

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 2, 2009

A Training Exercise for the Twelve

by Dan Trygg

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.’”

Matthew 9:36-38

“And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; ⁸ and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff-- no bread, no bag, no money in their belt-- ⁹ but to wear sandals; and He added, ‘Do not put on two tunics.’ ¹⁰ And He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. ¹¹ Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.’ ¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.”

Mark 6:7-13

It is interesting to compare the other gospel accounts to gain a fuller understanding of the setting. We saw last time that **when Jesus was rejected in Nazareth, He began to visit the surrounding villages, teaching where people were more receptive to His message.** Jesus had ministered previously in Judea and in the Galilean region to the east, by the Sea of Tiberias. **His visit to Nazareth brought Him to the central highlands of Galilee,** an area He had not ministered in extensively. In Matthew 9:35-38, we find Him going about the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God, and healing the sick. **In these travels, He came to be aware of the desperate spiritual state of the populace.** They were distressed (“having-been-picked-on”) and stuck (“having-been-thrown-over-on-their-backs”). Spiritually, emotionally and physically, they were in bad shape, and He felt compassion for them. They were like sheep without any shepherds to care for them. Sheep left to themselves would be at the mercy of pests, predators, and poor judgment. They quickly become distressed, tattered by the thorns and underbrush, sick from not eating properly, lost, confused, anxious and fearful. They can literally fall over on their backs and get stuck. This was a vivid word picture for the spiritual, emotional and physical condition of the inhabitants of central Galilee. Because of the sorry state He was witnessing, He commented to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, plead with (ask-for-with-urgency, beg, petition-fervently) the Master of the harvest in order that He might cast out workers into His harvest.” Interestingly, the words for “ask” and “cast-out” are in a form that emphasizes action at a point in time, rather than ongoing, repeated action. It seems that Jesus’ point is that **whenever you see spiritual need and readiness, fervently-ask God to send reinforcements to work the ready field of ministry.** The word for “send out” or “cast out” laborers is a very strong word. It is asking God to push out, drive out, or to violently throw out the workers He has in mind to do the work. This implies that they might not think *themselves* to be qualified or ready for this task, ...or they may not necessarily be interested or motivated to do it. The request is asking that God send them out anyway, even if it means to violently, or harshly throw them out, if need be. My mind goes to Saul of Tarsus as an example of one recruited against his will, understanding or inclination, and sent out to proclaim the gospel (Acts 9:1-22).

Jesus did nothing from Himself, but He only did what He saw the Father doing (Jn 5:19). Apparently, He recognized that the need, openness and responsiveness of the people was the result of what His Father was doing, so He quickly busied Himself and His men to go out and gather in the harvest as quickly and effectively as possible. **In this case, Jesus follows up the prayer with action:** He sent out His men in teams to more effectively spread out through the area, and He also went out to preach and teach (Matt. 11:1). **We should not ignore the principle that often we see the need because God is calling us to the work.** How much work for the Kingdom of God is left undone because those who are being called to do the work are expecting Him to use someone *else*? Even Moses tried that with God, and the Lord would not take “No.” for an answer (Ex. 3:1-4:17). The *outcry* of Israel prompted God to “cast out” Moses into the mission God had for him (Ex. 2:23-25). We see this same principle repeatedly in the book of Judges. Because of sin and spiritual hardness of heart, Israel would put herself outside of God’s blessing and protection. Like sheep that had gone astray, they became prey for their enemies, and the harsh consequences of sin oppressed them heavily. When they were distressed and desperate enough, they began to cry out to the Lord, who would then raise up a deliverer for them. **God raised up “workers” to get the job of liberating His people accomplished. Often they, too, were initially resistant to the mantle of leadership and warfare. Nevertheless, God called and appointed them to this task.** He *thrust* them into a position of warfare and leadership, and *empowered* them to effectively break the power of their dominating enemies and to rally the people of God to take back what the enemy had stolen. This is very similar to

what Jesus and the apostles were doing. They were going through the countryside, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and breaking the dominating power of the enemy off the lives of people by healing them and casting out demons. As they saw the power setting people free, and heard the message of hope and a fresh start with God, folks came forward to dedicate themselves afresh to God through repentance and baptism, and to live for Him.

