinary people hope to do what so far only Jesus had done?

[14 : 34] How would they have felt on hearing these instructions from Jesus? I know how I would have felt. Terrified, unworthy, underqualified and so on. How could they possibly do these things?

In a strange sense it might have been quite simple for them. There was no way they could do it except in complete dependence on Jesus. If they went into a town and prayed for someone to be healed it would not be them healing the person but God through the promise Jesus gave them.

Their job was to act in obedience to what Jesus had told them to do which is in this setting was the easy part. the actual miraculous healings and raising from the dead driving out demons was God's part and none of us I don't think would have any trouble in believing that God could do these things.

We can all identify with the idea of telling people about Jesus. We don't always find it easy but we know that we can do it but how are we to identify with this part of Jesus' instructions?

Is the lesson here that we should also go out and heal the sick and raise the dead and drive out demons? Well of course we worship the same God who enabled the disciples to do these things and God works miraculously through people today especially see that in the growing and thriving churches in Africa and South America and the same conditions apply to us as to the disciples.

[16 : 02] We obey and God works through us. But the main lesson is dependence on Jesus for whatever he asks us to do and whatever happens in our lives.

God calls us all in different ways to different ministries but dependence on Jesus is the foundation of all we do as his followers. As we prayerfully discern what God is calling us to do we put our trust in Jesus as the only one through the power of the spirit who can enable our obedience.

The last few verses in the passage talk about what responses the disciples might expect. Some as we have already seen would welcome them because of the promise that Jesus had given them about provision and some of course would reject them.

And as they went on their journey the disciples must have had some unexpectedly joyful meetings with people who encouraged them and welcomed their words. They must also have had some sad encounters with people who refuse to hear their message.

Fear of rejection is one of the big reasons why we sometimes hesitate to tell people about our faith or maybe invite them to something where they might hear a gospel message.

[17 : 20] After all if we don't ask the question then they can't say no. But that's not what we are called to do. We started this morning by seeing that Jesus first word was go.

That's what we are called to do and what we are seeing in these last verses is that God will bring us in touch with people who will bring us joy as we share the gospel with them.

Maybe it will be with people we already know. Maybe it will be new people but we will be able to share God's peace with them as we read in verse 13. Jesus' command to go is not like a child being caught somewhere they don't belong, an adult saying go, send them away.

And it's not like the start of the 100 metres race where the starting gun goes off and we have to go flat out at maximum effort. Jesus' goal is go and I'll be with you.

If you get nervous, tell me because I'm with you. If you get worried, tell me because I'll be there. If you feel like you failed or if you're rejoicing because you had a good chat with someone, I'll be there for that as well.

[18 : 29] Jesus is calling us to fulfil the mission he gave us and he will guide us and equip us to obey that call. He sent the disciples out with everything they really needed to carry out their task and that's the same promise for us as well.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for the story of sending and going that we have read this morning. We pray that you will help us to see the provision you gave us for your disciples and see that your promise of provision is for us as well as we seek to share your message of love with the people in our lives.

Help us to trust you and obey you as we fulfil your mission to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.