

“SENT BY JESUS”
Imagine Meeting Christ #18
Matthew 9:35-10:23, Matthew 28:16-20
August 7 & 8, 2021

We’re nearing the end of our series, *Imagine Meeting Christ*. We started by getting to know Jesus on a casual basis, watching what He could do and learning about His care for us. Hopefully that curiosity about Jesus grew deeper in you as He began to invite you closer to Himself. Maybe He talked with you, explained how things were going to go, and helped you to see the benefit of being His friend. And then hopefully, Jesus began to teach you about what His purpose was here on the earth so that you might understand His call in your own life to follow Him.

But in the midst of it all, Jesus then opened up His arms to welcome you as not just His friend, but also as His brother or sister. And that involved you believing in Him and receiving Him as the Crucified Christ, the Risen Messiah, who has now become the Ruler over all the Earth and the One by whom you receive Eternal life. I hope that in this series you have renewed your faith and trust in Jesus so that you can be counted as a child of the King, a daughter or son of God the Father. That is the essential message of the whole Christian faith, as Jesus lived and died and rose again for us to bring us new life through Him.

But listen to this; Jesus did not intend for His ministry to just end up with the people of Israel knowing about Him. Jesus died for the whole world’s sins, so that whoever believes in Him might find forgiveness through His mercy and grace, freely given to all those who will believe in Him. Israel was not the end of the plan of God’s Salvation for the world. God wants everyone in the **whole** world to not only hear about Jesus, but to come to the same point you did, to receive Him as their Savior and Lord.

So how would that happen? How will the whole world hear about Jesus? Well, the Jews of Jesus’ day decided that He was not the Messiah, so not many followed Him. History shows that the people of Israel were not willing to receive God’s gift of Salvation through Jesus, so God took the message of Jesus to the rest of the Gentile world. There were a few who put their trust in Him, and Jesus used those men and women to take the message of His Good News for the world to many other

nations and peoples.

Using the apostle Paul as His servant, God sent him all around the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, sharing the message of God's gift of life for us through Jesus Christ. He took the message about Jesus to many different nationalities and races, so that they could also find Salvation for their souls. While the other apostles focused on working with the people of Israel, desperately trying to turn their hearts to Jesus, Paul was sent to the Gentile nations, even to Rome, to help many others come to know about Jesus. And Paul trained many others to go out and share the Gospel message with those around them. So together, the disciples of Jesus turned the world upside-down as they helped us find faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Today we heard in Matthew 10 about Jesus sending the 12 apostles out on a "practice run" to learn about evangelism and disciple making. After giving them His authority, they were to "*heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases (leprosy), and drive out demons*" (10:8). They were to go to the people of Israel, telling them that "*the Kingdom of heaven is near*" (10:7). Remember, this was a training trip. They were to give freely, even as they had received freely. Jesus had empowered them to do all the things that He was able to do as a sign that the Messiah had come.

This training trip was to give the disciples a taste of what was to come, and to give them confidence that when they went out to work for Jesus after His resurrection and ascension, miraculous things would happen. Jesus gave them all the power and authority they needed to do the work of God and prepare the people for the Kingdom of God.

But look at the other guidelines that Jesus gave to them. He says 'do not take provisions with you. Depend upon Me.'" So as they traveled, the disciples were not to take any money in their pockets, not carry a beggar's bag (for taking an offering), no extra clothes or shoes, or even a walking stick (10:9-10). Wow, just the clothes on their back? Oh man, that really bites! Why would Jesus demand such restrictions?

Well, He explains it with one sentence, “*A worker should be given what he needs*” (10:10).

You see, in that day, it was common understanding and practice to meet the needs of strangers. It was commanded by the Lord that if there was someone in your community that needed help, you were to help them out of the abundance that you had available. It was a disgrace for folks to turn a stranger in need away without helping them. And someone who was bringing Good News to the people were to be cared for by the folks in that community. So Jesus invited His followers to go with the bare necessities so that the people of that town or village could really show off their allegiance to the Lord by helping those who were in need.

Sadly, that’s a far cry from our society today. First, there are some that make a living off of the generosity of others, so they ruin the hearts of the people to help those who are in genuine need. Then, because of being burned by those who abuse the system, we tend to hold our generosity close to home so that when a person is really in need, we look the other way, or just pretend not to see them, or outright reject their request for help. REALLY? Does that demonstrate our genuine love for the Lord? No.

So Jesus tells those who will be His evangelists to go simply, JUST SO that the generosity of the people might be displayed, either good or bad. And He further instructs His disciples on what to do from there. He says, “In every town or village that you go to, *look for someone who is willing to welcome you, and stay with him until you leave that place*” (10:11). It’s what we call the Person of Peace. That person will receive you, house you, feed you, care for you and then let others know about you so that you might be effective in sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No matter what socio-economic condition that person has for themselves, they will receive you and then you can use that house as your “headquarters” to reach the rest of the community. That not only blesses you, but it blesses that person of peace. If you were to go with all you needed, there would be no such blessings.

