

“Matthew”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 12

“Matthew 10:1-42”

Objective: To understand the message that Matthew meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context, in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis upon application.

Materials: I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Matthew, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, various modern translations, and any other sources relevant to the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding, help us make application to our current situation.

Procedures

1. We will begin by examining the text from the Greek text.
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural, and social settings, in order to understand the message Matthew intended and that God still intends for us.
3. From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the words of Matthew, for the early disciples, then to our modern contextual framework as disciples of Jesus.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes and thoughts in order to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Lesson

Just after the teaching that Jesus gave regarding the harvest and pleading with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for the harvest Jesus calls His twelve disciples to Himself. Here, rather than just speak of His disciples in general terms, Matthew gets specific, naming each one by name.¹ Matthew will also give a few additional details in order to identify them more specifically. It is interesting that the text speaks of Matthew, as being the tax collector. He wears this title as a mark of the transformation that had been brought about in his life when he became a disciple of Jesus.

There is obviously importance that should be attached to the number twelve as the number of Jesus' inner circle. This number corresponds with the number of the sons of Jacob. People might also have remembered that Moses chose twelve tribal leaders. It is possible that Matthew chooses to echo the phrase used in Numbers, "These are the names of"² The symbolism

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 375.

² Numbers 1:1-16.


will be made explicit in Matthew 19:28.³ There is no reason to believe that these twelve Galilean men were in fact drawn from the twelve traditional tribes of Israel; their significance is to be found in their number and not in their ancestry. When one of the twelve was lost, as in the case of Judas, the number twelve was of such importance that the number needed to be restored to twelve by the addition of another person.⁴ “So from an early point in his ministry Jesus was apparently thinking in terms of an alternative “Israel” with its own leadership based now not on tribal origin but on the Messiah’s call.”⁵

Matthew, at 10:1-4, does not spell out the purposes of Jesus in giving authority to the twelve over unclean spirits, disease, and sickness in terms of anything other than their immediate mission here. We are simply given their names and such details as might help us to identify who is being designated among the possibilities. At 10:2, these twelve are designated as “apostles” (*ἀποστόλων - apostolon*). The term means “envoy,” and the twelve

³ Jesus said to them, “I assure you who have followed me that, when everything is made new, when the Human One sits on his magnificent throne, you also will sit on twelve thrones overseeing the twelve tribes of Israel. CEB.

⁴ Acts 1:15-26. Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5.

⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 376-377.



are sent out on a mission in which they will represent Jesus and His message.⁶

In 10:5-15, Jesus will deliver to the twelve His instructions regarding the mission that they are to undertake. He gives them specific instructions that they are not to go “among” (literally - into the way of) the Gentiles, or to any city of the Samaritans. Jesus is the Messiah that was promised to the Lord’s people, Israel. This should make it not surprising that the apostles are sent specifically to Israel. Jesus will define His own area of mission in the same terms at 15:24.⁷ As natural as such a restriction may seem, it also is somewhat surprising in view of the wider unfolding of Matthew’s story. We have already seen this in the announcement of the birth of Jesus to those that are Gentiles. The apostles are therefore restricted to the territory of Galilee as they are surrounded on three sides by the way of the Gentiles and on the South side by Samaria. “After his death and resurrection the

⁶ R.T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 377.

⁷ **Jesus replied, “I’ve been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.”** CEB.

worldwide mission predicted in 24:14⁸ and 26:13⁹ could be launched in the disciples' commission in 28:19-20¹⁰.”¹¹

Jesus gives the apostles specific instructions that will challenge them to walk in faith, relying upon the good will, and the good graces of others. They are to take nothing for their services, or for their message, which is quite simple and straightforward, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” They are to stay where they find people that are “worthy” (ἄξιός - *axios*). The word “worthy” is a motif that highlights a repeated motif that will be found frequently in this chapter. Potential hosts and recipients of the message and ministry need to be those that are considered to be “worthy.” The discrimination that Jesus challenges His apostles to exercise reminds us of the words of Jesus in 7:6¹². The disciples are to be reliant upon those who would have sympathy for the

⁸ **This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all the nations. Then the end will come.** CEB.

