

The Proclaimers of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Well friends, let's pray. Almighty God and loving Father, may the words that I speak now be from you.

May you graft them into our hearts and work in us so as to bring forth in us the fruit of good works. We pray this for the honour and praise of your name and the glory of your Son, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friends, I think I can mount a good argument that much of human existence, much of the way we live human existence is shaped by fear. I think I can also mount an argument that that was true in the ancient world and that it is as well as being true today.

You see, I think we live in fear in many ways. A fear of life, fear of death, fear of illness, fear of insecurity. A fear for our children, for our future, for our world.

We are people, I think, of fear. And much that we do is fuelled by fear. You see, much of our bank balances, I think, are spent in assuaging fear.

[1 : 04] And much of our time is spent trying to escape fear. Well, at the centre of our passage today, Jesus addresses that very issue, fear. And as we work through the passage, I want you to keep an eye on what he has to say about the topic.

Then at the end, we're going to return to the theme and we're going to see if Jesus can help us in our fear. Now, I need to warn you, our passage today, as you heard from the Bible reading, is a long one.

Nevertheless, it's not a bad idea, I think, to read the whole of a long passage together, as we've done. But we have got lots of work to do. There's lots to say. I don't want to spend an inordinate amount of time doing it, though.

So what I'm going to do is briefly outline what I think the passage is about. Then I'm going to make some observations of a key theological and practical nature. And finally, I'm going to talk about what it means for us today.

So let's get to work. Let's see what God has to teach us from this grand speech by Jesus. So open your Bibles with me. Let's begin at verse 35 of chapter 9.

[2 : 07] You see, what happens in that verse is that Matthew summarizes what has just happened. It also sets the groundwork for what is about to happen in chapter 10. So chapter 9, verse 35, Matthew tells us, Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Now, that verse looks back. It summarizes what we saw last week and what we've seen in all of chapters 8 and 9. You see, when we summarize 8 and 9, what are they about?

Well, we've seen Jesus healed by touch. We've seen him heal at a distance. We've seen him cast out spirits with a word, steal the storm with a word, destroy demons, forgive sins, raise the dead, heal the blind.

He's touched an unclean and healed an unclean woman. He's eaten with tax collectors and notable sinners. He's called disciples with authority. He's done things and amazed the crowds who have never seen anything like this by their own confession.

He's done all that you would expect, though, from one who is called Emmanuel, God with us. As we saw last week, he's given us a foretaste of heaven. He's done things that the Pharisees could not deny, but which they tried to source to the prince of demons.

[3 : 26] That's what verse 34 said. But notice again the content of verse 35. You see, he not only healed every disease and sickness, more importantly, he has gone into the very heartland of Israel, into the synagogues of Israel, and there in the synagogues proclaimed the gospel, the good news of the kingdom.

That's the very first part of our section today. You see, though, in speaking about the heartland of Israel, the synagogues, we are told something.

Let me show you. Flip to chapter 11, verse 1, which is the termination of our passage for today, a sort of bookend for it. It tells us this. After Jesus had finished instructing the 12 disciples, he went from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

Now, the NIV, you'll notice, has a footnote, and the footnote is clear. It says that the Greek speaks of Jesus teaching and preaching in their towns. So we could rephrase it. After Jesus had finished instructing his 12 disciples, he went from there to teach and preach in their towns in Galilee.

You see, what this does is it catches the difference between Jesus and the Jews and the Jewish leaders. You see, he's increasingly, it's increasingly an us and them.

[4 : 41] He's increasingly a foreign element to the Jews. And yet he came to Jews and has a message for Jews. His mission is first and foremost for them. That's the background we need to understand as we come to this long passage.

Jesus is well and truly now on a mission to Israel. That is his task, to proclaim to them the kingdom that comes in him.

Now, that background, let's look at the detail. Verse 36. Israel is presented as sheep. In the Old Testament, Israel was often characterized in this way. In fact, we had two options for Bible readings, Exodus and Ezekiel.

But in the Ezekiel 34 passage, we are told about false shepherds who come to the sheep of Israel and abuse them. We heard how God was against such false shepherds.

We noticed how he himself would be their shepherd. And then just after that, we heard that God would place over them one shepherd, David, and he would tend them and be their shepherd. Well, here he is, a descendant of David, a ruler from Bethlehem of Judah, who fulfills the predictions of 2 Samuel 5 and Micah 5, and one, like our other Old Testament reading, filled with compassion like God his father.

[5 : 59] A shepherd for sheep, harassed by bad leadership that cannot even recognize the word of God when they see it. Harassed by Pharisees, who when they look at Jesus say, he casts out demons by the prince of demons.

