Sending Authority

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[0:00] Father, we thank you for your word today, and we thank you for your Holy Spirit who fills us. We pray that your Holy Spirit will help us to understand what you are saying here, help us to know what it means for us in our life, and by this living word, strengthen us to be powerful instruments of your grace in this world.

In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Well, yes, as my name tag says, I am Dan Gifford, and it was, I guess, inevitable that one of the kids thought I was David.
I have a twin brother named David, so I was called David all my life, and then I've been working with a guy named David for 20 years, and so it's happening again. And we're going to be talking about names today, too.
We're going to find out how important names are. This is a very exciting reading that we hear today, and I'd like you to look at page 814. It's exciting because prayers are answered in very vivid ways.
Do you remember last week at the end of chapter 9, David was preaching about how Jesus saw the crowds and that Jesus had a deep, powerful compassion, love, because he could see that they were harassed and they were helpless, people who were like sheep without a shepherd.
[1:33] They were lost spiritually, and Jesus loved them. Do you know people like that who are in your life, who live near you, or who are in your family?

Last Monday, a number of us met together in that chapel back there to pray, and it was a really good evening of prayer. And one of the things we did was to break up into small groups and to name one person in our life who is far away from God or who has wandered away from God, who has never known God, and to ask God to draw them to himself, to pray that they will come to love and trust the Lord Jesus.
And we committed ourselves to praying for them over the next weeks and months before our next prayer gathering. And this, I think, praying that way gives us a love and a compassion for people around us.
And I think that God probably uses that to send us to those people as well. We are like the laborers, then, who are sent into the harvest.
And in our verses that we are reading today in chapter 10, Jesus answers that sending prayer. Twelve people get sent out to do exactly what Jesus has been doing in his ministry, and it's an incredible scene.
[3:07] That number 12 is actually very important for us today. A significant, significant number. A few years ago, our family went down to Seattle for a very short vacation in spring break.

It poured rain the whole time. But one of the notable things that we saw were banners on buildings with the number 12 on it. And in the stores, you saw mugs with the number 12 and T-shirts with the number 12 and anything else you could think of, toothbrushes with the number 12 on it.
And we couldn't figure it out. So I asked somebody eventually about it, and they said, Oh, that's about the Seattle Seahawks football team. There are 11 men on the field, but the crowd is so vocal and so enthusiastic and so intimidating that it's like having a 12th man playing against the opposing team.
So the fans very proudly think of themselves and call themselves number 12, the 12th man. Now the Seahawks have very little to do with our passage today.
Not much to do with God as well. Although it can be like a religion in Washington. Oh, you're fine. Except for the fact that we also as Christians are defined in a way by number 12 too.
[4:27] That's because in Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that he would be a father of a great nation. And the promise was, God said, I will bless you so that you will be a blessing.

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And through you, the nations of the world will be blessed. And so God created Israel with 12 tribes in order to be the means of his grace in the world.
But over time, as you read the Old Testament, you see that Israel is less and less faithful to this calling. And faithful Israel gets narrowed down to Jesus Christ himself.
That's why David said last week that when Jesus prayed for laborers in the harvest field, he was the only laborer. He was the only one.
And so what Jesus does then is to choose 12 people. 12 men to represent the 12 tribes of Israel and to begin a new Israel.
[5:35] A new God's people. They are the very beginning of a new restored Israel. The kingdom of God where Jesus rules. That's what's happening here. Beginning with these men, God is assembling a people of God from every direction and from every nation.

Not only Jews but Gentiles who are very far away from God. And he is uniting them under Jesus in one body. And that's what we are today.
The church. God continues his mission through his body at St. John's today. And in the church throughout the world. We saw this happening when we were at Gathcon.
We are all of us spiritually descended from those 12 men that Jesus chose. So in a way we could drape large number 12 banners on our houses too.
And they'll mean something completely different. So in our passage, what we see is God's blueprint of a powerful movement. Of the powerful movement in the world.
[6:37] In which God sends people to bring his saving grace. His rescue into people's lives. This kingdom of God which is eternal. Now.