⁹ **I tell you the truth that wherever in the whole world this good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her.”** CEB.

¹⁰ **Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”** CEB.

¹¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 381-382.

¹² **Don't give holy things to dogs, and don't throw your pearls in front of pigs. They will stomp on the pearls, then turn around and attack you.** CEB.


message of Jesus.¹³ They are to search for those who are true seekers after the truth of God.

At 10:13, we come to the expression “worthy” (ἀξία - *axia*) once again. Matthew will use this term many times in this section. It is just sprinkled throughout (10:11; 10:13; 10:37). Not only is this specific word used throughout this chapter, but also it is a major theme in the context of what Jesus challenges the Apostles, and the disciples that would follow, to consider. As Jesus gives His instructions to His disciples He is preparing them for challenges that they are certain to face. All who bear testimony to Jesus, and to the gospel message, within a community, and in a world that is hostile to that message will face hardship and persecution.¹⁴ Only those that are “worthy” will withstand the testing and the trials that will come about because of this. From the very beginning, Jesus carefully warns the disciples of what they will encounter as His followers.

At 10:14-15, Jesus will focus on the reception, the welcome, that will be given to the disciples amongst the people that they

¹³ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 386.

¹⁴ F. W. Beare, “The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 89:1 (1970), pp. 1-13.



will preach the good news to, and where they will perform many mighty signs. How do you know when you are welcome in a place? Have you ever experienced a time when it was made very obvious that you were not welcome? Here Jesus focuses not only the welcome that was received, but also upon whether, or not, the people listened to the words of the apostles. How can you tell if someone listens to your words? What are some ways that you demonstrate that you are listening to the words of Jesus? At verse 15, Jesus indicates that for those that refuse to listen to the words of the apostles there will be a reckoning; they will answer for their refusal to listen and to welcome the apostles of Jesus Christ.

In 10:16, the warnings continue with Jesus telling them that He is sending them out as sheep among wolves. They will be attacked, bitten, and even devoured by those amongst whom they walk. They will be helpless in the face of the attacks that come against them. They are challenged to be as “wise as snakes and innocent as doves.” “The vulnerability of sheep is enhanced by their proverbial stupidity, but disciples are not to be like that.”¹⁵ They are not to be characterized as stupid, instead they are to be

¹⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 390.

wise. The idea of a serpent, or a snake, being wise may well go all the way back to Genesis 3:1¹⁶. The dove, on the other hand, was believed by the ancients to be without anger, or irritability, and readily symbolized a number of virtues.¹⁷ The instructions are both practical and in keeping with the ethical tone of the teachings of Jesus. “Thus when in danger and in persecution, the disciples need practical discernment and at the same time the sort of guilelessness that characterized Jesus.”¹⁸

Jesus continues His instructions in 10:17, warning the disciples that they cannot trust human beings (*ἄνθρώπων - anthropon*) because they will deliver them over to councils and to synagogues in order that they might be flogged. What should have been a bastion of safety and security, the place where people gathered in order to study the words of God, and contemplate how they might honor and be obedient to God, would be a dangerous place. Religious zeal often creates tension and anxiety that

¹⁶ **The snake, which was wiser than all the other wild animals upon the earth, which the LORD God had made** This is my own translation from the Old Greek translation (the Septuagint) of Genesis.

¹⁷ Cf. Romans 16:19 **The news of your obedience has reached everybody, so I'm happy for you. But I want you to be wise about what's good, and innocent about what's evil.** CEB.


¹⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, the Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 33A (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), p. 277. Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3 **But I'm afraid that your minds might be seduced in the same way as the snake deceived Eve with his devious tricks. You might be unable to focus completely on a genuine and innocent commitment to Christ.** CEB.

overflows into both mental and physical violence that stands in opposition to the ways of God and the calling that He has given to His people. For us the term “synagogues” (συναγωγαῖς - *sunagogais*) is most often seen as a term referring to Jewish places of gathering for worship. To be sure this is one way that this term may be used. However, this term may also be used in other ways besides being used for the structure where Jewish people gathered for worship.