You see, Jesus has come to rescue them from such false shepherds who call the work of God's Emmanuel the work of the prince of demons. Now look at verse 37.

Jesus uses a second image. He's tapped into one image, shepherd and sheep. Now he taps into another, a harvest field. In the Old Testament, harvesting is an image with a double edge. It is about a coming judgment, but it is also about restoring the people of God.

And what Jesus is doing here is calling for volunteers. He's calling for workers who will alert God's people Israel about the coming kingdom, who will warn people about the consequences of taking no notice, who will tell them that judgment awaits if they refuse.

Look at what he says. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into the harvest field. And with that request on his lips, he turns to the twelve following him.

[7 : 12] In verse 1 of chapter 10. Flip down again to chapter 11, verse 1, where he finishes his address to them. So what is happening between chapter 10, verse 1 and chapter 11, verse 1, is that he is addressing himself primarily to the twelve apostles.

Now, no doubt we should listen in. But it is addressed primarily to them. No doubt the apostles will pray as Jesus has just urged them to do.

No doubt succeeding generations of Christians will overhear the charge to the twelve and learn from what he's had to say to them. However, this chapter is addressed primarily to the twelve apostles.

Addressed to them as they take the great news of the kingdom to their fellow Jews. You see, it's the Jews first who need to hear that the kingdom of God promised in the Old Testament has come in Jesus.

They, you see, are God's ancient people. They need to hear. They need to respond. With that in mind, Jesus commissions his missionaries. Chapters, chapter 10, verses 1 to 4.

[8 : 15] In verse 1, he gave them authority to do what he has done. They will have authority to drive out impure spirits, heal every disease and sickness. But then he names the apostles in verses 2 to 4.

Then he gives them marching orders in verses 5 to 23. And each of the, there are two sections in 5 to 23. Each is headed by the word sent. In the first section, 5 to 15, we're told who they are sent to. In the second section, 16 to 23, we're told who they are sent to be like as they go. And each of those sections ends with a sober, Truly I say to you.

Look at the first section, 5 to 15. Jesus is very clear in this section. He's sending them to the lost sheep of Israel. 12 apostles, 12 sent ones from God, going to the 12 tribes of Israel.

And the message is clear. It's said in verse 7, they are to proclaim the kingdom of heaven has come. In other words, what they are to say is, look, God's king is now present in Jesus, God's Emmanuel.

[9 : 23] His kingdom has come. And you are to do as the king does. Or they are to do what the king does. Look at verse 8. They are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.

They are to owe nothing except the great news of the kingdom and its benefits. If the news of God's kingdom and God's king is welcomed, then they are to let the peace of God rest upon the people in that place who welcome it.

However, if it is not welcome, they are to shake the dust off their feet. For if people of God will not welcome God's king and kingdom, then only judgment remains, friends.

It is an ominous and serious commission that these apostles are being given. A king whose kingdom is being announced to his people. A choice is being offered to them. Will you accept the king God has sent you?

And a destiny is promised according to how you respond. Friends, as Gentiles, this focus on Israel sounds very harsh to us. But it makes eminent sense.

[10 : 25] You see, Israel was meant to be a light to the nations, to the Gentiles. And it makes sense if you are eventually going to end up with the Gentiles, that you gather together the Jews before the Gentiles are approached.

You gather them together before their king. But it makes even more sense than this. After all, you see, God had promised to be the God of Israel. It's only right that they are the first to hear of his promised king arriving on the scene.

It's only right, isn't it, that Jesus, the son of David, the Messiah, the chosen one of Israel, is given prominence and focus to Israel. Because what that will do is demonstrate to Israel that God has not abandoned them.

It's only right that they are introduced to Jesus first, are encouraged to embrace their king, are given the chance to line up with him and are drawn into the task of making the great news of him known. But let's return to the second part of the marching orders, 16 to 23. 5 to 15, told his 12, who they were sent to. Now, and they were sent to the 12 tribes of Israel.

[11 : 31] Now he says what they are sent like. They are sent like, he says, sheep among wolves. It's an incredible warning to them, isn't it?

You see, if they're going to fearlessly confess Christ, Jesus is saying, you're in for a tough ride. It is a perilous task I am sending you on. In it, you will need to be smart, as shrewd as snakes.

In it, you will need to be innocent, as innocent as doves. But look at the warnings Jesus gives. You can see why he warns, he starts off this way. First warning, verse 18. You will be handed over to various authorities and treated harshly.