In John 4:34,35, Jesus spoke of another harvest principle: There is a timing factor involved. **The harvest is ripe and ready only for a short time, ...therefore it is necessary and urgent to get the workers out into the field at the right time.** If harvesters were to go out into the field too soon, the crop would not be ready, and their actions could even be destructive to the growth process. If they wait too long, the opportunity could be lost. For this reason, when we see the need, openness, interest and readiness for the good news, we are to urgently-plead with God to “throw-out workers” into the harvest. Note, however, that in Matthew’s version there were clear restrictions as to where the apostles were to go. They were not to go into Gentile areas, or to the Samaritans, but only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5,6). This had to do with the purpose and limitations of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Later on, He commissioned them to “disciple all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). It is important to recognize, however, that there are assignments, callings, and timing factors involved in ministry outreaches. The apostles recognized that God had given Paul special grace to reach Gentiles, while Peter had better success among the Jews, at least early on (Gal. 2:7-9). Paul was not led to work with Mark, while Barnabas had a special prompting and ability to work with Mark (Acts 15:36-40). In another example, Paul and his team were in the territory of Mysia, in what is now northern Turkey. God forbade them to attempt to go southward into Asia, or into the region of Bithynia to the northeast. Instead, He led them to cross the Aegean Sea to the west, and enter Macedonia. God used a vision of a Macedonian man appealing to Paul, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” The team concluded that was God leading them to the next ready mission field, and they went (Acts 16:6-10). Several years later, they were able to come back to Asia, and plant a church in Ephesus (Acts 18:19-28). God provided an opportunity for Paul to effectively spread the gospel at that time, “so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:8-10). **The point is, God has a strategy, a time and a method to reach into areas. We have to discover and abide by His plan.** We are *not* called to go everywhere, anytime.

Jesus had specifically chosen the twelve for specialized training, so that He might send them out to preach (Mk. 3:13-15). He named them “apostles”, or “sent ones”, **because they were to go out to represent Him in places where He was not going to be.** They were being trained to do what He did when He would no longer be there. Jesus spent more time with them, and they were more closely associated with Him, so that they could be instructed and more closely observe what He did. **Now, He sends them on their first mission without Him.** He gave them authority over the demons, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of sickness and disease (Matt. 10:1). **This clearly is meant as a learning experience,** not the way they were *always* to go about ministering. Later on, He changed some of this prescription (Lk. 22:35,36). The point was **they were to go in simplicity and dependence upon God.** They were to travel light, not taking extra belongings or money. What can we learn from what Jesus’ instructions were?

They were to go out in pairs. There was more safety in going out as a team, and they would be able to provide encouragement and accountability for each other along the way. **They were to take nothing for their trip, except a staff.** This was a lesson about seeing God at work, so they were not to provide for their own needs on this mission. They were not to pack extra food, or a beggar’s bag (They were not to panhandle from people along the way, or beg for support. This was a widespread practice for traveling actors, teachers, philosophers and certain religious figures of the time. Like putting a hat down to collect money while playing an instrument on the street, these speakers would “perform” before a crowd, expecting donations to be placed in their “beggar’s bag”.) **They were only to bring the footwear bound under their feet.** This probably meant that they were not to bring extra sandals or shoes. **They were not to bring two tunics.** Two tunics were a sign of comparative wealth. They were not to appear wealthy, but to be simple in dress. The entire thrust of what Jesus tells them is that they were to travel simply, and trust God to use others to provide for their needs, instead of providing for themselves. **They were not to change accommodations in a town.** If they were invited to someone’s house, and went there, they were to remain there until they left. This kept them from the temptation of “trading up” to other, nicer lodgings, and the consequent appearance of self-interest. **If a community rejected them, they were to shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against them.** This is what Jewish people did when they left Gentile or Samaritan neighborhoods. It was a strong prophetic act declaring their uncleanness, defilement and rejection by God.

They went out and preached that people should repent. Again, repentance is always a part of gospel preaching. John the Baptist and Jesus also preached the need for people to “repent and believe the good news”. **Repent means to change one’s outlook or worldview. True repentance will lead to a change of behavior as well** (Lk. 3:8-14). **And they were casting out demons and healing people.** (Only here and in Jas. 5:14 is anointing with oil used in connection with healing.) They not only *preached* but *demonstrated* the Kingdom of God.