At James 2:2, we have this verse: **“Imagine two people coming into your meeting¹⁹. One has a gold ring and fine clothes, while the other is poor, dressed in filthy rags.”²⁰** It is likely that Jesus warns the apostles here that they will be brought into the assembly of Jewish people and flogged for the words that they speak, for proclaiming the good news of the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus warns the apostles of the dangers of the betrayal that they will face among people claiming to be the community of God. To be sure this was proven to be correct, but the words of Jesus also contain the truth that the assemblies of people gathered in the name of God have often perpetrated acts of violence and

¹⁹ συναγωγήν - *sunagogen*.

²⁰ CEB.



even killed people in the name of God. Today, in America, this is not something that happens on the scale that is spoken of here, resorting to physical violence, but there is definitely violence of a social type and in the form of shunning for those that disagree with the majority accepted opinion of religious leaders.

There is perhaps reason here for us to take pause and consider carefully the way we would treat others. To be sure, there is reason to oppose error and those that promote error, but care must be taken to deal with such matters within the spirit of Christ's teachings and recognizing our own ability to get things wrong and our own need for grace and forgiveness. I was taught when I was very young that you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. The warnings of Jesus were specifically given to His apostles, but they are also words that bear truth for our time and for a variety of circumstances. We, as Christians, must remember who we are, who we represent, and we should always treat others with the dignity and respect that are fitting for a disciple of Jesus Christ, and for a representative of the kingdom of heaven.

At 10:18-19, Jesus will continue His warnings so that they know what to expect when they are handed over to the

synagogues. They will drag them before the Gentile authorities to give an answer for their preaching and teaching. Jesus indicates that this is not something to be feared or that is unexpected, but is in fact an opportunity. It is an opportunity to give “testimony” (μαρτύριον - *marturion*²¹) on behalf of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. As there was the opportunity for them in their day and in their time, so today the opportunities still exist. Some are formal and confrontational in nature, but most are things that happen every day. How do we treat one another, how do we treat those that we encounter each day in the ongoing routines of our daily lives? Are we people that reflect the nature and the attitudes of Christ?

In verses 19-20, Jesus promises His apostles that when they are brought to give an account they will not stand alone and that there is no need for them to worry about what they will say. They will not be the ones doing the talking, but the “Spirit of the Father” will speak through them at those times. They will speak the words of God. This is a powerful assurance and a powerful indicator of the importance and care God gives to what they are

²¹ This is the word behind our English word “martyr.” A “martyr” is one that gives testimony on behalf of Jesus. In time it would come to be used primarily of those who died giving testimony on behalf of Jesus.

called to do. They represent God. What is it like to represent God?

In truth, all who are called to be followers of Jesus are called to represent God at some level. Does that thought enter into your daily reflections, your daily prayers, the actions that you take?

At verse 22, they are warned that they will be “hated” by all. What is hatred? It is intense dislike, or ill will. The opposite of “hate” is to “love” or “like” someone, or something. Hatred is an intense emotion that, I am sure everyone has experienced at some point in their life. To stand in the face of hatred is a terrible place to have to stand, but it is exactly here that the apostles and the disciples of Jesus are told they will stand if they remain faithful to Him. Jesus challenges them to “stand firm until the end.” This will in some cases result in death, imprisonment, loss of family, loss of possessions, loss of respect and even loss of dignity. The disciples of Jesus are called to endure all of this for the sake of their mission, for their calling to proclaim the good news to the world. Those that stand firm to the very end will be “saved.”