However, your father will be with you through the spirit, giving his word. Second warning, verse 21. Not only will authorities treat you harshly, your own kin will treat you that way.

In fact, everyone will hate you because of me. Verse 22. But you are to stand firm. You are to press on into new places in Israel. And Jesus says to them, look at verse 23, that they won't finish telling Israel about him and warning them before the Son of Man comes.

[12 : 43] Now, friends, I do have to pause just for a moment here at verse 23. Verse 23, I need to say, is a much debated and complex verse. We don't have time to do the detail.

Let me tell you what I think it means. The language, Son of Man, comes from Daniel chapter 7. And it speaks of a time when nations are set against God and the purposes of God.

And the Son of Man is one who comes to God and is given the rule of God by God. It's the language that Jesus uses at his trial.

When he says that the Jewish high priest will from now on see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.

So what I think Jesus is referring to primarily is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. So what Jesus is saying is that his disciples will not have finished telling Israel by the time he dies and is raised.

[13:42] Of course, as we later generations read it, we naturally think of another coming of Jesus, won't we? When Jerusalem was plundered in 70 AD, no doubt many Christians would have thought, this is it.

Later Christians will naturally have thought that he was talking about the second coming of Jesus. And they're all legitimate ways of thinking. But I am sure when the 12 disciples heard the words of Jesus at the trial of Jesus, they would have reflected on this verse here.

And when they encountered the risen Son of Man after his resurrection, they would have reflected on this verse here. And when they saw him ascend to the right hand of his father in Acts 1, they would have reflected on this saying here.

And thought, that's it. Israel has had its visitation. So, we've now heard Jesus giving his marching orders to the 12 apostles.

He's told them to whom they are sent. We've heard him say that they are to be like sheep to the slaughter as they go. And now he tells them the other side of the story. He turns to strengthen, comfort, encourage them.

[14:50] Let's look briefly at it. Verses 24 and 25. We've already seen Jesus begin to be maligned, haven't we? He's already been accused of operating under the power of the prince of demons. Well, if for the Lord, then for his servants.

It's quite a load now, isn't it? Persecution. Threats of death. Opposition from your own family. Hatred. Courts. Now, if you were one of the 12 listening into this, how would you think you'd be feeling about now? Not good, I suspect.

Afraid, perhaps. Fearful, certainly. Worried? I don't think there's any doubt about that. Such fear is addressed in verses 26 to 31.

Four times in six verses, Jesus uses the verb for fearing. Don't be afraid, he says. After all, God watches. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed.

[15:52] Be fearless, therefore. Speak openly. Don't be afraid of those who kill the body. After all, there's one greater who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Be afraid of him.

Friends, it's a moot point, isn't it? We in the contemporary world have forgotten or neglected that one day we will have to face our maker. We fear death.

And in the face of death and the pressures of life, we drift from faith. But Jesus warns us here. Death will mean giving an account to your creator.

But look at verse 29. Jesus confronts those who question that a good God allows affliction to fall on his people. And he says, look, the smallest, most numerous, and cheapest of birds does not fall to the ground unnoticed by God.

How much more so a human being? And even much more so, how much a child of God? No, you see, humans cannot count the hairs on their head. Even though mine are getting pretty thin now, I can't count them.

[16:56] Yet God has already numbered them. And if he has numbered our hairs, he surely knows our trials.

And so Jesus urges on the disciples and comforts them in verse 31. Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. Finally, in this section, Jesus turns to his children who will confess his name before the authorities in verses 32 and 33.

And he promises that their confession of him will be met by an acknowledgement by God. On the other hand, those who disown him, such as the Pharisees earlier, well, they will be disowned by Jesus before his father in heaven.

We're on the home straight now, friends. Now look at verses 34 to 42. This ties together much of what Jesus has said. First, Jesus reiterates what has been clear in everything.

His coming into the world will force decisions. In that sense, his coming into the world will not bring peace. Choosing Jesus will divide even the most intimate of relationships, that of the family.

[18:10] Friends, we in Australia glorify the family. If there's one thing that I think we have in common all across Australia, it is we love family. I think that many of us think that true life is family.

But Jesus is categorical. True life only comes, not in family life, but in giving yourself completely to him, his kingdom and his orientation.

He says, anyone who loves his father and mother, that is anyone who loves family more than me, is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves their son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it. And whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. Friends, let's see if we can wrap up what we've learned, what we've heard from the Lord Jesus.

First, we need to ask what this passage addressed to first century apostles has to say to us. Well, it's clear, isn't it? What we're doing is looking over the shoulder of Jesus as he addresses this group of first century apostles, 12 men.