However, Jesus says that if a town does not have a person of peace, if there is no one there to welcome you or provide for you, “*then leave that place and shake the dust off your feet. I assure you that on the Judgment Day God will show more mercy to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah than to the*

people of that town” (10:14-15)! OUCH! What a sad situation for any community that will not reach out and touch the needs of the widow, the orphan, the stranger and the evangelist! You all know what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus says that it will be WORSE to any community that does not show generosity! And that goes for the community of the church!

You see, there is judgment upon another when we “shake the dust off our feet” concerning them. It is God’s way of informing that person, or that community, that they are now on their own, that there will no longer be any support or help from the Lord to them because of their refusal to help the one who was in need. When we say “NO!” to the one who has need in their life, when we refuse to give them aid or shelter or even a cup of cold water, we bring God’s judgment to ourselves. God desires that we be generous people, giving to others as freely as God has given to us. That way God can continue to bless us with an abundance, so that we can continue to support and encourage those who are in need.

Jesus explains, *“Listen! I am sending you out just like sheep to a pack of wolves. You must be as wise as snakes, and as gentle as doves”* (10:16). That means that we are to be vulnerable even to the point of being taken advantage of. However, we are to use great care and wisdom in not wasting our resources, but careful to support each other, realizing that we live in a world that may prey upon us as wolves prey upon sheep. So we are to be wise, but we must also be innocent, willing to still give out of generosity to those who may even abuse our generosity. God knows their hearts, and He is the one who judges them.

But Jesus continues on in His warnings, *“Watch out, for there will be men who will arrest you and take you to court, and they will whip you in the synagogues. For My sake you will be brought to trial before rulers and kings to tell the Good News to them and to all the Gentiles”* (10:17-18). Despite our best efforts to be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ, or because of it, some will become offended and seek to abuse us with either arrest or beating. But that is not to stop a follower of Jesus from sharing the Good News. No, because we shall be taken before the rulers and kings, we are now given the opportunity to witness our faith to them so that they might hear the Good News of God’s Salvation for

the people of the world. How else might they hear the message of Salvation? Could it be that by being meek as a sheep or innocent as a dove will provide us the chance to boldly tell the life changing news to the ones that rule over us? Could it be that as we humble ourselves before the Lord, we might be able to bring the Light of Christ Jesus into the governments of our world? Who would have thought that it could happen like that?

And we're not to have prepared speeches ready to dictate to the ones we are brought before. We are to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us. I don't know about you, but my best speech can fall flat on deaf ears, resulting in only more anger and hatred. But when we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to tell the ones before us what He has to say, then those words will cut through all the fog and all the misunderstanding and hit the mark right on the heart of the hearers. It happened with the disciples before the Scribes and Pharisees. It happened with Paul before Felix and Agrippa. When we let the Holy Spirit use us as His mouthpiece, oh, the changes that can take place! It doesn't mean that they will suddenly agree with us and change their hearts, but they will hear the truth of God.

I had a chance to interact with one of our Senators about an item coming before the U.S. senate. I stated my request that they vote against that particular item, knowing full well where they stood on the issue. Yet, God led me to send it anyway. And upon receiving that senator's response, responding in favor of that item, I had the chance to share from God's word how the Bible views that opinion. The senator had the right to agree or disagree with me, but it was my responsibility to let them know how God saw that issue. I was not rude (at least I tried not to be), but I was bold sharing the truth of God's word with them. I know it might not make any difference in that senator's mind with regard to that issue, but at least they heard the truth of the way that God views it.

The hard part about being sent by Jesus to the world is that it may offend even our own family members. Jesus tells His disciples, *"Men will hand over their own brothers to be put to death, and fathers will do the same to their children; children will turn against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of Me. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved"* (10:21-

22). The Gospel message is not guaranteed to be heard positively by everyone. There will be many who will reject it vehemently, even to the point of them reporting and surrendering their own family to the punishment of death. We are seeing that in other countries that are hostile to the Gospel. However, Jesus tells us that when we stay faithful to Him, when we abide by His will and His way and seek to let everyone know the truth, we will have the assurance in our life that we will be saved. That doesn't mean we will not face death here, but if we face a physical death, our spirits will be with the Lord forever. Just as the Prophets and the Apostles and the Saints and the other faithful followers of Jesus that have gone before us, their earthly death gave way to their eternal life with the Lord. And that is better than anything here on this earth. So we are not to be afraid "*of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell*" (10:28). Stay faithful, even to the point of death!