Jesus tells His disciples to “escape” and move onto another place when they are harassed in one place. In the near future this practice will greatly aid them in the spread of the Gospel to the

world.²² When there is harassment the disciples will scatter and take the message of Jesus Christ with them wherever they go. What seems like something quite negative and counterintuitive to the human mind will be used by God to progress the Gospel message. There is much in the plans of God that is counter to the wisdom of men. Often it is the case that there is the expectation that the ways of God are simple and easy to comprehend. Such an assumption is false and will often lead one to reach the wrong conclusions. Just look at the complexity and intricacy apparent in the world and it should be obvious that this assumption is not true. God is amazingly complex and His ways are complex and detailed.

As we come to verse 23, there is every reason for us to contemplate the complexity and intricacy of the ways of God. This passage has been poured over, considered, examined, and the disputes regarding its meaning continue to this day. I will not examine any of the proposed interpretations in great detail, but I will give two proposals in general terms that have received widespread acceptance among scholars. However, it needs to be

²² **Saul was in full agreement with Stephen's murder. At that time, the church in Jerusalem began to be subjected to vicious harassment. Everyone except the apostles was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.** CEB.

made clear that none of these explanations is accepted without some sense of reservation and without others disputing the validity of these proposals. Hagner puts forward the proposal that verse 23 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He puts forward three major points to substantiate this opinion.²³

The first point is that the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows and is typologically related to the final judgment and therefore can be seen as the work of the Son of Man. Secondly, the destruction of Jerusalem symbolizes the rejection of the Good News by the Jews and therefore a turning point in which the shift of salvation-history from the Jews turns to the Gentiles. This then reflects a shift in priorities. Third, this happens as a reflection of the persecution of Christians by Jews, both prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and then in the aftermath of its destruction. This perspective then views the words of Jesus in verse 23 to be indicative of a shift in priorities that would take place after this point in history.²⁴ I will be honest I find this understanding unconvincing and lacking in sufficient evidence to convince me that it is correct. It seems to focus too much on the

²³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p. 280.

²⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p. 280.

shift in mission from Jews to Gentile focused on A.D. 70. This does not fit well with my understanding of this shift in focus.

France gives a different understanding. He points out that it is widely agreed that the wording of this passage is based upon Daniel 7:13-14,²⁵ which expresses more of what we have come to traditionally see as the second coming of Christ. This is something that grew up centuries later than what we find here and later than a critical passage in Matthew which is at 24:30.²⁶ It came to refer to what we call the *parousia*. In fact this term, which literally means coming, occurs four times in the gospels, all in Matthew 24. There it can be seen that the coming of the son of man in the clouds is carefully distinguished from the *parousia*. Matthew is speaking of a heavenly enthronement not of a return to the earth, a “coming in the clouds” focus upon the enthronement in heaven²⁷

“This means that, despite centuries of later Christian interpretive tradition, when the gospels speak of “the Son of Man

²⁵ ¹³ **As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. NRSV.**

²⁶ **Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory. NRSV.**


²⁷ R.T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 396.

coming” the presumption must be that they are speaking not of an eschatological *parousia* but of a heavenly enthronement, the vindication and empowering of the Son of Man after his earthly rejection and suffering, when God will turn the tables on those who thought they had him in their power.”²⁸ It is really hard once we have some understanding in our mind to view alternative perspectives with anything other than suspicion. There are really good reasons for us to seek alternatives apart from the second coming of Christ, in this context, as the second coming of Christ actually does not fit with what Jesus is saying here.

France believes that the emphasis can be seen clearly in the language that Matthew uses where the vision of Daniel 7:13-14 has molded Matthew’s language. This is perhaps the most apparent at Matthew 26:64.²⁹ It is here that Jesus stands before His supposed judges and predicts, instead of the condemnation that they had decreed, that God will make him “from now on” the judge over them. The coming of the Son of Man is then not a description of one particular historical event, but instead is

²⁸ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 396.

²⁹ **Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”** NRSV.




evocative language that depicts the eventual vindication and sovereign authority of Jesus. This means that the sovereign authority of Jesus, that is envisaged at Daniel 7:13-14, first inaugurated when Jesus has risen from the dead works itself out through successive phases throughout history until it will find its ultimate fulfillment in the last judgment.³⁰ I do believe that the proposal put forward by France takes into consideration much more of the complexity and the diversity of what Jesus says. It will be up to you to decide which option of the many that you believe best represents the intent of Jesus here.