[19 : 24] And it's clear that although their mission is special and special to them, special to God, special to them, we're meant to hear God's word to us as well.

Well, what would be God's word to us? Well, I can think of a number of things. First, Jesus has made clear here that God is about a grand work that has to do with eternity.

Those who hear him in the first century mission to Israel are part of that grand work. God is involving them in it. But we, as we look over the shoulder of Jesus and look at the 12, are not to be, or stand even behind the 12 and look over to our Lord Jesus, are not to be passive observers.

We, too, are part of that great work. Our context is different. Our time is different. Our nationality is different. But the center of God's work is still Jesus and his proclamation, is it not?

God's judgment of the world and of those who dwell in it is still focused on what they do about his son. And the news of his son still draws both love and hatred from humans.

[20 : 37] Increasingly in Australia, in my view, it is drawing hatred. So we, too, will experience what the early disciples experienced. If some of us grew up in a place where the name of Jesus was relatively welcome, our grandchildren will, I think, die in a place where it is relatively unwelcome, unless things change.

And that means, of course, that division and persecution are certain for Christian disciples in all times and in all places, sometimes worse than others. We, too, though, are sent as sheep among wolves.

We, too, will be hated and vilified. We, too, will be involved in the opposition and travail that our Lord and the 12 were involved in. And we, too, will experience breaks of relationship even in the closest of all relationships.

You see, if we tie ourselves to Jesus and his people, we, too, will experience what Jesus and the 12 experienced. Friends, the presence of Jesus in Israel confronted people with an eternal reality and forced them to come to a mind about it, to a decision.

Some will accept him, embrace him, believe in him, and hand their existence over to him. But the large majority will not.

[21 : 59] The large majority will not. If even his own people did not accept Jesus in the mission to the Jews, then surely the world will not either.

But I want to close this Bible investigation by reflecting on the centre of this passage. I want to return where we started. Do you remember? We started, I started talking about fear.

Friends, where is the locus of life found? For you, for the world? Is it found in family? Or wealth? Or security? Or safety?

Or health? Or lack of sickness, at least? Or enough money in the bank? Or is it just an overall lack of fear? Friends, Jesus has made it clear where true life is to be found.

True life is to be found in choosing him. In being with him. In being bound up with his purpose and his mission. That's where true life is found.

[23 : 03] That's where the locus of life is to be found. It's to be found in the presence and mission of God. For there is no fear there. Or at least if there is fear, it's assuaged by Jesus.

For there, with Jesus, is where true life is found. But I want you to notice one more thing in this passage. It's critical in this passage and yet, as I've read commentators this last week, most commentators have missed it.

Friends, this passage is rightly focused on Jesus. This is full of Jesus. But I wonder, did any of you notice the Trinitarian language that runs through this passage?

Actually, it's quite strong when you think about it. Among the focused on Jesus, did you hear him speak of his father? Well, yes, we did. In a passage that speaks of humans betraying humans and fathers betraying children.

Did you hear his reference to God the father? He will not betray his children by forgetting them. Not a hair on their head will fall to the ground without the father's oversight.

[24 : 09] No, Jesus will bring those who acknowledge him. And what will he do? He himself will acknowledge them before his father in heaven. What a grand picture.

But there's more. Did you notice the reference to the spirit as well? Look at verse 20. As the disciples of Jesus speak the great news of Jesus in the father's world, the spirit of the father will be speaking the truth through them.

It's a great truth, isn't it? God the father. God the son. God the spirit. And us who bear the great news of the son.

All bound together in God's great mission to God's world. All bound together for eternity. Sure, friends, there may be a cost.

That cost might be accompanied by significant fear. But in the presence of God the father, God the son, God the Holy Spirit. In the presence of such a great God. Who can fear?

[25 : 19] So, friends, will you join him? In testifying about God the father. In testifying of his son. In the power of his spirit.

And will you tell the world of the great news concerning him? Let's pray. Our father, we thank you for your son.

Whom you sent to be king of the world for all eternity. Father, we thank you for the words of your spirit.

That will enable us to speak of him. Father, we thank you for your comfort. That will come as we speak of your son. Thank you for your assurance that you love us.

Even when no one else will. Father, we pray in our world today. Where increasingly the name of Jesus is shunned.

[26 : 20] And not welcomed. Please help your church in Australia here to speak. The gospel of your son. And help us to draw comfort and encouragement from passages such as this one.

Please raise up more people who might confidently speak of Jesus. We pray. And we pray all of this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.