Here on earth. And it begins with those 12 that you can see named in verses 1 through 4. Those guys that are there as you look over that list. We don't know a lot about them.
But we do know that they were a bit below average. None of them had influence. None of them were formally educated theologically.
And they had all failed Jesus at some point in their lives. So some like the list that we see here. At the very beginning of the list and the end of the list.
It begins and ends with people who betrayed Jesus. Peter denied Jesus three times. And then he was wonderfully restored. And of course Judas turns Jesus over to die on a cross.
[7:39] A horrible death. It was the ultimate of failures. All of them. All of the disciples couldn't stay awake and pray on the night before Jesus died.

The night of most crisis. They were also guys that didn't necessarily get along all that way. Well. They argued about who was the greatest. And there were great differences among them.
You know. Peter prided himself in having faith. Thomas prided himself in being a skeptic. In questioning everything. Knowing the hard facts. Simon the zealot was a politician who wanted to throw off the tyranny of the Romans.
And Saint Matthew who wrote this. Made a lot of money off the Romans. He loved them. He loved their system that they had at one time. He became wealthy working for them.
So you see this is a motley crew. It is a crew that is full of imperfections. But they are the people that Jesus chooses to be the foundation of his new people.
[8:41] If they were in our church we might not vote for them to be trustees. Might not get a single vote. In fact they might not have gotten votes from you for city council in Vancouver.

However. That is what kind of group they appear to be. Yet Jesus worked through them. So that they became powerful. Powerful channels of his grace in the world.
Their ministry was foundational for Jesus' mission in the world. And we are here because they were that foundation.
They started this new people of God. And this is very encouraging for us. Because God takes you and me as imperfect as we are.
He takes this church as flawed as it is. And he calls us into his mission. I think one commentator put it really, really well when he said, The words of Matthew, the tax collector, teach that mission is exercised by sinners transformed by grace rather than saints without problems.
[9:46] It's done by angels. It's done by debtors, not creditors. It's done by angels. By people. It's not done by angels. This is who Jesus chooses.

So what qualifies them? And what qualifies us? If we have all these imperfections? Well, very simply, what qualifies these twelve is that Jesus calls them by name.

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Whatever your name is. Their names are what actually qualified them for this. Because when Jesus called to those people by name to himself, he was deciding to work in their life by his grace, by his undeserved love and grace.
It's not because they were the most powerful, impressive, spiritual people. In fact, Israel itself was not chosen because it was so big, so powerful, so impressive.
It was because God loved them. Because he had a purpose for them. And in choosing these twelve, Jesus' power and grace and authority is going to shine through.
[10:59] Because it will clearly be Jesus' grace and not the personal gifts and character of those disciples that will make them so effective in carrying out the mission.

It will be God's power and his goodness. It's the same with you and me. Jesus calls you by name. He sends you simply because he loves you.
Because he has designed you to be a channel, an instrument of his grace. And that's what makes you effective. That's why you and I can take risks for his sake.
That's what encourages us forward. It is his call on your life. And God doesn't just throw us out there as he calls us to go.
He prepares us. He prepared his disciples. They are a bit like my son Alexander. Alexander is 16 years old, which means that he is driving now.
[12:00] And he started driving a couple months ago. And he does a great job of driving. But it's not so easy for his parents. There is a certain amount of anxiety.

I have some knowing looks that I see when I look out there. There is some anxiety in your 16-year-old driving next to you. Because there is a definite loss of control when you are sitting in the passenger seat and you have turned everything over to your son driving.
For years, he has been a passenger. Sitting and watching his parents drive for good or for bad. Learning from them. And suddenly, he's the one driving.
It's quite a thing to get used to for parents. Well, you know, it's the same with the disciples. They have been passengers with Jesus. So in chapters 5 through 7, they have heard Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount.
Teaching what it means to be part of the kingdom of God. And then in chapters 8 and 9, they had witnessed his preaching. And the signs of the kingdom of God in his healings.
[13:12] In the miracles that he did. And they had seen those miracles as signs that Jesus himself is bringing the kingdom. He has brought the kingdom. It is near. And they had also seen how Jesus was stirred deep, deep down inside with compassion for the crowds.