At verses 24 and 25, Jesus continues to provide understanding and warnings to His disciples regarding what they can expect. As they will come to understand over time, the way Jesus is treated, with false accusations, misunderstanding, hatred, and ultimately with beating and death is what they can expect to receive. If they follow the path that He follows this will be the treatment that they must realize will come. Often it is the case that people have preached a form of Gospel that proclaims ease, security, and prosperity to those that would follow Jesus. This is

³⁰ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 396-397.

not the message of Jesus at all, if that expectation is to have earthly ease, prosperity, and physical security people will be deeply disappointed if they truly follow the path of Jesus. Jesus had none of these things. His disciples should expect to receive from this earth what He received. Those things were ridicule, hatred, insecurity, and ultimately death.


Jesus, at 10:26-31 continues to try and encourage the apostles to be unafraid, because ultimately all of the hidden things will be revealed and those things done in secret will be brought to light. At verse 28, He challenges them to not fear those that can only kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul. The one to fear is the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell (γεέννη - *geenna* - *Gehenna*). Once again we find Jesus warning of the dangers of hell. He does this often because in doing this He challenges people to avoid this possibility. In verses 29-31, Jesus will give illustrations regarding the care and concern He has for each person. Each, and every person is important to God and He knows what each person needs. Verse 31 sums up the message of Jesus here with the words “Do not be afraid.” The apostles are to be fearless in their pursuit of following in the footsteps of their



Master. They are to follow the path of Jesus in the face of any and every obstacle. This is not just a message for the apostles this is also a message for any and all who would follow Jesus.

At 10:32-33, the focus shifts somewhat to standing before the Father for judgement. This should be the focus of any and every disciple of Jesus. This is the focus of Jesus, who seeks to honor and please the Father in all things. What matters is what the Father believes, what the Father expects, what the Father judges to be good and right. Failure to follow this focus results in a denial of the Father. This will then result in Jesus denying that person before the Father. This is another way of saying that such a person will be lost, will be condemned, will be without hope. Jesus is the hope, the way of salvation, the only way. For Jesus to deny a person means that such a person is to be lost, condemned, to be on one's own.

At 10:34-36, Jesus informs His disciples that if they are under the misconception that He has come to bring peace to the earth they are mistaken. His coming, His mission, and His message, will bring the sword, will bring death. There will also be division created in the midst of families even the members of their



own households will become their enemies. For us the countless wars and conflicts that have ensued, often in the name of Jesus, are a testament to the truth of the words of Jesus at some level, but the focus is that in some senses one must expect that the true follower will be betrayed at every level of relationship because of following Him. Again, just as Jesus would be betrayed, so those that truly follow Jesus should expect nothing less. They too will face betrayal, conflict, and they will find those closest to them becoming their enemies.

At 10:37-39, Jesus will issue a challenge to His followers to love Him more than they love their own father or mother. How hard is that? The loyalty and love that Jesus challenges His disciples to display is unequivocal and must be without challenge or compromise. Those who love their family more than they love Jesus are not “worthy” of Him. Those who do not take up their crosses are not “worthy” of Him. Those that are not willing to be subjected to humiliation and even a painful death are not “worthy” of Him. Those who spend their lives in service of following Jesus are those that will find their lives. They are the ones that are secure in Jesus.

At 10:40-42, Jesus will make it very plain that the apostles are those that are sent. They are to act as ambassadors of Jesus and those that receive them do so as if they are receiving Jesus Himself. In this section, Jesus will focus on the positive aspect, the rewards for receiving them and their message. It is perhaps the case that Jesus wants to leave His disciples with this positive focus rather than with the warnings regarding what failure to receive the apostles means for those that do not receive them. A reward is promised to whoever receives a prophet and a righteous person. The question is how do you recognize a prophet, or a righteous person? For us the question of receiving a prophet often seems obvious. Prophets, after all are something that existed long ago, but for us do not exist today. Where do we come up with this idea? Does God not still speak to us today? Are you so sure that this is the case that you would not receive someone who claims to speak on behalf of God?