But Jesus then instructs His disciples a little strangely, at least to my thinking. He says, "*When they persecute you in one town, run away to another one. I assure you that you will not finish your work in all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes*" (10:23). That's being wise as snakes. When we see the persecution coming at us, we're not to stand up and fight against it, but rather move on to the next town. God can use us to do great work here on the earth as long as we are alive to do His work here on the earth. So even though we may face death, though we may be arrested and persecuted, when we have the chance, we are to run from those who desire to destroy us. That means here in the church, in our community, and even in our own county. If those around us are out to get us, move on to the next place.

We see that in Paul's life when there were those who were out to get him. After his conversion to Jesus, Paul "*grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Paul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall*" (Acts

9:23-25). His death would never have accomplished the work that God had for him to do, so Paul ran away from his enemies, to preach in other towns about the Love of God through Jesus Christ. So, we are also to do the same thing. When we are faced with persecution and arrest, we are to move on, shaking the dust off our feet and taking the Good News of the Gospel to other peoples in other places.

You see, there are plenty of folks who have not yet heard about Jesus. There are many places where we can go to tell of the Salvation of God, **IF** we are willing to become bold enough to accept Jesus' authority and power to do His work. The big question is **IF** - **If** we are willing to accept Jesus' invitation to be His witnesses, and **If** we are willing to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and to boldly speak the message of God's love for us through Jesus Christ.

I want you to hear the results of the work the disciples did when Jesus sent them out. Mark 6:12 tells the account, "*So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins. They drove out many demons, and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them.*" They took Jesus at His word, they went with His authority, and they did great things! Isn't that great!!!

Then, a little later in the Gospel accounts, we see that Jesus sent out 72 of His followers with the same command, and they came back with the same report, "*...even the demons obeyed us when we gave them a command in Your name*" (Luke 10:17)! WOW!

But sadly, many people today believe that these were Jesus' instructions just to His 12 disciples. Yet they are for us, too, as we have all been called into His service through Paul. Jesus equips **all of His followers** with gifts of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work. Jesus does not send us out unprepared and ill equipped. That would not do well for success of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We don't have to be practiced pastors, or renowned theologians to share the love of Jesus with others. You start with what you have and share that, and then go from there. You'd be surprised at the number of people who are so desperate to hear just one word of encouragement for their life, but unless we are the ones to take it to them, they may never hear it and never have the chance to have their hearts transformed.

Now think about that for a moment and consider this: who was it that shared the Gospel message

with you? Who took the time and the energy to train you to be a follower of Jesus Christ? What would you be like today had that person been too shy with their faith to tell you about Jesus? What would your life look like had you never had that person risk vulnerability to share what they knew about Jesus with you? People can only respond to the Gospel message when they hear it, and if no one takes the time or has the courage to share that Good News with another person, the whole world would be lost. But because that person in your life considered you important enough to share Jesus with you, you heard His words, you trusted in His gift of Salvation, and you accepted Him as your Savior. Thank You, Lord, for that person who has touched our lives for the sake of the Gospel message! So who is it around you that needs to hear about Jesus?

Now, when Jesus rose from the dead, He spent 40 days with His disciples, reminding them of this training trip that they took while He was still with them. Listen to how Matthew describes it.
(READ Matthew 28:16-20)

This is called the Great Commission, where Jesus let the disciples know that they would be continuing His ministry. Since Jesus has been given all authority, He has given that authority to all who follow Him through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, to go out and **MAKE DISCIPLES of all people**, everywhere. Not just to the people of Israel, now, but to all the nations of the world.

We who are followers of Jesus are now sent by Jesus into the world, not to be quiet about our faith, not to keep our faith private, but to share our faith in Jesus with everyone we meet, everyone we work with, everyone that sits next to us on that airplane, everyone who sits by us in the stands, everyone who is willing to hear about how Jesus paid the penalty of our sins and has brought us redemption to God through His death and resurrection.

But Jesus took a huge chance, in that He trusts that WE be bold enough to actually do His work in our world today. Imagine what would happen if every Christian shared Jesus with those around them? Would it take years for the Gospel to change the world? No! It would take only a matter of days or weeks. But we have to be willing to accept Jesus' invitation for us to take Him wherever we go.

Father, thank You for Your great work of Salvation through Jesus. Thank You that we have the chance to accept Him as our Savior. But don't let us be quiet about it. Let Jesus become the greatest thing to have happened in our lives so that we can't help but share that Great Good News with those around us. Give us Your Holy Spirit so that we, like those on the day of Pentecost, might boldly take Jesus to the streets and highways and byways of Sheboygan, and then Wisconsin, and then to the whole world. Let Your work begin right here, right now, for Your glory, for it is in the great Name of Jesus Christ that we pray. AMEN