And they had prayed with Jesus that God the Father would send workers into the harvest field of people who needed to trust Jesus. Now, Jesus answers that prayer.
And he says to them, It's time for you to drive. Go. He gives them authority to go as his apostles. Which is a special word that means his ambassador.
His envoy. Now, Jesus has prepared us as well. That's what's been going on just as we've been going through the Gospel of Matthew. We have witnessed Jesus' priorities.
We know what he teaches and preaches. We hear about this kingdom of God that has come now. We see his incredible love. And we too pray, as we did on Monday night, for his harvest field.
[14:23] And Jesus says to us now, Go. Drive. Be my worker in the field. Be my ambassador. The envoy. Wherever it is that God has placed you.

In your family. At home. With your friends. With your colleagues at work. Here in the church. Be God's representative. Live for him.
Be about Jesus' ministry. Well, that brings us to the last part of this sermon. And that is, How is it that this passage, Which is about that particular call to the disciples, How does it help us to go and to serve, to drive in the mission field?
I want to say, first of all, how it doesn't help, very quickly. Because the first mission of the twelve is unique and it's special. So Jesus' directions were only for those twelve in that particular place in time.
A number of the instructions that he gave were just for that time. So there are instructions here in verses five through fifteen that do not apply to us.
[15:33] It doesn't transfer to us. And so that's why we don't just travel within Galilee, as he said. Nor do we go just to the lost sheep of Israel. Nor do we forsake all possessions and depend upon the hospitality of strangers.

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Nor does God expect us to, or give us authority to heal every disease and every affliction, and to raise the dead and so forth, in this comprehensive way.
Yes, we are called in scriptures to pray for those who are sick. And sometimes still, now, God physically heals in extraordinary ways.
And I have witnessed this in my own life. But more often than this, through those prayers for those who are sick and afflicted, God renews and creates faith.
He goes deeper than the physical healing. He forgives sins. He transforms desires. He heals the soul. Always in those prayers, God pours his grace into people's lives, the people that you're praying for.
[16:41] But we don't have that comprehensive authority to heal in those amazing ways. Jesus gave the twelve that authority for a big reason.

And that was to authenticate their preaching. The preaching that Jesus is the Messiah who has come into the world. That he brings his kingdom.
I think the person who put it best was Jerome in the fourth century, who was a great translator of the Bible, great doctor of the church. And he said, Jesus gave those twelve power to heal in order that the greatness of the promises might be guaranteed by the greatness of the signs.
That's what God was doing. He was making clear that this word was his word. That the things that those disciples were doing authenticated that, in fact, that witness is the true witness to Jesus.
But there are at least three ways that our passage applies to us directly and really helps us in our mission. And I want to go over them briefly. First of all, Matthew puts this here to show us that the apostles' word about Jesus is trustworthy, as I just said.
[17:57] So when Jesus gives this authority to the twelve apostles, he is guaranteeing that what they say and what they do on their mission is exactly what Jesus was saying. It's exactly what he was doing.

And so the New Testament that you and I have right in front of us here is their witness to Jesus written down. And it is completely trustworthy.
As John the Apostle says in 1 John 1, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we look upon, and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. You see what's being said there is that the only way that we can take part in Jesus' mission is if we are in fellowship with the apostles and with their teaching.
Because their teaching is Jesus' teaching. It comes with Jesus' authority. It's his true, authentic, living word to us. And so he can and does correct us, he instructs us, he encourages us, he equips us, and he gives us his Holy Spirit through that word for our mission.
[19:19] This is the way he renews our minds and renews our hearts so that we have the mind of Jesus as we go. So that's the first thing. The second is that this passage shows us that our mission for Jesus will always involve both speaking and serving like Jesus.