Such a stance proved dangerous for Israel in the past. They failed to listen to John the Baptist, they failed to listen to Jesus, they failed to listen to Jeremiah and so many more. The consequences for this failure were devastating to Israel and if we

fail to listen when God speaks we too could face devastating consequences. Scripture teaches us that we must be attentive and open to the guidance of God. It is certainly true that we have the Scriptures, but nowhere in Scriptures are we told that the time of prophets will cease. As a matter of fact we are told the opposite of this.³¹ It is far easier for us to claim that prophets do not exist today than it is to discern who are the real prophets and who are the false prophets. We most often deny them all and so we hear nothing they have to say. The role of discerning the voice of God has always been a challenge for His people. We are called upon to recognize that voice and to follow Him. Let us take great care in this venture and listen carefully and attentively for His voice.

We are called in 10:43 to give a cup of cold water to the “these little ones.” We have very often interpreted this to mean children and while this phrase certainly does not exclude children it is not specifying children only. The disciples of Jesus are also

³¹ Ephesians 4:11-13 **He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. 12 His purpose was to equip God’s people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ 13 until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son. God’s goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.** CEB. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 **You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. 28 In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues.** CEB. Revelation 11:10 **Those who live on earth will rejoice over them. They will celebrate and give each other gifts, because these two prophets had brought such pain to those who live on earth.** CEB.

referred to as “little ones” elsewhere.³² This term may refer to them being inexperienced, young Christians, or even those that other places are referred to as the weak as well as to children. It is perhaps meant to refer to those who humble themselves, and seek to be obedient to the words of Jesus. It is perhaps then to be seen as a mark of humility.³³

In this entire chapter, Jesus seeks to prepare the apostles, and the disciples, that would follow, for the hardships, for the challenges, that they will face as they seek to follow Him. In order to accomplish the task of following Jesus they must learn to see the world in a different way than is normally the case for humanity. They must learn to see the world in terms that challenge them to focus more on a future hope that is unseen and unfelt by the physical senses. The challenge of Jesus is to transform our thinking, our actions, our goals, and our priorities. This will bring hardship, pain, loss, and danger in this life of the flesh. We are called to be “worthy.” We are called to be like the people spoken of in Hebrews 11:35-40 **Others, again, had to face jeers and flogging, even fetters and prison bars. 37 They**

³² Cf. 18:6, 10, 14; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2.

³³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p. 296.

were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were put to the sword, they went about clothed in skins of sheep or goats, deprived, oppressed, ill-treated. 38 **The world was not worthy of them.** They were refugees in deserts and on the mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. 39 **All these won God's approval because of their faith;** and yet they did not receive what was promised, 40 because, with us in mind, God had made a better plan, that only with us should they reach perfection.³⁴

What will you choose? Will you choose to be a disciple and face all of this hardship and pain for the hope of a better future in the kingdom of heaven, or will you pursue a good life in this kingdom and face the possibility of the forfeiture of a place in the kingdom of heaven?


³⁴ REB.

Synopsis

Jesus calls His twelve disciples to Himself and gives them authority to go out in His name to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near. He gives them specific parameters of where they were to go; only amongst the people of Israel. They are to take no provisions for the journey, but they are to expect provision to come from people to whom they give this good news. Their mission will involve both blessing on those who receive the message and judgment upon those who reject the message of hope.

The apostles will be like sheep among wolves and yet they are to be wise and gentle as they are handed over to councils, synagogues, and even the rulers of the Gentiles. This is not be seen as something negative, but as an opportunity to proclaim the message of Jesus amongst a wider audience. When this happens, God will speak through them. They can expect to be treated the same way that Jesus will be treated.

Jesus challenges them not to be afraid of people who can, and will, kill the body, but to fear the one who can kill body and



soul. Once again Jesus gives warning regarding the dangers of hell. God will give them what they need. Notice it is not necessarily what they want. The focus is to be upon acknowledging Jesus before people. Jesus promises that for those that acknowledge Him before people He will acknowledge them before the Father.

Jesus makes it clear that He has not come to bring peace. His words will bring the sword, they will destroy family unity, and they will create many enemies. Jesus challenged His followers to an unparalleled loyalty, to be “worthy,” of Him. He promises that those who lose their life for Him will find their lives. He challenges them to recognize those who receive them are in fact receiving Jesus. He challenges them to seek out those who are righteous and those who follow such a path will be rewarded.

Main Points

- Jesus gives authority to the twelve.
- They are to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven with words, with healings, with cleansing, and by casting out demons.
- Jesus challenges His apostles to seek out those who are “worthy” and to be “worthy.”
- Jesus warns His apostles that they are to be like sheep among wolves, and that they will face much persecution and harassment.
- Jesus challenges them with the expectation that they will be treated in the same way that they will treat Him.
- Jesus came to bring trouble not peace and tranquility.

Questions

1. How would you define authority?
2. What do you think it was like for the apostles to be chosen and told of all the hardships that they would face because of Jesus?
3. Why do you think the apostles chose to accept the role of being an apostle after all the things Jesus told them would come as a consequence of His choosing them?
4. Should we, as ordinary Christians today, expect to be treated better than Jesus was treated? Why?
5. What does it mean to betray Jesus?
6. What does the phrase “kingdom of heaven” mean to you?
7. What does it mean to be “worthy” in the way that Jesus describes being “worthy”?
8. What do you believe will happen on Judgment Day?
9. Why do you think Jesus sent His apostles out as sheep among wolves?
10. What are some ways that Christians can give testimony to the world that they are in fact followers of Christ?
11. How does it feel to be betrayed by someone who is close to you?
12. How do you think Jesus felt about being betrayed by Judas?
13. How does it feel to be betrayed by a family member?
14. What does it mean to be hated because of the name of Jesus?

15. How are Christians called to respond to harassment?
16. Knowing how Jesus was treated during His lifetime on earth, how should we, that follow Him, expect to be treated?
17. What makes you afraid?
18. How do you feel about all the secret things of your life being revealed?
19. Which is of more value the body, or the soul?
20. What are Christians to fear?
21. What are some ways that people can acknowledge God before people today?
22. What are some ways that people deny Christ?
23. Who are your enemies?
24. What does it mean to be “worthy” of Christ?
25. What are some ways that we can give a cup of water to little ones today?
26. What is the most important thing that you have learned from this chapter of Matthew?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that following Jesus is not easy, not without hardship and not without betrayal. Jesus warns His apostles that they can expect to be treated in the way that they will treat Him. Often it is the case that people have the expectation that when they choose to follow Jesus their problems will become less, or not come at all. Why do you think people have the expectation that following Jesus is easy and pleasant?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words trying to prepare His followers for what they can expect being followers of Jesus. For those that are unprepared for the hardships that will come to those who are obedient followers of Jesus these words are meant to challenge them in ways that give them a chance to succeed. What are some ways that the words of Jesus in this chapter challenge us today to be different?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The words of Jesus challenge people to change the way they view the world and the priorities that they set. The ways of this world are not the ways of the kingdom of heaven. So often we are blinded by the priorities of this world so that we are unable to see what is necessary for those who would follow Jesus. What are some ways that you seek to insure that you are not blinded to the priorities of the kingdom of heaven and enticed by the inducements of the “good life” in this world?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to be like Jesus. Jesus came to this earth to show us, to challenge us, to pursue the kingdom of heaven. Often it is the case that people fail to recognize that life as a follower of Jesus is a hard life. It is a life that requires perseverance, boldness, and a certain lack of fear. We are called to fear God and put all other fears aside. Being a follower of Jesus requires a person to trust in God always and above all else. What are some things that you are encouraged to persevere in your following of Jesus?