And that's very important for us because I think we are often tongue-tied in our pluralistic, secular Vancouver. There's lots of pressure to keep quiet.
Conversations about faith of any kind is not nearly as acceptable as it is in most countries in the world, most cultures. So we're reluctant to speak about Jesus because I don't want to offend or I feel inadequate in my speaking about Jesus.
So we are, I think, more ready to serve than to speak. But there is a shallow blessing that comes with even the greatest act of self-giving in service because if we don't tell about Jesus, there's no healing of the soul.
It doesn't go deep. There's no reconciliation with God. There's no knowing the love and forgiveness of Jesus, which is the very reason why you are serving, because you know that love, the reality of the living Lord Jesus.
[20:38] And so in Jesus' mission with the 12, serving and speaking go together. Look at verse 7. Jesus instructs his disciples to speak. So he says, proclaim as you go, saying the kingdom of God is at hand.

It is here. So you see, Jesus has come to transform and forgive and bring eternal life. That's the greatest news and is meant to be told. And then in verse 18, right after that, he instructs them to serve, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leopards, cast out demons.

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You receive without paying. Now give without pay. You see, Jesus is telling them to proclaim Jesus and to live a life consistent with that message, with Jesus himself.
You have received from God grace, freely given. Give to others that grace, freely. On Monday night, if you weren't there at the prayer meeting, you missed a great testimony that Hunter, who is a professor of forestry who's here with us in Vancouver for less than a year, he's leaving in December, gave us testimony about what God has done in his life and what it will be like to go back to China.
And one of the things he told us is that when he goes back, when I asked him what it meant to follow Jesus when he goes back to China, he said he is committed in his life now to relate to people with kindness and grace that Jesus teaches in the Gospels, in the Bible.
[22:16] He wants to live out that grace, he said, in his life. And secondly, he said, he wants to seek to find ways to speak about Jesus to his students and his colleagues in his university in China.

That's not an easy thing to do where there are many restrictions to sharing your faith, but he's committed to find ways to do that. And that's the pattern in our own mission, a life that is shaped by grace, that serves, and a life that speaks about God in the way that you can in your situation, in your setting.
That's the pattern for our mission. And finally, the last thing this passage shows us is that our mission, very simply, is to be representatives of Jesus.
That's what we are about in the world as Christians. You know, Jesus sent the Twelve on his behalf, as his ambassadors. That's why he gave them his authority to speak and do miracles. Those Twelve begin the new Israel. And in that new Israel, the people who are part of it, which is you and I, become a royal priesthood, becomes a nation of priests.
[23:35] Representatives of God is what a priest is. They represent God to the world. And that's why in 1 Peter 2.9, Peter, one of the Twelve, teaches that Jesus has made us all a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possessions, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So you see, God sends us a priest. God sends us to be a priest as Jesus' representatives, to bring his good news, to bring his rich blessings, and to bring his gracious rule to the people that you know.
His kingdom has come. And so we experience the blessings of the King Jesus. He sends us out personally to represent him, to appeal to the people in your life, to receive that gracious work in their life, just as you have received that gracious work in your own life as well.
It is an awesome thing to be a representative because when people receive you, Jesus says here, they are receiving the peace of Jesus.
When they receive the message of the Lord Jesus through you, they are experiencing what it means to be reconciled to God himself by the forgiveness of sins.
[25:05] There is a deep peace that is nowhere in the whole world that you are giving. But if they don't receive that peace, they don't know it.

They will not know it in their life. And it's a critical ministry that verses 14 and 15 tells that whenever the apostolic message about Jesus is proclaimed, a mini sort of last judgment is in progress.
And people determine their destinies by their receiving or their not receiving that message. And that's the sobering way that this passage ends.
It is saying that your life as a representative really involves the spiritual life of people that are in your life. That your blessing to them is a blessing that is an eternal blessing as they receive you and your ministry.
So may God strengthen you by his Holy Spirit. Really encourage your hearts to go into the world around you in the name of Jesus on his behalf to speak and to serve as his representative.
[26:11] And by his resurrection power, may he more and more make you a channel of that amazing grace, bringing people, peace to people all over the world, bringing many, sometimes very unlikely people, into his kingdom where God's gracious rule and his glorious worship, this privilege of worship, is theirs forever.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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